

Melbourne

(3)

Dec 2-97

My dear Balfour,

The immediate

purpose of this letter is to tell you that our old friend Roth has been at work amongst the natives of Queensland and has just published a book called "Ethnological studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines". It is published by the Queensland Government & contains some valuable material. He has evidently worked in complete ignorance of what has been done by others which in certain respects makes his work all the more valuable. There are certain points in which it would have been a great advantage to him if he had known something of what had been done already by men such as Horitt.

For the various forms of relationship he has invented a series of names which I think are inadvisable as they will tend to complicate matters without any compensating advantage. The tribal name he calls a Patronym, the mother's tribal division a Gnomony & the mother's child's name he calls a Paldomatronomy & the Terms of relationship are either Heteronymy or Genonymy.

As regards the custom enounced with initiation etc he has invented the term Ethno-ponomographical which is most objectionable. Ponomographical implies something almost deliberately 'dirty' & as it is merely a matter of scientific ingenuity I am very sorry that he has used this term.

If you will write to the "Home Secretary, Queensland" I am sure that

he will send you a copy of the work if he has not already done so.

It has a most valuable chapter on gesture language - the best yet published so far as Australia is concerned - and although there he must have worked hard. I do not

think that any one worker has, in Australia of course, put anything like the results which Petto has except the man with whom I am working - fellow who he got still deeper. The one great

drawback of Petto's work is that he has looked at their customs from what one might call a dirty point of view & the expressions he uses such as 'bricks' & 'jeanting'

make you feel wild to think that he should spoil such a valuable piece of work in this way.

It is excruciatingly written but despite all this it is the most

valuable piece of work done for many years
in Australia in the time & I never thought
that R. B. would have stuck to a thing in this
way. At home you can hardly realize
the immense difficulty of working in such
a climate as that of N.W. Queensland. It
is simply awful. Heat, flies, mosquitoes,
dust, bad water or none at all & small
natives.

I am hard at work trying to finish off
fillies & my own work but it takes a lot of
time. Tomorrow I go up to Sydney to a
meeting of our Aust. Ass (= Brit. Ass out
here) & in the while it is decidedly an Ass. he
has to listen to idiotic papers from individuals
who can't otherwise discharge an obligation
soul or liver. But on the other hand it serves
as a point of union for many who would
otherwise not meet as Australasia is rather a
big place and scientists here are about as
much isolated as if at home you had

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year had one man in London
another in Constantinople, another
in the Congo etc.

Thanks to the very kindly intervention
of Mr. Hayes, Macmillan has offered
to publish for us but I am a bit
apaid that when he gets the ms.
with a discussion of promiscuity etc.
that he may cry off.

I wish that you could see my
collection of Aust. Ant. things. Some
time or another it will find its
way into our public collection, meanwhile
it is being round my walls with the
most-estimable things in a big glass case
which contains such unique specimens
that I go to bed each night in fear of
fire.

Partington saw some of them while
he was at here and I tried to persuade
him to get the Brit. Mus. to offer fallen

\$200 - \$300 to secure a series for
them. Filler + myself are the
only white men who have ever seen
the most sacred of these things + I
have only got them through filler.
In a few years they will not make
them + if they do they will make
them 'to order' which means that the
makers have never seen them used
but that they have been told about
them and are willing to manufacture
them for a 'consideration'.

I see that Hadden has started
out to New Guinea again. He will
doubtless get a good deal of information
but the more we know of natives
the more we see that it is impossible
to gain any real knowledge about them
except by living amongst them for a
long time. You can collect their
weapons + implements but in regard
to their customs + beliefs you must

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be thoroughly well furnished + trusted by
them before you get any reliable
information. It is only the most
sacred ceremonies which they will allow
a white man when they have given
for long + thoroughly trust + to see
which one of real value and these I
found an quite one that Hadden will
not see.

At home you hadly
realize the fact that it is simply
impossible for a man however good
that will be very be as an observer to one
not out here and to get into the confidence
of the natives. To do this he
must live amongst them for years
or else he must as in my own
case be 'introduced' to them by a
man like filler who has lived
amongst them. Filler told the
Dunta Stacks that I was his
father and after this they received

me as one of themselves.

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I found this bottle in my bag ^{unfit}
+ though it is now rather a matter of
ancient history it is being sent. Since
it was begun I have heard from R. B. R.
In ~~an~~ a critique in one of our papers I made
some remarks concerning his having
missed the totems but he tells me that
as they did not fit in with those amongst
N. Am. Indians he came to the conclusion
that they were not totems in the strict
sense of the word. He has been
appointed medical officer or something in
charge of the natives of N. Queensland & is
evidently as yet green on the work but I
am much afraid that he will tire in a
while though he has opportunities now such
as no man has yet had out here.

In Sydney Howitt was president of the
Ethnological Section of the Ass. + gave a

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Simply masterly address on the origin of the Australian natives. He has a good grip of the requisite Anthropological, Geological & Philological knowledge such as I think no one save himself has. Seeing that he is resident in the Colonies no one at home seems to take much notice of him were he in England he would be F.R.S. & goodness knows what.

We had some rare old Philological cranks at the meetings & amidst some good work I never before heard such idiotic bosh as some of them propounded.

Old Hism was in the chair at times & the way in which he dealt with them was enough to bring down as it did the audience.

I have come to the conclusion that if you have any capacity at all it is a good thing to be say 5'10" high & proportionately broad. To see

H. Smith + Jim together the one whom I
think you know - the other rather
smaller than myself is a comic sight.
He about ten days or a fortnight
I hope to have finished our ms.
There seem to be a kind of Altitara
present at present in the way of semi-
anthropological - religious literature.

From all the ponderous to me on the
"Evolution of the Idea of God" seem to me
to be made up of extracts from
everybody except himself. He can
imagine his saying when he finishes
the volume 'where do I come in?'.
Personally I prefer to read Frazer
undisturbed.

Have you ever read a book
called "Old New Zealand" by a
'Papeha Miori' (p. 4. in Auckland N.Z.
1863). If you have not you ought
to. It is an account by an early

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visitor to N.Z. of his experience + pain
of a wonderfully bright idea of
certain of their customs. This
Papeha is a man with a most
remarkable sense of humor + also
one who could see things from the
native point of view which as I have
said before very few even out here
can do.

What we want most in regard to
Australian anthropology is a small
com. able to draw up an index
expurgations. It is simply
expecting to see the statements
which find their way into print +
are accepted by European writers
as gospel truth. You people
at home can scarcely realize the
fact that it is only about one man
in a thousand who has the special
ability of understanding a savage +

most unfortunately he is the one man
who cannot write what he knows.

A man may be really honest
and well meaning but unless he
can put himself into the position
of a native & think as he does
he will in all good faith write
as some of them do the very best
romance and yet because it is in
black & white it is quoted & requoted until
people think it is true.

I hope that things flourish with you in
Oxford and would much like just now to
have a look round some things in the Pitt
Rivers. You have probably a better lot of
Australian things there than we have out here
which is not saying very much for you I am
sorry to say & now our chance has passed by.

Yours sincerely

W. Aldrich Spencer.