

Melbourne.

(7)

Aug. 28. 02.

My dear Balfour

Very many thanks  
for your letter which I was  
glad to receive - please excuse  
my long delay in answering it  
but I have been having a  
rather busy time since returning  
home as a few days after that  
lectures began & what with these  
& routine work & Museum business  
& the attempt to write up our  
results I have had very little  
spare time.

On the whole we had a  
very interesting & successful time  
except just towards the end  
when we were more or less  
enveloped in the smoke of the  
gulf of Carpentaria. The newspaper  
reports of our being in a bad way

were all nuisance but they  
probably resulted in the Queensland  
Government sending over a little  
steam to bring us away. Apart  
from the usual discomforts of  
travelling in a country where you  
must carry everything into you  
& where heat flies & mosquitoes  
are about as bad as they can  
be with out a vestige of anything  
in the way of natural beauty to  
cheer you we had no hardships  
& enjoyed the best of health  
& luckily avoiding malarial fever.

As you will realize it is not an  
easy matter to study tribes in the  
course of a journey over such a big  
tricky country & what we did was  
to try & work out a few typical  
ones where we had the best opportunity  
of doing this.

Most of our work is of course a

kind of elaboration of what we had  
done before in fact fundamentally  
all of our central & northern tribes  
are closely akin but it is something  
& I know that the customs & beliefs  
of the central tribes extend into  
I come interesting anthropological right  
to the Gulf country.

The reincarnation theory is common to  
very tribes with which we came into  
contact & I fancy that it is widely  
spread over Australia & rather was  
until the white man civilized &  
spoilt the blacks.

Roth as you know was sure  
that there were no tribes amongst  
his tribes. On our way down  
we met him and he now says  
that he was mistaken. I asked  
him to state this as Keane has  
published saying that Roth has  
explained all the non-existence of  
animals & plants by certain individuals  
as due to an arrangement between the  
Ruler of our universe - a simple absurd  
statement if we know anything of

Australian natives but Rott  
declines to do so & told me that he  
was going to say nothing. In some  
ways he is doing really good work  
but he comes very little into contact  
with the wild savage & only knows  
those who are gathered into the fold  
of the mission station. I think  
that his main work will lie in the  
direction of language (which is when  
one or two Australian dialects  
have been carefully investigated scarcely  
with a dog) & in describing games  
& ordinary things. His Bouliu &  
Nomantun blacks are all civilized  
& clothed &, as he himself describes,  
adjoum pu tea!

Rott is the same as of old and  
I shall be very much surprised if  
he does anything except publish a  
series of bulletins dealing with games  
& customs & dialects & at the  
same time hold a very comfortable  
lillet. He has chances such  
as no one else in Australia has with

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a perfectly free hand + also a  
boat at his disposal + stores to  
distribute amongst the natives by  
means of which he could if  
judiciously used do no end of  
ethnologic work. He will do  
good work but I fear nothing at  
all comparable to what might  
be done by a man in his  
position with his really unique  
opportunities.

I wish that you could have  
been with us sometimes. We  
saw scenes such as would have  
delighted your ethnologic soul  
but I am afraid that your  
museum curatorial soul would  
have been too much for the savage  
who strongly objects to parting with  
anything that he holds most sacred.

However I have got a real live  
Kurtunja for you + a good  
many Chinija + other things of  
lesser value. When you come

not here I will show you a  
big case in my Museum of sacred  
ceremonial objects such as will make  
your mouth water. They are  
the actual objects used in ceremonies  
of which we have ordinary photographs,  
cinematographs & phonographic records  
& so far as a stage race is  
concerned it is a satisfaction to  
know that we have a really  
complete record of one such as is  
now preserved in Melbourne. Of the  
Banta tribe we have a complete  
series illustrating every implement &  
weapon, article of clothing & ornament,  
foods & letters still all their sacred  
songs such as chants, dances &  
songs used in sacred ceremonies.

The ordinary public do not  
appreciate our collections but in  
years to come it is our satisfaction  
to feel that ethnologists will do so  
& meanwhile I wish that you would  
come out here & see what we have  
got. I can promise you that

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you would not be disappointed &  
that your collection would benefit  
by your visit.

of course apart from Australia  
we have little changing scenery  
ethnologic things as our means are  
almost nil.

at the present time we are in  
a rather bad state. The awful  
drought which you can hardly realize  
has simply denuded the whole of  
Australia of its resources so far as  
cattle & wool are concerned. Indeed  
of course our sheep & cattle by  
millions we have only sold thousands.

The result is that economy is the  
order of the day.

Added to this our University account  
has amounted himself by begging  
£30,000 of my trust funds & on the  
top of this the Government proposes to  
cut down the annual allowance of my  
which salaries are paid. The result  
is that we are really in a very bad  
way. Poverty is the cause of  
the next few months I may be at

home in search of something to do.

I am getting 'full-up' of a democratic government & am regretting the time when I left the old country, where if salaries are somewhat low they are at least safe & when one is in contact with civilized society.

How are things progressing in Oxford. Dyer wrote to me a week ago & I must reply to him. I was much interested in the account of your totem 'poles': they are a great acquisition & before long I hope to have the chance of seeing them. At present all of my spare time is taken up with writing out on results & in due course I will send you a copy of the book which Macmillan is publishing. It takes a lot of thinking about & when this is done I have a more popular work to write dealing with Central Australia generally. I have just been reading John's 'Uganda'. Ethnologically there is not much in it but he is an artist & I wish that I had his skill. Please write again & send me all of the Oxford news.

Yours very sincerely

Walden Spencer.

I hope that you manage to get in good health if you do not there is nothing like a trip out to Australia.