

This letter
ought to have come
a week earlier but it
arrived the post. My last
mail I sent a few photos to
give some idea of what the ceremony
are like which are described
"Nature" of June 10.



Frazer

(1)

The University of Melbourne.

July 12 1897

My dear Sir,

My friend Mr. Dixon has
kindly sent on to me your letter in
which you make enquiries with regard
to the joint work of Mr. Gillen & myself.
First let me say that the work which we
are doing is due in the first instance to
Mr. Gillen. He had for some years
been taking a great interest in the
Cent. Australian natives & the result of his
work up to the time when we met has
already been published in the report of the
Horn Exped. to Cent. Aust. vol. IV. At the
close of that expedition I spent some time
with him & having been originally interested
in matters anthropological by my old
teacher Prof. Huxley & also by Dr. Tylor, was
able to suggest to him lines of enquiry with
regard to Totems & other matters of interest.

The work of men like Hamitt & Fison are
few as yet very little. I need hardly
say that to these two fillen myself are
much indebted.

Mr fillen has always encouraged the
natives to preserve all their old customs &
in his position as superintendent of the Aborigines
has had a splendid chance of acquiring
influence amongst them. They regard
him as their chief man & by means of
the, perhaps under the circumstances,
expedient device of calling myself his
youngster (Tribal) brother I was adopted as
a member of the tribe & allowed to see
anything.

I have often thought that much of
our work would be of interest to you &
so am venturing to write direct to you
instead of through Mr Fison.

As yet we have only published a
brief abstract of part of our work dealing
with the Totems. This appeared in

"Nature" of June 10. 97. You will find
therein an answer to one or two of
your questions. In a few days I will
send an abstract of the same paper which

Then he suggested that we should work
together & gradually the thing has grown
until now I think that we are in a
position to describe in detail & with I
trust comparatively few errors the organization
& customs of one tribe & have secured also
a lot of information with regard to 8 or 9
others.

Last summer I spent four months
with Mr fillen living with the Arunta
tribe & also the members of which had
gathered together close to the Telegraph
Station of which he has charge on the
overland line from Port Darwin to Adelaide.

It is as nearly as possible right in the
center of the continent.
We have fortunately been just in time to
record the details of this tribe - for it is
interesting how rapidly custom die out the
moment the white man comes on the
scene.

Unless we can in some
way set to work seriously we shall be too
late to do much in Australia for despite

is practically identical with the account in "Nature".

First of all with regard to the eating of the Totem. This was the point which struck me most when first I saw the ceremonies performed & questioned the natives with regard to their present custom.

There are plenty of restrictions as to eating particular kinds of food but in no case are the restrictions concerned with the Totems. A Kanyaroo man eats & kills Kangaroos, an Inna man eats & kills Emus & so on.

In the ceremonies connected with the different Totems the point comes out clearly. An Unjeamba that is a Hakea flower man is constantly, for example, represented as eating the Hakea flower. A Mungern or grass seed man eats mungern. In one ceremony two wild-cat men were represented as cooking preparatory to eating a wild-cat man. All their traditions dealing with this subject constantly represent ancestral individuals eating their own Totem animal or plant.

Further than this we come across such



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curious + suggestive traditions as this: -
 Two women of the alcheruisa (that is the
 very early times - lit. 'dream-times' - in
 which their ancestors lived) were walking
 over the country. One was a bandicoot
 + the other a pigeon woman. The first
 performed a sacred ceremony + by this
 means changed the second into a
 bandicoot woman after which she (that is
 the former pigeon) walked on + eat bandicoot.

It is a striking feature that the eating of
 the totem is represented in some of the
 traditions as a kind of necessary function
 of the members of that totem. Another
 tradition refers to certain wild cat men
 who died + came to life as Plum men
 after which they walked on eating plums.

I do not think that with the
 possible exception mentioned below there is
 anything of the nature of a solemn sacrament

at which the Totem is eaten. In the case of the great majority of Totems when the ceremony already referred to at which the ancestors are represented as taking the Totem can be regarded as such there is no such custom.

In one Totem however we meet with what may perhaps be regarded as such. Every Totem has what is called its *Witchetty* ceremony the object of which is to increase the supply of the animal or plant bearing the Totem name. In one of these, the *Witchetty* grub, (to which both Mr. Miller & myself belong) the head man has a small wooden trough in which he is supposed to grind up the *Witchetty* grub preparatory to eating it. I am rather inclined to think that in the case of the tribes with which we are dealing we have to take the question of cannibalism into account. We have a

great deal of information dealing with this.

Practically all the aboriginal ancestors are described as cannibals, indeed in many of the traditions considerable stress is laid on this fact. The older in the tradition the more certainly do we find an individual feeding upon his own Totem. We must also note

traditions such as this - A Kangaroo ~~was~~ was being pursued by a Kumsama man (Totem *subpin*) but he could not catch it & turned back then a Bultara man of the *Arungga* (Euro) Totem at once changed himself into a

Kangaroo man & set off in pursuit being anxious to kill & eat the Kangaroo. We have of

course many other traditions in which men eat animals - men who are not of their own Totem but the custom however in which in not a few traditions this definite change of Totem is recorded associated with the eating of the same is a noticeable feature.

So far as the Australian tribes are concerned I fancy there is little doubt but that their early ancestors were through and through cannibals & after thinking over the matter a good deal I cannot see how

we can do otherwise than take this into account in dealing with the totems. The Arunta people at the present day are ^{epitaphically} not cannibals & the prominence given to cannibalism in the traditions may I think be taken as fair evidence of the actual former existence of this in remote times.

Now if they were cannibals there was no reason why they should not eat their own totem. A kangaroo man would eat - at least tradition says he would - a kangaroo man why should he not eat a kangaroo. To eat a man was to make part a parcel of yourself his strength etc (we still have relics of this in the Arunta amongst whom a weakly child is occasionally fed on the flesh of a younger & stronger one so as to give it the strength of the latter). A kangaroo man would be especially advantaged by eating a kangaroo.

We may in fact starting from a common point have had development proceeding along two divergent lines. Along one it may have become less & less the custom to eat the totem until the latter becomes 'tabu' & along the other a kind of proprietary right in the totem may have been developed one result of which is that at the present day, as in the Arunta tribe, it is only the men of the totem who may take part in the sacred

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Subincision were introduced & the 'classes' were for the first time adopted. (In the early alcheringa stone knives had not been invented & circumcision was performed with the aid of fire sticks).

(3). The later alcheringa when the present organisation in its full form was introduced.

We have full details with regard to these stages & it will be seen that 'individual' preceded 'class' totems.

With this has to be associated the fact that in the tribes amongst whom we have been working mainly, marriage is solely regulated by the 'class' totem - the 'individual' totem has nothing whatever to do with it.

Here again we seem to have had development proceeding along at least two different lines in different Aust. tribes. In the neighbourhood of Lake Eyre we find a sharply marked

line. To the north he takes in which descent is counted through the male line & where 'class' only updates marriage to the South & East are taken where descent is maternal & where the individual takes governs marriage.

On the question of the form of insanity in which an individual imagines himself to be an animal etc I am sorry to say that I can give you no definite information. I think that we can say that it does not exist amongst our tribes but have today viewed a question which to fallen which will result in his finding out of any such things etc.

We have been careful to dig as deeply down as possible & to overlook nothing in the way of detail but with regards it is most difficult to tell where you have got to 'bed work' & if there are points on which you could suggest our working we should be grateful to

you. I need hardly say that the 'Golden Bough' has been most useful to me. Of course Fellen & I have worked a great deal together in the Centre but mostly the actual finding out things has of necessity to be done by him. I send him an sudden question & things to find out & my mutual agreement he reads someone else's work so as to keep him quite unprejudiced in the way of theories. He is simply indefatigable. You may judge of his enthusiasm from the fact that he has already declined two good appointments so as to be on the spot & able to find out any thing which I want to know further while writing up our work.

The thing which troubles us most is that with our present knowledge of the tribe & their knowledge of us we could simply, carrying our second language, be handed on from tribe to tribe right across the continent & so find out much which must sooner or later be lost &

Yet we are both of us unable to do
so be lacking money + I lacking time
for a University appointment out here
does not allow of too much leisure.

Central Australia is not an ideal place
to travel in + it is useless for an ordinary
traveller to come out from England + attempt
the work as the natives would simply tell
him nothing of secret things. Mr Fison has
neither time nor I am sorry to say has
he now the strength to do it + Hornett is
far too busy. It would take a year's
hard work but I am quite sure that
the results would be good.

As to publishing our work; I hope to have it
ready in three or four months time + there
will come the difficulty of finding a
publisher as we want to have it well
illustrated for we have a great series of
photos. dealing with totem + other
ceremonies such as initiation, burial,
mourning etc.

I ought really to apologize for troubling you
with such a lengthy letter but if you would
be good enough to suggest any enquiries on
special points we shall be grateful.

Yours very sincerely

W. Baldwin Spencer.

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ceremony the object of which is to increase the supply of the totem for eating purposes. At all events in Australia we have so far as the totems are concerned a sharp division of the tribes into (a) a series to whom the totem is tabu + (b) a series to whom it is not tabu + who have ceremonies to increase the supply for eating purposes.

You will see from the abstract which will follow this or from the account in "Nature" the remarkable way in which the totems are accounted for: you will also see that every man + woman has his or her own totem. The traditions are so complete that we can now plot down on the map the actual paths taken by the ancestors of various totems as they walked or rather are supposed to have walked across the country in the 'dream times'. Apparently the totemic system in the Arunta is entirely different from

that of the Australian tribes as yet recorded but it must be remembered that we have very little detailed information.

The Churinga or sacred stones & stones you will find interesting. They seem to me to be a relic of a time when a man deposited his spiritual part somewhere outside of himself. This is certainly not very clear on the surface but such a tradition as the following seems to point in this direction.

In the alchemija a number of men went out to hunt & while away they hung up their churinga on a sacred pole to help them safe & took them down when they returned. Again every human being has a spiritual double & the latter the natives say always hovers around his churinga munga. When a man dies his ultiana or spirit part goes to the sacred store house where the churinga is kept & there lives in company with the spirit double. This is complicated but we have to remember that the

ultiana is exactly the same thing as the spirit part of the alchemija ancestor & each one of the latter has an arumburinga who goes on living unchanged while the ultiana or spirit part of the alchemija ancestor may be re-incarnated time after time.

The arumburinga in the spirit double of the alchemija man (or woman) & therefore the spirit double of every human being who is the re-incarnation of that alchemija man.

The old men decide what alchemija ancestor is re-incarnated in every child born & the child bears as its Churinga aritua or sacred name, that of its alchemija ancestor.

At a certain age, when initiated, each man is taken by the head of the local group (totem) to which he belongs to the sacred store house. There in is haunted up, shown the churinga, & told his churinga name. The women all have churinga names but the men

alone know them though the very old women are told of their existence. The showing of the churinga to the younger men is a most solemn affair. Hadden & myself have stood by for hours watching the old men showing & explaining them to the younger ones who were being initiated into the tribal secrets concerned with the totems.

The question of 'class' totem is a difficult one. Haddon & Fison are of opinion that the 'class' totem precedes the individual totem. The traditions which we have in the Arunta tribe are explicit on this point & we can clearly divide up the alcheringa into three periods

- (1) The early alcheringa when human beings were transformed by the aid of two spirit men who dwell in the western sky, out of half animal & half plant into human beings (men & women)
- (2) The middle alcheringa when the rites of circumcision (with stone knives) & of