

Hotel Beau-Sejour

Gersau, Lake of Lucerne

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FRAZER

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My dear Spencer, I am delighted to hear from your telegram and your letter of October 4th (which last has just reached me) that all the arrangements for the expedition are progressing so well. The two governments have behaved well, and Mr Syme's liberal offer seems to show that the Australian public is taking the matter up. The news will be welcome in scientific circles in England, where our appeal to support the petitions met with an even wider response than I had expected. By the same post which brought your letter this morning I received from Dr Hill (Master of Downing College) some extracts from the Australian press referring to the

expedition.

I quite understand that you will not be working under much greater difficulties than before, and that it would be unreasonable to expect such full information about the tribes whom you will visit as you obtained about the Central Tribes among whom Gillen had resided so long and whom he knew so intimately. But the introductions you will get from your old friends will doubtless be a great help to securing the confidence of their neighbors, and your knowledge of the customs and ways of thought of the natives will stand you in good stead. I have no doubt the results obtained will be most valuable and will be well worth the exertions and hardships undergone in securing them. You will have the

satisfaction of knowing that you are rendering an immense service to science; this work is probably without any exception that I can think of, the most important that could be undertaken in anthropology at the present time. It would be impertinent in me to tell you what to look for. You both know that well enough. Everything is important. As you know, even apparently trivial details may turn out to be of great significance.

So get everything you can and despise nothing. Remember your conjecture as to the reason of subincision and look out for anything in that direction that may throw light on that and similar mutilations, which all probably hang together. The explanation of one such custom might furnish, or at least lead to, the explanation of all. The connection of initiation ceremonies with puberty, and of both with totemism are things to be kept in mind. Some of the Americans think that the personal totem, acquired in a dream at puberty, may be the origin of totemism in

general. Any evidence of this in Australia?

I hope the new edition of the G. B. may reach you before you start. It should be out next month, and as it contains much fresh matter it might possibly suggest to you some fresh things to look out for.

Compared to you and Gillen, I feel shamefully indolent and idle, spending a whole winter away from my work. But the doctor has recommended it for my wife's health, and I have brought a good many books with me and hope to get through a fair amount of reading.

We have been six weeks in Switzerland. Tomorrow we start for Rome, where we think of spending the winter. I shall find plenty there to interest me at least, if not to study. But I find mere archaeological remains, even of Greece and Rome, comparatively ~~and~~ uninteresting beside the study of human beliefs and customs.

My wife joins me in very kind regards, and with our united best wishes for your success in all respects

I am yours very sincerely  
J. E. Frazer.