

Narrow Creek.

Jun 17, 1901

My dear Frazer,

We are now at a station on the overland line working amongst the Raitish tribe. Fortunately for us the natives have heard all round about of our coming up and are coming in to see us which saves us a lot of time & trouble. At the Alcei we went over some of our old work. There is no doubt whatever about our account of the totem there or about the fact that the man normally eats sparingly of his 'totem' but must eat at at the utichiuma and then really gives the other people permission to eat it. Here amongst the Raitish we find a most interesting (from your recent point of view especially so) state of affairs. The

men of the totem not only eat this
paddy but have the joint right to
do so. We have a fine old fellow
of the pan seed totem in the
western box joint now + wheat is the
case with him in Mus. He makes
witchamoa to cause the pan to grow
seed. Then when it is seeding
all sorts of people (different totems)
go out to collect it and it is brought
to him. He puts some up +
it, takes some in his mouth +
squirts it out all round so as to
make it grow plentifully everywhere
and then gives the people permission
to eat it and go on always eating
it freely likewise. If an enemy
man comes into his (pan seed) country
the former gathers some but before
giving it up takes it to the pan

seed man and says I have been
gathering pan seed, I want to eat it.
The pan seed man then says "all
right you eat it." This same thing
exactly so far as the principle is
concerned takes place in regard to
other totems. This tribe is the
exact reverse of those in which the
totem is taken - whether it be the
more primitive or not remain to be
seen. I fancy that if we could
get to the root of the matter in
Australia we should find that this
is the fundamental idea underlying
the totem. I am persuaded that
in the tribes described by Frey the
men of the Koroong were obliged at
times to eat it and had to take
charge of it. We may find
interesting development when we get

men of the totem not only eat their
prey but have the joint right to
do so.

We have a fine old fellow
of the grass seed totem in the

witman box just now - what is the

case with him is this. He makes

intichisima to cause the grass to grow
+ seed. Then when it is seeding

all sorts of people (different totems)

go out to collect it and it is brought

to him. He finds some use later

it, takes some in his mouth +

squirts it out all round so as to

make it grow plentifully everywhere

and then joins the people permission

to eat it and goes on always eating

it freely himself. I am even

now come into his (grass seed) country

the former gather some but before

grinding it up takes it to the grass

seed man and says I have been
gathering grass seed, I want to eat it.

The grass seed man then says "all
right you eat it". This same thing

exactly so far as the principle is

concerned takes place in regard to

them totem.

This tribe is the

exact reverse of those in which the

Men is taboo - whether it be the

more primitive or not remains to be

seen. I fancy that if we could

get to the root of the matter in

Australia we should find that this

is the fundamental idea underlying

the totem. I am persuaded that

in the tribes described by Grey the

men of the Koroong were obliged at

times to eat it and had to take

charge of it. We may find

interesting development when we get

a hundred miles north of this in
the Warramunga tribe. Time is
slipping by but we cannot work more
quickly than we are doing. Natives
are very difficult people to worm
reliable information out of and we have
to keep working back. Of course we
are getting plenty of information on other
points but the above is the best bit in
regard to Totems & is alone worth coming
some distance to find out.

Kind regards to Mr. Frazer also I
hope is better again. I expect you
are hard at work. Please remember
me to W. Jackson & Prof. Ridgway.

Yours very sincerely

W. Baldwin Spencer.

I don't know when you will get this: it is going
down south 200 miles to the nearest post station.