

FRAZER

4 Park Side

Cambridge

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My dear Spencer, Your letter of June 7th came yesterday and was most welcome. As you will have seen from my last letter I was beginning to wonder at not having heard from you for so long. Your previous letter was of November 12th of last year! But I did not allow sufficiently for the tremendous pressure of work you must be under since your return from the dreary Australian wastes of the torrid zone to a lecture room and laboratory in a great city. Let me say again how truly glad I am that everything on the expedition went so well, that there was no mishap, and that you both came back hale and hearty. I hope that Mrs Spencer and Mrs Gillen will now regard me more favourably and not regard me merely a wicked and slothful man, who sits at home at ease, while he sends his friends out on laborious and dangerous expeditions.

I agree with the substance of your criticism of Graeber's 'Mystic Rose'. He

overdoes the notion of taboo, and indeed extends the word to cover things which are not taboos at all. A taboo is, <sup>always negative,</sup> a prohibition to do certain things; he applies the term to positive duties - "Thou shalt," instead of restricting it to "Thou shalt not." It was also my impression, from your knowledge and confirmed by the greatly exaggerated dangers that in certain cases, ~~to~~ by savages to arise to men from women. His theory would logically lead to an absolute separation of the sexes, and so (like the extreme systems of asceticism) to the extinction of the human race in a single generation. I put this to him in a letter, and he admitted that this was the conclusion to which the line of thought traced by him logically led. He seems to have quite overlooked the mass of evidence which goes to show that among savage races before marriage are perfectly free and unrestricted. This fact alone seems to knock the bottom out of his theory.

On the other hand there are some good things in his book, particularly

the explanation of the Swiford and Swiford exogamous divisions of the Australians as deliberately adopted to prevent the marriage, first of brothers and sisters, and secondly of parents with children. But he was not the first to perceive this. I indicated it very briefly in a note to one of my papers on the Origin of Totemism. And if I remember aright, Morgan clearly perceived the reason of the Swiford division; and Huxwell writes to me that he and Finlay pointed out the reason of the exogamous classes long ago.

Again, Crawley seems to me very entirely to underestimate the strength of the converging lines of evidence that preceded the rise of sexual communism. These lines are indicated, as it seems to me, conclusively by you and Spiller in "The Native Tribes of Central Australia" and Crawley ~~merely~~ follows Wesler, <sup>merely</sup> follows Wesler, the evidence with a simple assertion that it amounts to nothing. By the way I have not seen Westermarck's last edition, and don't know how he deals in it with the factor that

you and Gillen gave him. In all this question of primitive communism Westermarck's book gave me (when I read, but did not finish it, I confess, many years ago) the impression of being a special pleading for the social proprieties, instead of a strict and impartial inquiry into the facts. In this respect it seemed to me to rank with the books written to please the religious public by discovering a high ethical religion, if not the essential truths (so-called) of Christianity, among the lowest savages. Such books have their vogue for a time, so long as they chime in with the tone of current orthodox opinion. When that changes, they are forgotten, or remembered only as obsolete historical curiosities. Let us try to look the facts straight in the face and damn public opinion!

I am deeply interested by all that you tell me about the results of your last expedition. It is particularly gratifying to me to find that our theory of Australian totemism has been so strongly confirmed by the new evidence, and further that (as I maintained, and have been attacked for maintaining) the Central tribes are the most primitive of all.

I am delighted to hear that in the midst of all your other work you find time to go on with the writing of your book. I pant for the time when I shall be allowed (as I hope I shall be) to read it in proof. Remember I expect to be allowed the privilege of reading your proofs. If you allow me, I should like to do just as I did for the former book - look out for printer's errors and for occasional obscurities or awkwardnesses of expression, of which I might sometimes suggest amendments to be approved or rejected by you at your discretion. As to omitting or cutting out a single fact or opinion, however apparently unimportant, I hope I would rather cut off my hand.

It is a great satisfaction to me that Howitt has retired from his official work and is giving himself wholly to completing his book. It will be grand if he finishes it this year. The work will

of course be of primary importance and will be an anthropological classic from the day of its publication. He is very kindly sending me type-written copies of the chapters as he finishes them. I have not finished reading the last batch that he sent me (having been, like you, desperately busy in moving into a new house, shifting and rearranging my books &c.), but I hope soon to be able to write to him any remarks that may seem worth making.

Though I feel that the work of such an expert, dealing with the subject he has made his own, is really beyond the reach of effective criticism by an outsider like me.

I note what you say as to the Anthropological Institute in connection with him, and will lay it before Haddon, the President, who I am quite sure will take it up warmly.

My wife joins in kindest regards to you. She would like much to come out to Australia with me, but I doubt whether that will ever come off. Please give all kinds of kind messages to Fison when you see him. I trust that he keeps fairly well.

Yours very sincerely  
J. G. Frazer