

FRAZER

Melbourne

(46)

July 23.02

My dear Frazer,

Your letter received today surprised me by saying that you had not heard from me since my return seeing that I have written twice. I ought to have written more often but have really been so busy with work of various kinds that my correspondence has fallen sadly behindhand. I am in my lab. from 9-5 daily except such odd times as are spent supervising work in the Nat. Hist. Museum. The evenings are occupied with lectures & writing up our ethnologic work but the sabbath is about the only day which I can call my own & even that is a good deal cut into

with visitors & visiting. Please understand that any abundant neglect of you is not really any such thing & only arises from the fact that I have more to do than I can get through & that therefore competence suffers. My whole day is occupied with zoological work & students & it is only after looking over & preparing for lectures in the evening that I can get some to ethnology & enjoy myself.

Very many thanks for the two papers which you sent me. In regard to Mr. Cook's I would have liked a good deal of further elaboration: it was in the nature of an 'abstract' which could only be really appreciated by those who have a good deal more knowledge than I have. It also struck me that he had not read his literature enough for he referred to us as stating that in the initiation ceremony a burning bark was used for circumcision. A much better

example of this would be found in the use of a stone knife for circumcision amongst the Jews, vide Tylor. The latter refers to what actually takes place whilst our illustration dealt only with a tradition.

Mr. Bosc's paper I have not read all through yet but it strikes me as being really good. The penichest matter is my suggestive I suppose there is no doubt but that the intercourse only takes place (with the spect of securing the increase of the totem) when one or other of the two individuals belongs to the totem. Here in Australia - or at least in the Central Area - we are not likely to meet with anything of this kind for the simple reason that the natives do not believe that children are directly connected with intercourse and therefore they are not likely to associate them with reproduction in the animal or plant kingdom. We have not with us

trace whatever of this idea - in fact during the *utichiuma* ceremonies exactly the same takes place - strict continence is enforced. We asked a Kaitish man about this matter with the object of finding out whether the natives ever had intercourse for the purpose of influencing the increase of the totem and he told us that when he was performing *utichiuma* he was too, as he said, "full of *churinga*" - that is sacred power for it to be safe for him to have intercourse with his wife. Any such thing would result in serious ill to the woman & would make him incapable of properly performing the ceremony.

So far as our tribes are concerned there can be no doubt whatever about the fact that the members of the totem are responsible for the increase of the animal or plant: but as we pass out of the dry interior parts towards the coast where the rainfall is more abundant & food supply less precarious the *utichiuma* ceremonies disappear

July 25. 02

until on the gulf coast there are only traces of them left.

I see that in his "Uganda Protectorate" Johnston p 589 says "each tribe or clan has its own ancestral spirit, who is sometimes compared with the totem" (this is in reference to the Banyoro tribe). He evidently has not gone deeply into the matter but what he means by a "tribe or clan" is I presume a totemic group and if so the statement probably implies that the natives imagine themselves to be the descendants of an ancestral animal whose name they bear as that of their totem - just as ~~is~~ the case of our Australian totemic groups. I wonder if Mr.

Roscoe has made any inquiries as to what are the ideas of the members of the different totem groups as to their 'alcheringa' (if they have the equivalent of such) ancestors.

In the Warramunga tribe every

totemic group has an ancestor such as a snake from whose body emanated a large number of spirit individuals who were located in certain definite spots & have since been re-incarnated. I think that

Mr. Rose could come across something equivalent to this idea of reincarnation which is such a striking feature in Australian totems. Of course we know nothing about this in the earlier & southern crested tribe but I think that if we could only have investigated them in their primitive condition we should have found traces of the belief.

Unless we had known of this belief as it exists in full force in the central tribes I don't think we should have detected it in the tribes on the Gulf coast.

Roth writes to me that he has come across a curious belief

on the East coast where certain groups & tribes are supposed to be inhabited by spirit children & he also told me when we met him on our way home that 7 years ago he had been told something about a belief amongst Greenland tribes of spirit children going in to women & children having nothing to do with intercourse but did not like to refer to it because it sounded so superstitious - until he saw what we had published.

Also he has quite given in on the subject of his tribes having no totems. I asked him to publish a statement on this subject but am afraid that he will not do so & meanwhile I see that Keane has stated that Roth has explained the non-eating of the totem (or rather of certain animals) by which are really totemic animals) by a system of tabu in the form of an agreement between the old & the young men! No one who really understands our native could pro-

moment imagine that any such agreement could possibly take place. If there is one thing which stands out prominently in this respect amongst Australian tribes it is that the old men rule the young ones with a rod of iron & that anything in the nature of an agreement as to what they are respectively to eat is simply an absurdity.

I would give much to see the look upon the face of an ancient 'black-fellow' of any Australian tribe when asked by W Keane as to what kind of agreement he had come to with the young men of his tribe in regard to what they & he might eat.

Roth has just been on a trip round the Greenland coast but so far as I can see he does not really come much into touch with the uncivilized native & his interests are more in the direction of games & gesture language. He

FRAZER 46  
Melbourne

July 23. 02

will do good work in this line but not much I fear in regard to 'sacred' matters + beliefs which lie at the root of things.

I feel more than ever convinced that, judging from our Australian tribes as a fair example of savages, your theory of magic preceding religion is the true one. It is so easy to render into English what a native tells you with regard to an individual such as Baiame or Daramulun so as to give an idea of a belief in a supreme Being. Howitt whom Lang quotes time after time only made his statements on this matter as the result of talking to natives who were so civilized that they said that the young men were spoiled by their intercourse with the whites + therefore required to be brought under proper control. I do not believe that any native

Australian has the slightest idea of anything like an "all father" but that this is simply a pre-ponderance on the part of a man who did not recognize the real importance of the matter of some term which to the natives implied a very different meaning.

When I can get a little spare time I intend to go over the whole evidence in the light of our present knowledge & think that it may be possible to show that very much has been made out of very little evidence.

Lang does not realize that Stovitt is regard to New matter only worked with civilized natives & as you know Stovitt himself does not agree with Lang.

At all events in all of the Central tribes, who are presumably the least untouched by civilization we do not find any trace whatever of a belief in a Supreme Being.

Do you know anything of Mr Crawley

the author of 'The Mystic Rose'? I wish that before writing his work he had had some acquaintance with savages.

His idea with regard to intercourse with any particular woman being associated with danger which may be removed by his previous intercourse with another individual is most remarkable. Amongst our savages there is certainly no idea of this nature.

If there be any danger in regard to intercourse surely this applies to me more just as much as to any one else & a savage is not likely to incur any danger to himself by doing anything which will at once secure immortality to any other member of the community & at the same time render himself liable to injury.

On Mr Crawley's hypothesis <sup>as well as for the first time</sup> any intercourse with a woman is fraught with danger (I do not think that any Australian people has the slightest idea of this)

& yet according to him there are in each case certain men who



willing to take the risk of this so  
that one man may go free of  
any evil influence! If it hurts  
this one man why will it not  
hurt them? Perhaps Mr Crowley  
thinks that there is 'safety in numbers'.

His criticism of group marriage is  
very poor & thin & some of his remarks  
such as that referring to the wise provisions  
of the Sabay in causing the elder sisters to  
be married to the elder brethren so as to secure  
marriage for her are very remarkable. Savage  
women never lack husbands & the elder  
sister has no more difficulty in getting  
married than the younger one seeing that  
every girl is betrothed it may be years  
before she is born.

I trust that your eyes are not  
troubling you and that both you & Mr  
Hayer are in the best of health & spirits.

Please do not imagine that I shall be  
anything but most grateful to you for help  
in proof reading - I only wish the time had  
come - meanwhile I am making slow  
progress & have about 300 pp. of type  
written: foot-caps which all needs revising.

What we wanted was 20 years instead  
of 1. With kindest regards to Mr Hayer  
Yrs  
Waldron Sherrill.