

FRAZER
Melbourne

(47)

Aug 19.02

My dear Frazer

I intended writing
you a few lines this mail when
this morning your very welcome letter
came. I cannot understand the
long silence but a letter must have
gone astray. Anyhow things are
beginning to settle themselves somewhat
& I will not treat you thus again.

Your criticism of Crantzi's book
was very refreshing: the more I have
thought of his idea the less I like it.
So far, quite apart from other features,
as I know him, the Cent. Am. savage
has not the slightest dread of sexual
intercourse or any idea that there is
danger of any kind attached to it ~~at~~ on
the just occasion. Then as you say the
fact that among many savage races
the relation of the sexes before marriage are
perfectly free is simply fatal to him.

In view of his work which seems to
have attracted some attention - even one of

our 'teacher' in this remote part of
the globe devoted a long 'leader' to it
I had to a certain extent understood
the ground in regard to the Urubuma
tribe and will leave in what I have
written so that you can see it. If you
think it superfluous I shall be pained
by your advice & omit it but with
wonder much still in the field and
attracting a good deal of attention (to
judge by the numerous articles called for) with
Crawley promptly coming into a second
Edition I thought it better to state the
case briefly once more.

Have you yet seen Strutt's chapter
dealing with the Pirara system? I thought
that in the original draft of it he was
not quite clear enough upon the point
that the Noa women were only as it were
a specialization of the Pirara women &
that the important fact to draw attention
to was that every Noa woman was also
a Pirara of some man belonging to the
same group as the individual to whom
she was Noa. In the Devi &
Urubuma there simply is no such thing as

an individual wife.

Crawley's way of dealing with this
rather irritated me - it was so evidently
a case of special pleading & a perhaps
unconscious twisting of the facts.

As to the 'discovery' of a high
ethical religion amongst the lowest savages
this is not I am convinced any such
thing. ^{in Australia} The great difficulty is that
we have had statements made on the
authority of such life givers. The latter
was an illiterate police trooper, I
believe, who was perfectly honest but
at the same time perfectly incapable
of dealing with matters such as these.

In the days when the wisdom of
Barrow & Davanulua was elicited the
importance of securing accurate & detailed
information was really not realized nor
was it imagined that there were men
without any so-called religious ideas &
as I have endeavored to point out in
one of our chapters it is the easiest
thing possible to be misled by what
a native tells you in broken English
in regard to such a point as this.
The 'all-father' business is a theory

based upon the most slender & I believe
unreliable statements but unfortunately it
is now too late to test the truth or
otherwise of the statements. The same
thing is repeated over & over again until
people little realize that the whole theory
of this high ethical code depends on
two or three casual remarks made mostly
by men who in rendering into English
what natives told them quite innocently
translated the native ideas in terms of
their own.

Anyhow Gillen & myself could not find
any trace of any such thing amongst the
Central natives though we searched hard
for it. I have written a short
chapter dealing with "Beliefs in superior
beings" which refers to these matters &
shows I think conclusively that the Central
Australian natives have nothing whatever
in the way of a simple, pure, religion.

Sooner or later people will see that you
are in the main right meanwhile you
can afford to wait & do you say
damn public opinion.

I have not heard from Howitt for
some time. He is quietly working on

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at the book which will be a
great work. The only thing of which
I am at all anxious in connection
with it is that he has to trust
so much to evidence collected by
others. My experience of the
average man in Australia who
writes amongst the natives & gives
you information about them is that
whilst thoroughly well meaning & honest
he is usually very unreliable. I
met with a very good example of
this in the far north. There was a
really good educated man - a police
magistrate stationed on the
MacArthur R. at Borroloola - named
Stretton who published a paper
dealing with the natives in those
parts. He was quite friendly with
them & published in all good faith
but most of what he said was sheer
nonsense & yet it sounded all
right & Dr Stirling (who by the way is
Lamp's authority for saying that Jason

we are excellent & reliable observer) thought highly of his work. Stetson said that the Macartney natives had no totem & could not discover their class system. Mrs Stemm simply 'sticks out' & hits you in the face or on the leg, more probably, says 'saddle our gear' as soon as ever you begin to really investigate matters amongst these natives. We managed to get hold of the same natives who supplied Stetson with his information & soon found out how unreliable his information was. However, Hovitt has had so much experience in so thoroughly able that I hope he will not be led astray.

I am in hopes that you are going to reply to Powell's short paper in 'Man' dealing with Totemism. According to his Totemism is merely a system of naming & if we follow him we have to explain a more primitive system by reference to a more highly developed one. He does not seem to me

to have any real grasp of the matter or to realize that our Australian savages are in a very much earlier stage of Totemism than his Americans & that we must interpret the idea of the more highly developed Totemistic people in terms of the more primitive ones & not vice versa. The 'Shamanist' societies are clearly only a specialized form & rather they consist of a special group of members of the totem who perform ceremonies equivalent to the intricacies of our Central tribe - ceremony which with us are taken part in by every member of the totem. If the American ethnologists are going to admit this, we shall have no end of confusion.

His remarks with regard to exogamy & endogamy I do not quite understand & nor do I see that we have fallen into any confusion in regard to exogamy. The whole thing so far as our Australian tribes is concerned seems to be perfectly clear but if the Americans want to

make totemism mean one particular thing such as a system of naming then it is not totemism in the ordinary accepted meaning of the term. I trust that either you or some one else will reply to Powell. Can you tell me what he means when he says (p. 105) "The tribal peoples cannot be divided into those which are exogamous & endogamous, but every tribe is exogamous in its ~~groups~~ some one of its groups, and endogamous in the others." Exogamy & endogamy are, therefore, correlative phrases of one institution in every tribe in America. The failure to recognize this leads to much confusion in our knowledge of Australian Tribes."

Does this refer to his remark "among all tribal people we discover strange prohibitions; thus, a man is prohibited from marrying a woman of his clan, but he may avoid by being accepted into another clan,..."

In Australia there is absolutely no such thing as adoption of this kind and I cannot see that we have fallen into any confusion in regard to exogamy or

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'tabuism'. We shall fall into a
good deal of confusion if we are
going to follow Mr Powell.

If the American ethnologists want
to apply the term ^(Totem etc.) in the sense and
of Mr Powell then we had better
adopt a new set for our Australian
custom such as Kobong & Kobongism
but if only people will stick to your
original definition of a totem then there
need be no confusion at all.

I was rather amused to see
that in 1902 he (the head of a big
ethnologic dept.) referred to the 'Native
Mite' as a book not yet published.
Even in Mullbourn the head of a
department is not quite 3 years behind
the times.

at present amongst other things I
have a goodly list of public lectures
on hand - 10 all told with some
to follow. Some in Mullbourn others
in up country towns. One has to

spread myself a good deal in a part of the world life there. The University is paid for out of the public purse and so we who are connected with it are more or less public servants. However though it is rather a grind still I am glad to be able to interest people in these matters.

A short time ago I gave a public lecture in the Pullman Town Hall - an audience of more than 2000. As we are in a bad way in the Science Labs. I charged for admittance & after expenses were paid cleared more than £200! for the Labs.

I have not seen Fison for a long time but he seemed better than a year ago when I did last see him. He seems to have quite given up ethnologic work. Horvitt is simply marvellous. In 1860 he was exploring in the Centre & yet today he is as fresh & lively as a canary bird.

young man. I sincerely hope that the Anthrop. Instat. will do something to recognize his work while yet he is with us as he is really the father of Australian ethnology.

Kindest regards to Mr. Drayton: I hope we could see you out here.

Yours very sincerely
W. Baldwin Spencer.