

PRAZER

Melbourne,

(49)

Apr 15-03

My dear Drager,

By this week's  
mail I have sent home to Mr  
Macmillan the ms. & illustration  
of our new work. It has  
cost me the whole of the  
long vac. & every spare minute  
during the year & I am not at  
all satisfied with it and, were  
time no object, would like to  
start afresh. When you read  
it please remember that it has  
been written under rather hard  
conditions as the very day almost  
on which I came back, feeling  
none too ready for hard work  
after a summer in the Gulf country,  
I had to set down to University  
lectures & Museum work. I  
have asked Macmillan to send  
you copies of the proof & shall be  
very grateful to you if you can spare

time to go through some of it.

Chapter 1 + 2 will not interest you at all so please do not trouble about them. They are merely introductory & also deal into physical features etc.

Chapter III I want to ask your advice about. It deals into

the social organization & in it I have included or rather repeated material dealing with the Woottona Tribe & Frank marriage which has already appeared in 'The Native Tribes'.

I have done this mainly on account of Crawley's book & also because I do not know how Woottona has dealt with the subject in his 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. & partly also because it was more or less necessary to give a general kind of account of the whole thing.

However if you would be good enough to read through the first part of the chapter & tell me whether or no you think any part should be left out I should be grateful. The succeeding

chapters will be more interesting to you.

There is a certain amount of new material & the chapter deals into Burial & mourning ceremonies (Chapter 17) gives I think a much more complete account of this matter than has yet been known.

The accounts, especially that of the ceremonies in the Warramunga tribe, are of value as they are complete even to minute details or at least they are as complete as I think a white man could possibly make them. As you will understand the material embodied in this chapter cost us a great deal of both physical & mental expenditure. The very

intimate relation between a man & his tribe comes out well in these ceremonies and even better still in the case of the more northern tribes.

Chapter 12 the Fire Ceremony is something quite new - a kind of primitive highly moral saturnalism.

Chapter 16 will not at all please Lang. There is nothing like a

single 'High God of the Mysteries' amongst these tribes & I feel persuaded that the 'moral' injunctions laid upon the youths at initiation in savage tribes have had their origin in the desire of the older men to keep the best things for themselves.

It does not seem to have struck Lang that if these savages have, as he argues, such a simple pure & high-souled idea of the existence of a primitive Deity that it is at least a very remarkable thing that all knowledge of this Deity is kept perfectly hidden from the women and that indeed they are deliberately deceived in regard to this matter.

I feel sure that the accounts which we have of Baiame & Daramulun are very misleading & that, quite innocently, the white man has 'read into' the ideas of the native his own ideas in regard to a Deity simply because he could not free himself from the idea that there could <sup>not</sup> be a race of people who had no idea of a 'supreme being'. I do not think that there is really any direct evidence of any Australian native belief

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in a 'supreme being' in our sense  
of the term.

Chapter 21 dealing with various  
customs concerned with the  
flowing of blood - Hair - teeth  
knocking out etc. is the last which  
will interest you. Chapter 23,  
24 & 25 deal with implements,  
clothing & decorative art. These  
have been included so as to make  
the work more complete. The  
illustrating of them has cost me a  
great amount of time & trouble which  
I have much grudged.

However I think that you  
will find in our work a good  
many things which will interest &  
will also I hope be of use to you  
in your work.

I hope that your eyes are  
not giving you any further trouble  
but that you are able to go ahead  
without any interruption.

Last week my wife left Melbourne  
on a visit to England. I would very  
much have liked to have come but  
that was not possible.

In the first  
place my year away in the wilds  
made it impossible for me to apply yet  
for leave of absence in the second our  
University has fallen upon bad times.

The accountant was discovered last  
year to have embezzled £55,000 of our  
securities. The leading newspaper here  
has published a series of scurrilous  
attacks upon us led by the Professor who  
to the public is highly over-paid  
incompetent person who do little work.

Australia is a wonderful place &  
were it not for the chance of doing some  
ethnographic work I should very much  
regret the day when I left by land.

I was very glad indeed to see  
that the Anthrop. Inst. has recognized  
at least Stenroos's work. During the  
last week or two I have been going  
through, once more, the run. of his  
work on the S.E. tribes which he left  
with me while he is serving on a

Royal Commission in quest of a  
suitable place for building a Capital  
city for this noble Australian  
Commonwealth which three of us who  
have the honour of paying taxes to  
support a most inadequate number of  
public servants most fervently hope  
will not be built during our time.

It is really a great piece of  
work though I could wish that  
none of it were at first hand. His  
account of the organization of the various  
tribes is splendid. In my own & the  
relationship existing between a man &  
his father he has very little to say  
for the simple reason that he knew  
very little personally of a native tribe  
in a really primitive state. Lang  
quotes him as not one great authority  
but quite to mention that at the  
initiation ceremony which he, Lang,  
quite then were certain things done  
because the young men had been so  
much in contact with the white men!

For his account of the initiation  
ceremony of the central tribes, Stenroos  
relies upon correspondents & after some  
experience I have come to the conclusion  
that it is absolutely unsafe to place

any reliance upon the statements of  
even an educated white man in  
regard to matters of this kind unless  
he is a man who is trained in research  
or is guided by such an one.

I cannot as yet think of any  
suitable + short title for our new  
work. "Australian savages" I like but  
it is rather too comprehensive: "The  
Native Tribes of the Northern Territory" is  
more accurate but then it will have to  
be increased in length by the words "of  
Australia" which makes it very unwieldy  
but otherwise people will naturally think  
that it refers to America. On the  
whole I incline to "Australian Savages".  
Can you suggest a better title?

Yours very sincerely

W. M. Baldwin Spencer.