

Melbourne,

(57)

Aug 27.03.

My dear Frazer,

I am just back again in Melbourne after a most interesting short time spent amongst the Wapunnna tribe.

Gillen & myself left Adelaide on Aug. 3rd & after three days miserable railway journey on a narrow gauge line which runs up to the W. of Lake Eyre we reached an outlying cattle station owned by an old friend of Gillen's. Thanks to him we got into touch at once with half a dozen ancient natives & took them off to a retired spot where we made a camp. At this time of the year the weather is simply perfect - nothing but brilliant blue skies, more brilliant even than those of Italy, & lovely clear nights. I wish you could have been with us for a day or two. Our camp simply consisted of a brake of boughs

to protect us from the cold wind at night + on the leeward side + this we opened our eyes + slept out in the open with a good fire to keep our toes warm.

The native pitched their camp amongst some acacias closely + I think that they enjoyed themselves as much as we did. Every morning we had two or three hours with them + then sent them off for a ramble amongst the hills, after that we had another hour or two with them as you cannot safely work the savage brain for too long at a stretch. Evening came on we lit our fire + the native fires + filled + myself + discussed matters over our pipes + listened to the black fellows singing away as they always do at night at their evening songs until we fell asleep.

Thanks to our acquaintance with the Aruanta we soon got into the thick of things + when we had got tired of their words for 'to stem', 'alcherna', 'tabooed' etc we soon made

headway. They knew the Aruanta terms + so we had little difficulty.

As our time was very limited we confined ourselves mainly to the question of reincarnation + intichiuma + were delighted to find that they are firm believers in reincarnation + also before intichiuma. I felt sure that we should find intichiuma but with a strict descent of the pattern in the maternal line I was a little doubtful as to whether we should find reincarnation.

Lany of course says that we must go to the 'maternal-descent' tribe if we want to find out anything 'primitive' + now I am thankful to say that we can provide him with the idea of reincarnation + with intichiuma in a typical maternal descent tribe with only two 'classes' which are the exact equivalents of the Matorri + Kiamon of the Dieri. The Wotumma +

Dieri are contiguous + closely allied
+ I have not the slightest doubt
but that in reality the beliefs of the
Dieri are similar to those of the
Urabunna.

The gist of the matter
so far as reincarnation is concerned
is as follows. In the Ularaka
(= alcheringa) there were a small
number of ancestral half human,
or animal (or plant) creatures
who wandered about performing
ceremonies + giving rise when they
performed ceremonies to the different
natural features such as springs,
rocks, creeks etc. When they
performed ceremony or 'set down' there
they left behind them what the
Urabunna call mai-awli (or
sometimes murra-murra - evidently
the equivalent of the same term in
the Dieri). These were spirit
individuals + these mai awli
are constantly undergoing reincarnation.

Some of these old mai awli
changed into men + women who thus

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became the founders as it were of various totemic groups. If the old ancestor was a snake then some of the mai-aurli whom he left behind him changed into snake men & women & so on through the various totems.

This gives us their idea as to the origin of the different totemic groups.

In regard to reincarnation their ideas are really more complicated & less 'primitive' than those of the Arunta.

They say that when a man dies his spirit goes back to his old alcheringa spot (that is where the old ancestor left him in mai-aurli form in the alcheringa). Sooner or later he is reincarnated but he absolutely declines to go into any woman who belongs to the same moiety of the tribe & therefore to the same totem group as his last mother. At such reincarnation the individual changes his or her moiety, totem & also sex. If a man be a Matthurie then in his

next reincarnation he is born a Kiavaa woman of another tribe. This Kiavaa woman changes at the next reincarnation into a Mathurii man & so on ad inf.

If the spirit of a Mathurii man should go into a Mathurii woman it would cause the death of the latter & any premature births or deaths of women in childbirth are attributed to the wrong spirit child having gone into the woman.

The Wotumna are just as strong believe in spirit children & reincarnation as the Arunta but though they are a maternal-descent tribe their ideas are by no means so simple as are those of the Arunta. It looks very much as if at bottom all Australian tribes (other than perhaps highly modified coastal tribes such as the Koomai) had fundamentally the same beliefs. Some tribes like the Wotumna may have retained a more primitive system & become

more modified in other ways while others like the Arunta & Kaituma may have developed further in the way of ~~the~~ system & have at the same time retained more primitive ideas with regard to reincarnation, *intichiuma* etc.

The all-round 'primitiveness' of the female-descent tribes simply means that we know very little about them.

As regards *Intichiuma*, there is no doubt but that this exists in the Wotumna. The rain men are responsible for the production of rain & the big and men perform ceremonies to 'snake lizard jump up': the snake men do the same & so on. We saw the rain & snake ceremonies.

I am at present busy with adding notes to the proof of this fresh evidence must be published. It will not occupy many more pages as I am putting it as shortly as possible but it must go in.

My only fear is that we are rather

trenching on Howitt's ground. He has
for long been at work on the Dicki
but when Lang's last book came out
I felt that it was essential to get up
amongst a maternal descent tribe & find
out whether or no it had any ideas in
regard to reincarnation & witchcraft.

Siebert is of course a very good man
& has done good work but the fact that
he is a German & that in my experience
the central natives dislike & have a
profound contempt for Germans made
me feel sure that he had not got to
the bottom of things. No missionary
unless he is a Roman Catholic - at
least this is true in Australia - ever really
understands the natives. The forms &
ceremonies of the R.C. church appeal
to the black fellow - probably because they
remind him of his own alchemiga
rites & ceremonies - & the R.C. missionary -
who is always an educated & broad
minded man which is more than the
German or Englishman is - knows much
more about the black fellow than any
other missionary does & yet he declines to
publish.

Aug 31. Today I received the last slips of
the book & within two weeks hope to

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Send the whole home again.

The number of corrections is abominable especially in the matter of capitals. I hardly like to ask you to go through the proof as the corrections + additions are so many. If you can really spare the time to do this I need hardly say that we shall be perfectly satisfied with any changes that you think fit to make.

The printers do their work so well that in the matter of corrections I think they may be trusted & all that requires to be done is to see that the capitals are right & that the 'English' is passable.

In regard to your suggestion as to publishing a list of tokens. I purposely avoided this. Unless you can spend a life time amongst the tubes this is scarcely possible. We have made it a matter of principle not to publish anything unless we had it at first hand & one of the most striking features of the native is

that he professes the most complete ignorance of anything concerning the sacred matters of any people except those with which he is personally associated. Any list of Hstens which we could publish would be most misleading. I will add a note

saying that our list of Hstens contains

my share with mention of which we came into personal contact & that practically say material of just give its name to a totemic people. As you suggest I will add something in regard to food. As a matter of fact the native eat anything which is edible but as you say it does not occur to the average white man that snakes & such are edible.

May thank you for your reminder with regard to the 'loving' of men in the Kaitich who eat to much of their Hstens.

This quote true but in writing up our notes I somehow omitted it.

No pit account which we had of the Kaitich man eating his Hstens was wrong & I think that I corrected this in a subsequent letter to you.

I do not know whether the native meant to mislead us but we had to be most careful when dealing with natives as they are apt to tell you things which they think you will understand more easily than what is the real truth.

If you ask a native (such as a Kaitich man) whether he eats his totem he will probably answer 'yes' it is only by a good deal of further enquiry that you find out that the eating is confined to the time when he smokes Intichiuma.

As the other hand another man will tell you that he does not eat it & then it takes a good deal of further enquiry to find out that he does eat it when making Intichiuma. In fact as you will understand it is a very difficult matter to get accurate information from natives & the trouble is that a great deal of what has been printed has been put forward by men who did not realize this fact.

I am afraid that our new book will have to run into two volumes. The printed matter apart from paper & cover & index runs to about 600 pp. & the illustrations will occupy about 200.

The sale will be small

and I am afraid that Macmillans
will 'fight shy' of further Australian
work.

Hoult is now at work finishing off
his book. I was afraid that the
death of his wife would be a very great
blow to him but he is a fine old man
& I am hoping that the work of preparing
his book for the press may be a
blessing to him. I wish that you
knew him personally.

I hope you are making good headway
with the new G.B. & that your health keeps
well. Of course make any use that of
you like of letters or anything else though
in the case of letters, later ones may
contradict or modify statements in earlier
ones.

Kindest regards to Mrs. Dwyer. I wish
that we could see you out here.

Yours very sincerely

Waldron Spencer.

There are one or two things in your last
letter I will reply to next mail: at present
I am trying to outtake areas in work.
W.S.