

FRAZER 76 +77

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
PITT RIVERS MUSEUM

11 July 1964.

Two letters from Sir James Frazer
(J. G. Frazer) to Sir Baldwin Spen-
cer (W. B. Spencer); 15 Dec. 1916 (with
added notes from Lily Frazer, his
wife), & 18 September 1921.

Sent by Mrs. C. H. Rowan, Bal-
narring, Victoria, Australia, through
Dorothy Lady Young, 106 Oak-
wood Court, London, W. 14. Both
are Spencers' daughters.

FRAZER.

1 Brick Court, Temple
London, E.C. 4

(77)

18th September 1921

My dear Spencer,

I was delighted to get and read your Presidential Address to the last meeting of the Australasian Association. From it I am glad to see that you have not quite deserted the anthropological shop for the Muses' Hill. I had somehow pictured you as seated on the top of that eminence, surrounded by artists and poets, twangling a golden lyre, and lifting up your voice in the divine chorus or circling in the dance about the altar. But it appears that you can still descend from these Olympian heights to common life and simple savages.

Needless to say I was much interested, and I may add pleased, to see you repelling the attempts of Rivers to land his betel people, or his Kava people, or whatever the baffled colonists may have been, on

the shores of Australia. So far as I could judge, you repulsed these Johnnies with great slaughter. I suppose the survivors will be dumped somewhere else.

In your Address you speak of three distinct modes of making fire as practised among the Australian aborigines. What are the modes? I should be greatly obliged if you would send me a few lines indicating them. I have some idea of taking up the early history of fire as a subject of investigation. It has never so far as I know, been seriously tackled, and it is worth investigating, considering the immense importance which the discovery of fire has had in moulding human destiny. I have already written a pretty long chapter containing many legends of the first discovery of fire, but they do not go far to reveal the way in which men first learned to produce fire. Probably we shall never get beyond a more or less plausible conjecture. I incline to the view (not all novel or original)

that men first learned to produce fire accidentally in the process of boring one stick with another or chipping splints. But I wish to make a fairly complete collection of facts as to primitive modes of kindling fire, noting the geographical diffusion of the various modes and the natural conditions (in regard to the different sorts of woods and minerals, &c.) which may have favoured the discovery. Henry Balfour, who has studied the question for many years, tells me that the easiest way of making fire is the fire-drill made of two pieces of bamboo; he himself can make a fire in this way in forty seconds. The stick-and-groove method, he says, is difficult and tedious.

I have undertaken to give three annual courses of lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge. The first course will be on the "Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead in Polynesia and Micronesia." They will be a continuation of my Gifford lectures and will form a second volume of that work.

When you write, as I hope you will do soon, tell me about yourself and what you are doing. Have you retired from the chair at Melbourne?

My Wife is well, but she had two very serious illnesses the last two winters, both of them in Paris. She has just completed and passed for the press a French translation of "Adonis," which will be published by the Musée Guimet in Paris.

Roscoe is bringing out a popular account of his recent expedition to Central Africa. It will be followed by a full scientific account in several volumes. He was brought back very interesting materials.

My Wife joins me in kindest regards to you. Will you not come over and see us? In any case, write soon.

Yours always most sincerely
J. G. Frazer