

Pitt Rivers Museum ms collections

Spencer papers Box 1a C letters from James Edge Partington, D Walter Edmund Roth

Box 1a C letters from James Edge Partington

Letter C1

[Westbury Lodge,  
Eltham]

9 Novr 97

Dear Profr. Spencer

You will think I am dead & buried. but I am still alive & kicking altho' in the Dr.'s hands with a liver – Oh what a climate this is. I only got back a fortnight ago and found your letter of the 16th Aug. waiting for me. In the first place many thanks for the notes referring to the album

Note: Pl 354- No. 10. This is one of those large "6 in diam" stone axes used mostly for splitting wood. from Queensland.

Pl: 355. No 8 The locality of this is Victoria

Brough Smyth I p. 309

Very many thanks for the [page missing in scans] yet to work on it at once but it is little difficult to get started after being on the wander so long. Haddon I hear is off the Torres Straits Islands & starts in February it is a pity it is not some less known part of the world as he seems to have done those islands so thoroughly while he was there before.

With reference to the Waninga refer to Shibel & Reiss "Necropolis of Aucon p 32

I am glad to hear your work nears completion & sincerely hope you will find no difficulty in finding a publisher.

I had a very good time the way round & got a considerable amount of fresh material & also managed to pick up some few things in Sydney and N.Z.

Dont forget, if you want information, to write to me & I will do my best

Address here cf. C.H. Read Esq FSA

The British Museum

London WC

with the v kindest remembrances

Yours v sincerely

J. Edge-Partington

Letter C2

Eltham, Kent

8 Fby 98

My d. Prof. Spencer

I was pleased to receive your long letter & will take a note of what you say re Matthews. I certainly do not like the idea of his being a corresponding member of our Institute. I gave him a good talking to when in Sydney re publishing anything which he had already published & he assured me it was from ignorance that he had made his first mistake & he could assure me it cd never occur again [sic] I am hard at work re providing my drawings

Dont forget if you have photos of anything you cd let me put into my work to let me have them. I am glad your ms has been accepted – what brutes those Queenslanders are to so adversely criticise Dr. Roths most important address to our knowledge & the North "jealousy" at not having done it themselves is at the bottom of the correspondence.

With regard to Gillens coll'n of ceremonial objects I dont see how the Brit: Mus: could purchase without seeing them – altho' £200 does not seem a large sum for so big an institution yet din [?] a large one out of one [illegible] part except for most important objects & I am afraid it is too difficult to get the Trustees to agree to such a purchase unless the specimens cd be exhibited to them or at all events to the Keeper of the Dep't. I can assure you that they will be v grateful to you for any specimens you can send them & the Anthrop: Inst: for any photographs

If you can will you send me the title of your work as soon as it is accepted by the publishers as I sh like to refer to it even if it is not published before my work is completed dont forget if I can do anything for you I shall be only too glad.

With the v kindest remembrances

Yours v livery [?!] & sincerely  
J. Edge-Partington

Letter C3  
The British Museum  
London WC  
My dearest Spencer

I cannot apologize en. for not having written you before nor can I thank you sufficiently for your extreme kindness in sending me the drawing of you & Mr Gillen [&?] specimens those that I had not already fig'd I have had carefully drawn by Mr Chas Broeloius our Bl: & Wh artist in the Mus" feeling that they deserved to be so done by better hands than mine the work nears completion but I am sorry to say my friend who joins with me in producing it (the business part) has just been taken ill with b...llage of the lungs which sounds bad.

We are experiencing the most extraordinary weather here 3 days ago it was melting while yesterday & today we have had to go back to fires & great coats. Tonight it is fine & warm again Dont talk of tests of liver in Australia

I am looking forward to hearing your book is launched. I have referred to it as about to be published but i sd [insert] have [end insert] liked to have seen it before I finally closed I am printing 20 extra copies for Australia so if you know of any one who has not had the Pt. 1 2nd series & only wants this vol: alone let me know.

Mathews is appealing to me to to reinstate him as it will do him so great harm in the Colonies & saying what an enormous amount of work he has done for science – his aim & object being to become an Hon Fell of our Soc: what & I check Again thanking you for your help / [illegible] v sincerely yours

J Edge Partington

Letter C4  
15.XII.99  
[Telegraph Great Bardfield  
Park Hall,  
Great Bardfield  
Braintree]  
My dear Spencer

I found your letter at my club. when up in town the other day. You have indeed been having a busy time & I can heartily congratulate you on having secured the Gillen coll'n for the Victorian Coll. Museum. It would have been a thousand pities if it had been allowed to allow the Colony. Read wishes me also to say how pleased he is, but at the same time hopes that you will remember the British Museum with regard to duplicates as we have so little from Central Australia and it would not be the first time that exchanges have been made with your Museum. I can quite imagine what the work must have been weeding out and labelling. I have been v. busy too rearranging my collection in my new home. It certainly is very astonishing how men in the position of Sir Wm McGregor – who holds governmental posts because [illegible ?wt] pay can so wholly disregard their obligation to the nation. Why should his things go to Cambridge & none come to the Brit: Mus: I shall indeed be pleased if the next time you come over here if you can come & stay here. I enclose you a photo of the house where you will always be welcome. I am afraid my good wishes for Xmas will be late but they are none the less hearty – coupled with prosperity & happiness for the New Years

Ever yrs sincerely  
J. Edge Partington

Letter C5  
Park Hall  
Braintree  
29th Feby 02  
My dear Spencer

I got yr letter before leaving for the interior & ...ed to be with you. What new wonders will you bring to light? I wrote you a letter which you ought to have got – before you started and I have since sent you the last number of our new venture “Man”. I think this ought to turn out of the greatest use to Ethnologists as it encourages the putting into print of short notes &c which the writer might not think worth while sending up to a journal, so far I believe we are very successful both as to the way it has been taken up & the amount of material coming in, I wish we could instil a little enthusiasm into our Government, but I really dont think there is single man who cares a dump [?] for Ethnology, or d-? not be only on [sic] excellence in our National Museums the Berlin Museum is already seven times larger than ours & with the amount of enlargement it gets will soon put the p...[?] Brit: Mus [illegible] the shade. Most of the best specimens offered for sale here go abroad. No money few friends [?] we are like the beggar thankful for small gifts, so dont forget us if you have anything to spare. I am glad Gillens coll. has gone to Melbourne what were the S.A. people doing [illegible] to let it go. I fancy they are a sleepy lot & Stirling but an enthusiastic ethnologist when in England a few years ago I dont believe he put his feet inside the Brit: Mus: Melbourne ought to become a great Central Museum now that Federation is a fait accompli. if, when you return, you find you have any rough photos to spare similar to those you gave me before, after you have done with them I sh be so grateful I have got the others mounted up into an album with the letter & they make a useful book of reference. I shall look forward to hearing from you on your return. Here we have quite settled down into a new era. all seems so strange without the old Queen. With the best of good wishes

Yours sincerely  
J Edge-Partington

Letter C6  
25 July 01  
[Telegraph Great Bardfield,  
Station, Rayne G.E.R.  
Park Hall,  
Great Bardfield  
Braintree]  
[illegible] Prof. Spencer

I have often wondered where you are & how you were getting along. I sent you out a little time ago a number of ‘Man’ which had a short notice of yr. expedition & it was not till then that I realized that we were fellow townsmen. Things have been jogging along much as usual. We have had an extraordinary summer & now we have started harvest so must call it autumn. our heat has been excessive ending up with a tremendous thunderstorm when the biggest rainfall they have had for 20 years or more 2” falling in London in a few hours filling the underground at huge force. Some body calculated the rainfall as equal to 16 million tons of water. I had to go over to do some work at the Cambridge Museum & the temperature there was 105 [degrees] after this you will be feeling quite cool in the interior of Australia and no doubt longing for a little of the 16 million tons I suppose it will not be long before we get some news of you & I hope it will be that you & all your expedition are on your way home safe & sound.

I am in the midst of house hunting as I am too much out of the world here & on the worst of railways so I am trying to find a home within driving distance of Bletchley, as I find I have to be in town oftener than I anticipated.

Hoping soon to hear of you & with the best of Chin Chin [?]

Yours sincerely  
J Edge Partington

Letter C7  
The Oak House  
Beaconsfield,  
Bucks.  
15.II.22  
My dear Spencer

I cannot express how ashamed I am at having [insert] allowed [end insert] so long a period [insert] to [end insert] elapsed [sic] since last writing to you – firstly to congratulate you on your more than well earned recognition by the King of all that you have done – may you long live to carry on this work – secondly I have to thank you for yr addition to my Library – forwarded to me from the Anthropol Inst: I am sorry to say it and I parted company over the decision of the Council to retain the German Hon: Fellows. However that is past history now and I don't want to dwell upon it.

Since leaving Hampshire I have devoted myself to collecting Australian Books & Prints as Ethnographical specimens became too cumbersome for a modern house & my Coll'n had to go into store & the war put a stop to any chance of selling This time last year I sold ...gates as being too big to carry on as my wife was not strong & the domestic difficulties threw too much upon her. I was fortunate in hearing of this present house the very hour of it came onto the market – one of the best positions in B'field & as some one else wanted to buy mine, it all fitted in v. well with a clean profit of almost £2000, fortunately there was a very good garage here & as I do not want to keep a car I had it remodelled as a Library, with a big bow window looking South over the garden.

I have had rather a poor year as I had a very severe attack of shingles in the head and I am still suffering a good deal of irritation & my doctor says there is nothing for it but to wear itself out, so I am a student in the School of Patience. It is evidently an after effect of the war as I have heard of so many cases. Fortunately I have plenty to keep me occupied.

Have you seen the latest New Zealand puzzle illustrated in the Journ: Polynesian Society June 1921 Number I cannot think for one minute that it ever was a Lintel – probably a house ornament & I should say of Melanesian origin I should like to know what you think of it. There has since been another find in these Kaitia swamps in the shape of a pendant [insert] a description of [end insert] which I suppose will appear in the Journ: in due course.

We are at present having a real old fashioned winter which will benefit the gardens as we were eaten up with every conceivable pest after the long dry summer & I hope also it will make havoc of the flu ferus [?]

When next you come to England you will see a land of topsy-turvy-dom. The New Rich are in evidence every where & social life entirely changed. The old homes of Old England are either being shut up or sold.

I must not go on grousing so with many kind remembrances

yours sincerely

J. Edge Partington

Letter C8

16 April

Wymondley

Stevenage

Herts

My dear Spencer

I am afraid I am in your bad books for your letter has been lying on my desk unanswered for so long. I should indeed like to see yr. Ethnological coll. but am afraid there is little hope of my ever getting very far away from home again my boys are growing up but I look forward to your next publication why is it that the powers that be care so little for Ethnology we suffer here just as much as you do & one gets really disheartened.

I congratulate you on having obt the head hunting canoe from the Loy Is (New Georgia I presume) they are indeed beautiful things. I am sorry you disapprove of [illegible] things in private wh'rs yr. hair will stand on end when you come to see me here. Don't you think they are sometimes better taken care of than "given to Cambridge, where they will simply be stowed away in a cellar"!! Sometimes however I wish I had never begun collecting – the Museum has had all they wanted out of my Coll'n but it becomes rather unwieldy I only get now either small things or tip top ones & the dealers here are such sharks. I am comfortably settled in my new home – an old Vicarage with yew hedges &c & only 28 ms from Kings Cross.

My second boy is at Felsted School his house master has just left to go out to Melbourne his name is Beard & he has gone to some College wh: sounds like Melville – if you should meet him

say "how do you do". I know him well from having seen him often when down at Felsted & like him.

My wife & I have only just got back from Biarritz & Paris & feel this cold weather very much. We are having heavy snow showers & biting east winds much colder than during the winter

I hope you have rec'd your copies of "Man" all right. I think it a most useful publication it was a bold venture for a poor society

I hope you will forgive me for having been so long in answering your last & as a proof send me another line soon

Yours v sincerely

J Edge Partington

Spencer papers Box 1a D Walter Edmund Roth

Letter D2

Cook

10 May 90

My dear Spencer

I am afraid we cannot come to terms upon this much vexed question of "totemism": however, as we have both tried to explain exciting facts, and offered opinions diametrically opposed to another, there is no reason why we should not discuss other matters. To tell you the truth, it is indeed a pleasure for me up here, away from civilisation – so far as the scientific element is concerned – to have a five minutes talk by letter.

I am very grateful to you at any rate for your criticism re "climanyiu" [?chiuauiyin] etc, and you are quite justified, so far as I am concerned in taking up the position which you do. However, as there will evidently now be a lot written by careful observers in the future upon these varying systems of clarification, would it not be advisable to form a small committee of the whole e.g. yourself, Howitt, Fison, etc and draw up a standard of some sort, so that these various groups can be conveniently tabulated, and carefully named if you like, so that there will be no doubt as to which groups (primary, secondary etc) are being referred to. Of course I would fall in with the views – if a majority – of any such private coterie: at present even I have a lot of M.S.S. ready and will be only too pleased to hold anything back provided there is any chance of our getting uniformity in our work.

In other matters also, there is a lot of ambiguity – e.g. the "throwing stick", "yam"-stick, the "throwing-stick" at present is apparently applied to such things as—

a spear thrower wommera

a "nulla-nulla"

two kinds of toys

"Yam-stick" may also mean

a stick for digging yams

a fighting-pole.

And so on with many others Surely if you scientific men ~~mad~~ [insert] down south [end insert] drew up some regulation for the ~~adoption~~ prevention of such mis-nomers it would do a world of good.

As for Carroll and his Anthropological Journal, -- I saw the first copy – unlike Pear's Soap I have never used it since!

Strange to say, for the last four years I have been collecting from N.W. Central, [insert] Central [end insert] Queensland, and the Gulf Country, and now from the far north. My private collection with about 600 ~~different~~ [insert] separate [end insert] objects (50 of them skeletons & skulls) I have also arranged on the Pitt-Rivers type – though of course in a small house such as mine things ~~have~~ cannot be shewn to such advantage as in a Museum. Now of course that I am a Government official, anything of special interest will go to my department down in Brisbane.

I believe the Brisbane Museum is extra strong in New Guinea things, though the authorities there are very much cramped for space.

I returned last week from a trip to Thursday Island and Normanton. At the former place I met Haddon and some of his party. I told them how delighted I was to hear of their expedition, as they might find traces of many ethnological connecting links between New Guinea and Malaya on the one hand, and Cape York, with North Queensland, on the other.

With regard to my anthropometric measurements (each accompanied by photo. of front and profile) I unfortunately do not possess a Broca's goniometer, or whatever name is applied to the instrument, so will have to get some mathematician ultimately to deduce the facial angle from the other measurements. What a joke, -- yes, the odour is pretty strong at times, but the statement is new to me that the smell of a native increases as he gets excited. I will look out for it [insert] at [end insert] any rate. There is a reverse side to the picture however -- the blacks, at Boulia used to declare that they could not stand the stench from us whites!

I am looking forward with very great pleasure to seeing your and Gillen's book published -- and sincerely trust that you will succeed in getting Macmillan to take the financial responsibility off your hands.

Your remarks re the average European Anthropologist not seeming able to put on one side the ideas of relationship to which he has hitherto been accustomed, are such as I can heartily endorse. It was a great puzzle for me to understand ~~how~~ for a long time how it was that a man could have so many mothers! -- indeed their system of social organisation was the hardest thing to grasp.

With regard to "fancy" wife, I mean the wife of the man's own choice in contradistinction to the one allotted him by the general camp-council -- his "official" wife. You see, he may not personally care for his official wife, though he is obliged to take her. Both, -- in fact all --, his ~~wife~~ wives must of course belong to the same group -- the group to ~~which~~ the females of which I applied the term "sisters-in-law". If a man attempted surreptitious intercourse with any but his "sisters-in-law," it would prove disastrous, for him -- probably death: with any of his "sisters-in-law" however no notice would be taken, unless their husbands of course chose to object.

By the bye, did I tell you that there is a most complicated system of "taboo" up here, the very same word "taboo" or "jaboo" being used to give expression to it.

Good old Martin -- he is a splendid fellow -- please pay him my best respects: the fact of his having been appointed Professor of Physiology at Melbourne is quite new to me.

No, I have not read Howitt's paper on the Organisation of Australian tribes, and would be delighted if you could spare me the loan of a copy as you kindly suggest. Mr Fison was good enough to send me [insert] his [end insert] Classifactory Systems etc: in the course of my last letter to him, I told him that we disagreed over the "totems" and that if he cared to learn my views I had stated them to you.

Now, with regard to publishing -- I cannot do anything now without permission, though I know full well that it would be granted at head-quarters as soon as asked for. I have a lot of M.S.S. in hand at the present moment, and am continually sending down reports to my chief, though, in view of fire or flood, I take a [insert] press [end insert] copy of everything (even sketches) before it leaves my possession. For instance this week I am sending down [insert] a report on [end insert] "Some of the Native Foods of the Bloomfield River Aborigines." Next week I shall have a lot of diagrams relative to "cat's cradle" to send down. I am also just at present completing the drawing for an article on the "Mesh of the Queensland dilly bag" -- these have taken me a terribly long time to work up, -- I have watched and studied the whole process of manufacture of all but two of the dozen or so different varieties. And then committing it to paper -- well you are yourself deft with your pencil, and can realise what a "grind" it meant. To tell you the candid truth, I am not really anxious to publish until such time as I have worked through all the Cape York Peninsula, and then make everything "comparative," I think it is far better to do that than to let out a little bit here and there. Up here there is apparently a good deal New Guinea and perhaps Malay element, and all that has to be sifted. At any rate you can readily understand that I have got my hands full, and that, at the same time, I am simply in love with my work. And what more does a fellow want?

Now Look here, don't you ever talk any more about my minding your free criticisms: what ever I take, I can give!! Besides as I say it is most delightful to have a chat like this -- it's just like the way we used to squabble with poor old "Hicky" at Oxford. By the bye, he is Professor at University College London isn't he? Of course, I should dearly love to have a personal talk with you, and you can rest assured that if ever I come anywhere near your neighbourhood, you will find I have taken you at your word Many, many thanks. By the bye, Tylor wrote me such a nice letter -- he says he remembers "Tommy's" sketches at Shrimpton's well. Alas!

Always sincerely yours

W.E. Roth

Letter D3  
"Strathmore"  
North Quay  
Brisbane  
22nd Dec. '97

My dear Spencer

It seems ages since I have heard from you, and you can imagine my surprise on seeing your kindly criticism re my work on the N.W.C. Queensland Aborigines. By the bye, to prevent misapprehension I thought better to write to you at once concerning your remarks about totemism.

The fact is, I purposely avoided using [insert] in my book [end insert] the term "totem" such as I had understood the word as originally applied among the North American Indians, though for purposes of reference the expression "Totemic Systems" is mentioned in the Glossary and Index. My reasons were as follows:--

- (i) the only association I found existing in those districts is that between a particular group of animals, and a particular group of individuals.
- (ii) The particular group of animals (as many as half a dozen in some cases) which are collectively described as having "all the same skin, flesh" varies with each tribe (sect 62 b)
- (iii) The particular group of individuals remains constant so far as name and identity is concerned, with each tribe (sect. 62A) The particular group of individuals referred to is what I have called the paedo-matronym (specialising blood-mother from offspring) and constitutes one of the four secondary divisions – Koopoowo, Woongko, Koorkilla, Bunburi, or the equivalent – which are met with in every tribe, and upon which the marriage-rules depend. These four terms, expressive of the divisions, have no independent local meaning.
- (iv) The special association consists in the avoidance of an individual eating – not necessarily of killing, nor participating in killing – any of the animals "belonging" to his particular paedomatronymic group
- (v) Such avoidance is only binding on the individual, male or female, subsequently to be first of the initiation ceremonies i.e. at puberty.
- (vi) There is no special association whatsoever between any particular individual or group of individuals, and any one particular animal or plant: I have underlined there two words to emphasize the total absence of any protective or religious influence between any [insert] particular [end insert] individual (or [insert] group of [end insert] individuals) and any particular animal – my interpretation of True Totemism.

Indeed I would very much like to get evidence of True Totemism among the Australian Aborigines anywhere: (I have lately had an opportunity of going through the papers of Messrs Fison, Howitt etc in the Journal of the Anthropological ~~Journal Society~~ [insert] Institute [end insert] etc but certainly [insert] can [end insert] find nothing bearing upon that protective or religious influence between individual and animal which is essentially the interpretation [insert] crux [end insert] of a totem. Of course I may be wrong, but it appears to me that the word has been improperly applied out here.

It was to explain the above facts taken in conjunction with the marriage rules that I expressed the opinion (sect 71D) that the social grouping has been devised by a process of natural selection, to regulate the proper distribution of the total quantity of food available. [The Sydney Bulletin critic so far is the only one that recognises this). Thus the husband, according to his paedomatronym lives on several articles of diet different from those of his wife (or wives): both of whose dietaries again differ from those permissible to their resulting offspring which belong to a third paedomatronymic group. Hence, to put it shortly, whereas in a European community with a common dietary, the more children there are to feed, the less will become the share for the parents, in this N.W. Central Queensland Aboriginal system the appearance of children (when once they pass puberty and its corresponding initiation ceremony) will make no appreciable differences in minimising the quantity of food available for those that give them birth.

It may interest you to know that on the Central Coastal Districts (where I have just been spending the last four months) I came across a tribe where every individual of the tribe (not of the particular group) is forbidden to eat certain articles of diet previously to passing certain of the initiation

ceremonies—it suggests the regulation of the food supply by the strong (the elder people) over the weak (the younger ones).

I expect to be leaving for the north shortly, where I hope to put in at least a good ten years at anthropological work – this time I purpose paying greater attention to anthropometric and osteological data

Trusting to hear from you soon

Always sincerely yours

W.E. Roth

Letter D4

Cooktown

Queensland

19 Jan 98

My dear Spencer Just at present I am on board the “Aramac” lying off Townsville on my way to Cooktown, which will be my permanent address for the next few years, where all correspondence will ultimately find me. I was delighted to receive your letter which reached me just as I was leaving Brisbane: I am looking forward to the printed papers which I trust will come to hand by next mail.

Re. Totemism in Australia, of course “with the proviso that in different parts of the world and in different localities totemism has developed along different lines” (your own words) I cannot do less but think that you are begging the question. Surely you cannot be aware that along a large area of the East Central Queensland Coast line (where I have been hard at work since last May) are numerous tribes (some 6 or 7 at least) in which certain dietaries are forbidden to all the young collectively (males and females up to puberty), no restrictions of any kind, in some of these tribes, being observed by any of the elders (no matter to which of the four divisions they may belong). That this is not unique for Australia, I have had access to some hitherto unpublished notes (which I propose publishing) on Tribal customs etc observed by Assistant Surveyor Robert Austin at Koombana Bay, Port Leichenault, Western Australia, in the year 1840-3 where a similar injunction of certain food-stuffs to all the young of the tribe, but none of the elders, is made mention of. [This Mr. Austin is the discoverer of the Murchison Gold Field, has Lake Austin named after him, and [insert] is [end insert] still both mentally hale and physically heart] Examples such as these can certainly not be admitted to be developments of Totemism: for my own part indeed I would consider them rather to be a primitive condition, from which, by gradual evolution, the highly organized systems (which you describe, and rightly so, as totemic) in Central Australia have gradually been derived on lines somewhat as follows:—

Stage A. On the supposition that the food-supply is inadequate to the increased population, the elders (the stronger) combine to force the younger (the weaker) to limit themselves to certain articles of diet. e.g. remnants of this, in the examples already cited, on this same supposition that this is a primitive condition, we can well believe that such is now rare, though if properly looked for, would probably be common.

Stage B. When the younger, the weaker, progressively increasing in number, and gradually insisting on being heard and taking part in the general camp-council etc come to terms with the elders (the stronger) and mutually agree in dividing themselves into two parties, each admitting the rights of the other to certain dietaries, to maintain which in status quo these divisions become exogamous. This separation of the tribe into two primary divisions, and nothing more is evidently known to you e.g. your critique of my work in the “Australian”. Because the descent in my tribes ~~took~~ [insert] takes [end insert] through the mother, I called them gamomatronyms, though is some of yours they could equally well be named gamipatronyms: at any rate this would not interfere with the validity of my argument. There is every probability of stage B being both contemporary with, as well as subsequent to stage A, the youngest children etc being still prohibited from certain food-stuffs.

Stage C. An analogous subdivision, for similar reasons, of each primary division into two again, making the four secondary divisions which are pretty common throughout Australia. A still further advance, on similar lines, would be the recorded cases of divisions into six, and lastly into eight, as alleged to be the case at the back of Burketown, in N. Queensland. Now what I would particularly draw your attention to, under this same Stage C, are the facts that



(i) the exogamy of Stage B is still retained. In other words, the divisions have arrived at that period where they actually regulate the marriage rule: the sexual are equalling and gradually overpowering the food regulations

(ii) the various animals etc forbidden to be eaten under these four divisions vary in different districts for each similar division – indeed, I have traced the identity of these 4 division pretty well step by step from the N.W. Central Districts across to the North East Coast ones, whence, travelling down to the Central East Coast we find the condition of things to be a quaternary division of the tribe, upon which, in some cases, only the marriage rules depend, the (what I believe) original abstention from certain dietaries by all the young indiscriminately being still retained.

(iii) Out of 13 tribes in N.W. Central Queensland and 7 on the East Coast, there is no connection traceable in the [insert] names of the [end insert] quaternary divisions (which you call totem names, and I, paedomatryms) and any animals etc whatsoever – much less, any totem ceremonies.

Stage D. where the various animals etc tabooed by each division progressively come to have that social and religious interdependence with human beings that you have met with in the Central Australian tribes, and other [crossed out word illegible] insert] writers [end insert] in various parts of the continent, -- and which I willingly admit may there be described as Totemism. But even there this highly developed state of affairs cannot to my mind be taken as a standard with which certain allied customs in other parts of the Continent are to be compared.

Of course in an ordinary letter such as this, it is somewhat difficult to detail all the arguments of my hypothesis that the classificatory systems of the Aborigines have originally been dependent on food-supply – but the above, though in a crude form will give you a rough outline of my ~~lines~~ [insert] course [end insert] of reasoning. Indeed from what I have been able to gather personally from both extremes of the colony of Queensland, I find nothing approaching to what you mention in the way of totems, or any ceremonies connected with them, and you will therefore understand my reason for being so guarded in the use of the term. The number of careful observers throughout the Continent is at present too limited to allow of the assumption that because [insert] certain [end insert] connections have been found between groups of animals and groups of individuals, these are necessarily a development of totemism: it would be as equally preposterous to suppose that because certain N.W. Central Queensland aborigines invariably refuse to eat pork, a positive fact, therein is a development of totemism. At any rate, taking all the above in conjunction, I think even you will admit that my hypothesis (which I have expressed in the Queensland Royal Society Transactions soon to be published) is tangible, as compared with the opinion that Totemism in its original meaning of a social or religious (or both combined) interdependence with individuals – and when that term is used, we cannot admit the proviso etc which you, in your letter, maintain – has been “dumped” holus bolus onto the Australian Continent.

With regard to the various terms used in my classificatory system, you will understand my original difficulty in finding names to suit various classes which I found to be common everywhere (i.e. East and West limits of the Colony) and so long as the etymology of the word sufficed to explain what was intended to be expressed, their cacophony etc really does not much matter. I have used the same terms in my M.S.S., which I am holding back for incorporation with a larger work which I have in view, “On the Aborigines of the Rockhampton and surrounding Coast Districts” although I propose, in this paper, taking your advice (for which many thanks) about altering the word Patronym: in future, Ethno-nym would I think prove more suitable to express Tribal name. I may admit that at the same time, even of going to Press, I did not like the word Patronym too well, because of my having read of descent through the mother (so far as tribal name was concerned) recorded elsewhere although I had neither heard nor met with, such a case in my districts: I took care to protect myself however by ~~called~~ [insert] calling [end insert] it “Patronym or Tribal name”. On similar grounds I don’t like your expression totem-names for the simple reason that there are cases (e.g. East Central Queensland Coast [insert] etc [end insert]) where these divisions have certainly nothing to do with totems. But after all, what does it matter, so long as our readers can understand what we meant? On the other hand if one of us employs a term, such as climanym (which expresses “step-ladder name” in reference to the progressive titular distinctions on the social “rung”) it would be inadvisable I think for you to alter it or re-name it, especially in

view of the fact that I am first in the field to have recorded it: furthermore I have found climanymys in East Queensland, as well as a justification for all the other terms introduced when speaking of the N.W.C. Districts.

With regard to the particular men taking part in the sexual orgie [sic] at a womans initiation ceremony, among the Pitta Pitta [insert] etc [end insert] (with whom I could make myself understood) I remember noting the fact which you will find recorded in my work that any males can partake so long as they do not belong to the same paedomatronym as the woman: i.e. she may have connection at this ceremonial only, with even individuals of groups-of-men into which she is otherwise not allowed to marry. I was particularly struck with this circumstance at the time, because until then I was firmly of opinion that the classificatory system necessary prevented incest or rather too-close consanguinity, which it certainly does not.

The only uses to which the "bull-roarer" I found to be put in the N.W. Central Districts which if you look up will be found in my work (of which unfortunately I have not a copy to hand) are as (1) toys, (2) love-charms (3) specially concerned with initiation ceremonies, by males only (not even allowed to be viewed by females). The markings on these vary, but they are invariably red-ochre greased, with a pattern in charcoal often superadded. The natives will "spin" you any yarns you like ~~abe~~ as to the significance of the markings taken together, but as any two never agree, and one man would vary his own statement ad lib, it was useless recording them – no definite accuracy would have been arrived at. The ring of concentric circles was very commonly described as the circling of the flame of fire at night-time when the ~~b—ing~~ [illegible] [insert] smouldering [end insert] stick was whirled round and round with the extended arm: while another pattern was pretty generally known as representative of the female genitals. These bull-roarers act as the signal for women to keep at a distance only, when any of these ceremonies are taking place: if they hear the bull-roarer they know that their presence is not yet permissible. I learnt nothing of their whirring noise being indicative of spirit's sounds.

Concerning avenging parties, if you like to call them so, they certainly have taken place: the avengers, if strong enough, will surround the delinquent's camp at early dawn and demand his person – if he is not forthcoming, ~~his~~ [insert] a [end insert] brother (blood or group) – the particular one being picked by his elders then pays the penalty. Of course, the two camps may fight for it collectively. Death is the punishment (see my chapter on this) for marrying a prohibited person.

I really cannot admit much similarity, re your suggestions as to origin of introcision, between a "whistles" and a marsupial penis: an avian one would be more to the point. We must look to the origin of such a custom as introcision somewhere in the natural framework upon which all evolutionary processes have been built e.g either in sexual attraction, utility, mimicry etc – [insert] your idea of a [end insert] "pure caprice" (a hitherto unrecognized factor in nature's economy) would hardly do. Indeed it seems to me, that its origin will always be shrouded in obscurity, though a comparison with the various penile ornamentations [insert] and mutilations [end insert] met with in New Caledonia, New Guinea, Borneo, and Malaya generally must not be lost sight of. Strange to say I have a record of a trader's black boy visiting some gins on the eastern slope of Cape York Peninsula and being punished by death with the additional mutilation of the sexual organ: the penis had been split down [insert] in the centre [end insert] each half being pinned backwards and outwards [insert] on the body [end insert] by a sharpened twig.

By the bye, Pornography is no invention of mine – you an Oxford man too! --, look up any dictionary you like, say the "Century" (the latest) and you will find it to express "obscenity in general". Furthermore the Government original intended omitting the last chapter, with accompanying plate, and publishing it separately for special distribution to certain people only: mainly for the purpose of drawing public attention to the present condition of certain of the aborigines in view of the legislation proposed to be enforced. The ordinary reading public had in a sense to be protected by being told that such and such a chapter was obscene, and that they could please themselves if they chose to read it. And after all, scientific and interesting as at [insert] these particular [end insert] may be to men like us, they are certainly not so to the general lay reader. Personally I admire and respect the aborigines – so long as they are not corrupted by opium, alcohol, or syphilis.

The Government of the tribe by a council of elders etc about which you write ~~for~~ [insert] me [end insert] for information, you will find described somewhere in the chapter on Punishment, Fighting etc. I have met with no divisions of the Tribe into local groups, in the sense of each group

occupying a definite area of country -- as I find to have been the case, from Austin's notes, in the old days in Western Australia. Of course, I am writing all this in the conviction that you are taking all this criticism and argument in the proper sense in which it is intended, and on that presumption I trust you will continue it, and send me more next time. At any rate I know that in your forthcoming work you will give me credit for anything I may have done in the way of priority.

Yes. I am indeed a lucky fellow: the Protectorate of the whole northern and central districts in my hands the main and only drawback is that, travelling about so much and over so large an area, I shall be prevented learning any language thoroughly -- the real key-note of the situation -- though I shall only be accompanied by blacks as much as possible. However, I will not and learn as much as I can. Now, to return to personalities, I also went Home and spent '91 and part of '92 very quietly in London, and working night and day; managed to take my double medical qualification. I am very thankful now that I did. I never had the heart to go up to dear old Oxford -- a fact which I now regret. However, I am glad to hear through you of all the dear old fellows who used to work in the "Lab": I had heard of poor old Pode's death,--the first of us to go. After taking my brother's practice in Sydney for 6 months, I did a trip in the ill-fated "Catterthun" up to China and Japan, just before the war, and on my return in '94 started out into the West of Queensland. Last May I ~~went~~ [insert] set [end insert] my steps southwards, working up the districts around the Central Coast on similar lines. It was not until my arrival in Brisbane at the end of October, and after going to press, that I was able to make a somewhat systematic study of the literature, so that you were quite right in your surmises expressed in the Australasian.

Hoping soon to receive a copy of your magnum opus, as well as the other papers

Believe me

Always sincerely yours

Walter E. Roth

Letter D5

Cooktown

8th October '98

My dear Spencer,

I have been putting off writing to you week after week, but until now have been almost run off my head and legs with work, getting everything in readiness for the Commissioner whom we are daily expecting -- as soon as he comes, I expect we shall be making a trip right through, overland, to Cape York.

Yes -- by Jove, I often smile at the way we used to "chiack" Hickson: Poulton, as I could never stand, and I think you shared the same sentiments towards the gentleman. I am delighted at Bourne getting Oxford -- in addition to his scientific attainments, he was a thorough gentleman. No "snob" about him. When next time you write to G.C.B. please remember me very kindly to him, and tell him that his old pupil has not done so badly after all!

Like yourself, Australian life has a great charm for me -- I love the freedom of existence, the hospitality of the people in general, the climate, and I am extremely fond of my work. Of course this year, in my position as Protector, most of my time has been occupied in office and clerical work, drawing up regulations, enquiring into existing abuses, assisting in popularising and introducing the new Act generally, and consulting with the different Police Officials who will in the future look after its proper execution.

Next year, on the other hand, I shall be travelling about for the most part of the time, and camping out with the blacks, when I hope to have even better opportunities than at present for carrying on my scientific duties. Even this year however has shewn comparatively good results: for instance, during my last visit among the Cairns District Aborigines I found the natives counting up to 20, in multiples of fives; I never was so taken aback in my life [insert] (so far as Australia was concerned) [end insert] & though I tried them in every way they could not get beyond the score -- both hands & both feet. But as I go along, I find nothing but surprises everywhere: -- I guess you have found the same.

I heartily congratulate you upon McMillans [sic] accepting your work, and I appreciate very much your kindness in asking them to send me a copy when published: I need hardly assure you that it will be highly valued by me.

Certainly in the N.W. Central and in the Cook (N.E. Coast) District, I know of no natives calling themselves Kangaroo emu etc men: in the former locality I could obtain no meanings of the names they called themselves collectively.

Up here in the Cook district, the natives call themselves after the places where they are born e.g. Mount Cook = Ki-âr, and any one born in that camp is Ki-âr-a-ra, the suffix being sometimes pronounced wa-ra. Now the Mount Cook boys are friendly, [insert] speak the same language, [end insert] intermarry etc with all the coastal blacks (named on similar lines) from the Annan River to (close up to) Cape Flattery. The term "Koko-yimidir comprises all these blacks collectively, this term literally signifying "speak-thus (similar, the same)"

In close proximity to these Koko-yimidir speaking natives (but more inland) are in the "Koko-yellanji" which in their language also means "speak thus (like this)" Another neighbouring tribe speaks "Koko-warra" which in the Cooktown dialect means "speak foreign (i.e. wild)".

In the Koko-yimidir speaking tribe we have two exogamous divisions only, while in the neighbouring Koko-yellanji we find the (good old) four groups of Woongko, Bunburi, Koorkilla, Koorpooroo. Only in certain of the dances at the initiation stage in this District is there some (what perhaps you would regard totemic) allusion to animals, in that we find a wild-cat, Kangaroo, etc dance. On the other hand you must remember that for many generations past there must have been Malay and Papuan influences at work, these foreigners working their way down Cape York, the Gulf etc and so destroying any totemic systems that may have been present among those [insert] Australian [end insert] aboriginals whom they conquered and dispersed. Personally I am finding more and more of this foreign element among these Northern aboriginals – e.g. the outrigger canoes, the bark blankets, the taboo, the high development of "cat's cradle" etc.

I am very pleased with the terms you propose adopting in the future re Social Relationship e.g. Class, Sub-Class, Status term, Relationship term, Totem name, Term of Address etc They are simple, definitive, and do not arrogate too much. Even these however will hardly comprise, or define (except perhaps under Status term?) what I find in this Cook District –

e.g. among the males –

A. name at puberty (early)

B. name at puberty (late) when he undergoes initiation (of which there is but one ceremony only)

C. name, when his children begin to toddle, and walk about.

d. [sic] name, when his children are adult and getting on in life

e. name (the last of all) when his flash-scars begin to disappear.

Here is a nice complication!

Of course re all my scientific reports to the Governments, I take a press copy of everything, including photos and drawings. I hope thus to have a lot of MSS etc to shew you when I caome down to the 1900 meeting in Melbourne. Of course before that time comes, I shall get you privately ~~the~~ (through your Committee) to ask the Queensland Government to let me represent them officially – I could then be certain of being able to put in an appearance down down [sic] south. I think you will be pleased ~~that~~ with all the MSS I shall then be able to shew you.

Now that the proper season is on, I am working hard at all the local economic plants – not only those used for food (and how prepared etc), but those used for fibre, for poisoning water, for different implements, for gum-cements etc. The Government Botanist is doing the thankless task of identification.

Well good bye old chaps and with best remembrances

Always sincerely yours

Walter E. Roth

Letter D6

Cooktown

2 March 1899

My dear Spencer

Thanks most sincerely for your book, which has just arrived. Of course, so far, I only have had time just to glance over it, and I beg to congratulate you most sincerely and heartily.

How I do envy you having seen those wonderful totem etec ceremonies. I only wish we had something comparable with them up here.

Last November and December I was working all up at the back of Princess Charlotte Bay, and was present at the first and fifth, of the six initiation ceremonies which take place in that particular tribe (the KoKowara). I also went in very carefully for their social organisation, and found the 4 primary groups (with similar rules) as we meet with so commonly elsewhere. This fact was of no little interest, considering that it is the first tribe north of Cooktown (among the coastal tribes) where these exogamous grouping prevails under definite terms. [insert] I believe however the Kokowara have come from the west. [end insert]

In the initiation ceremony (the higher of the two which I witnessed) masks were brought into requisition, -- these I permanently recorded with the camera, -- pointing of course to a New Guinea etc element.

I am off now to Cape Bedford to get taught the local grammar which the missionaries have been writing down for me. I shall then make a surprise visit among the pearling fleet, fishing somewhere in the vicinity, -- I believe they have some native women on board, which is contrary to my regulations. I will not allow any women (aboriginal) on these vessels. I expect to be back here by end of the month.

Well good bye for the present, and thanking you again most sincerely

Believe me

Always & truly yours

W.E. Roth

Letter D7

Cooktown

28.3.99.

My dear Spencer

Our letters must have crossed! Yes, I was beginning to think that it was a jolly long time since I had heard from you, but this is quite explicable when you tell me that you have paid a visit to the dear old country. How I envy you!

With regard to the Oxford vacancy, I can well understand your preferring Melbourne -- without a doubt there is far more intellectual freedom and scope for good scientific work out here. Bourne will get it -- there is none of that "teach-your-grandmother-to-suck-eggs"-style about him -- a weakness which, as you well know, would [insert] was [end insert] always en [sic] evidence with Hickson, Poulton etc. I am surprised that E.R.L. is supporting Weldon -- I thought he would have worked hammer and tongs for Bourne. On the other hand, it may be a case of "Save me from my friends", and his advocacy of the former may turn out to the latter's advantage.

What about little Hatebeth Jackson? -- surely his merits are not going to pass unrewarded, or perhaps he has not sufficient go and push about him --

No, I have never had the pleasure of meeting Howes, though I had often heard of him, and always spoken kindly of.

Yes. I would dearly love to see the old Laboratory again -- William, I suppose is still growling for a rise in salary!

Good old Waggett -- he was a rum chap, but always had a good heart.

Yes -- very many thanks indeed again for your book [insert] it is excellent in every respect [end insert] I suppose you saw the Queenslander review -- I do not know who wrote it, but if written in Brisbane, the only person capable of it would I think be Shirley (a London B.Sc) and one of the Senior School Inspectors. I have been away from Cooktown some little time, so that so far I have not seen its mention in the Bulletin or ~~Queenslander~~ Australasian.

By the bye, with the assistance of the Lutheran Missionaries, I have just completed the grammar of the Cooktown language (on identical lines as the Boulia District one) and this time have written it all with the proper spelling -- that authorised by the R. Geographical Society.

Now this is strictly private, and I would like your advice. I want dearly to come down to Melbourne for the Assoc'n meeting, but official tape might stop me (in refusing leave of absence for that purpose). The only certainty I would have would be to ~~represent~~ come as representation of the Queensland Government -- but now is this to be worked? Would it be possible for you to apply officially for my presence?

Always sincerely yours

Walter E Roth

If Bourne should get Oxford, please let me know, as I should like to congratulate him. I am leaving today to distribute some presents for the coastal aborigines who rendered assistance to the ship-wrecked crews during the late gales.

Letter D8

12th November 1899

My dear Spencer,

Your letter of 17th Sept. has only just reached me – I have been down through the Peninsula, and got it at Normanton. I being now on the government steamer on my way to Thursday Island.

Please excuse the note paper and the handwriting, but the ship's vibration is too much for me.

I have taken some careful scientific notes – ethnological of the coast-blacks between Duyphen Point and Albatross Bay – and came across a very curious burial custom – the near relative, -- the one who eats portions of the deceased,-- remaining dumb for some months after, his voice being ultimately restored to him at a special ceremony.

The history of the interview in the Brisbane Courier may be given shortly as follows. A good many people up here are envious of my billet and several questions have been publicly asked – the press & elsewhere – as to what work I was doing for the salary. Parliament was also to meet, and being interested in the passing of an amending Aboriginal Bill, I took the opportunity of being interviewed while at Brisbane. The reported happens to be an old pupil of mine, so that accounts for all the “jam” – because I do not for a moment hold myself responsible for all that is stated there – I think you know me well enough to know that I would not make such invidious comparisons re having seen more interesting initiation ceremonies etc than yourself [I have since been informed that it was this same young reporter who reviewed your book as well as my brother's on the Tasmanians in the Courier]. I am also sincerely sorry at the remarks re Professor Morris and the word Kangaroo, but you must remember that some few months ago (or perhaps last year) in the Queenslander, there was a whole series of correspondence along the word in question, and hence the Professor's name again cropping up in connection with it.

~~Of course~~ All my scientific reports go down to the Home Secretary now – I keep a press copy of course – but nothing will be published until I have completed the ethnological survey of the whole Peninsula – so as to make a comparative study of it as it were.

As I have not been in the Government service two years yet, I am sorry to say that there is not the slightest chance of my getting permission to leave the colony for a month –

I wish you could arrange next year a scientific trip up in the north – we could work the Queensland and Northern Territory border together. I shall start on the northern border about a month or two after the wet season is over.

No: I am afraid I don't know Minchin, and I am very sorry to hear that Bourne did not get Oxford. Poor old Balfour, I am sure a trip out here would do him good.

With all good wishes

Always sincerely yours

Walter E. Roth

Letter D9

Cooktown

10th Jan. 1900

My dear Spencer,

By the time you receive this, I hope you will have got rid of all the worries and anxieties entailed by your organisation work as Secretary for the Assoc'n meeting, and I know full well that I can congratulate you on a very successful termination of your labours.

Yes. I was indeed greatly disappointed at not being able to get away, but it is hardly good enough to ask for a thing only to know that red tape will refuse it. However, the Government are awfully good to me, giving me every encouragement, and have now taken in hand the matter, which I have urged upon them, of making a collection of the literature (scientific of course) bearing upon the Queensland aboriginal.

Every since I returned from the Peninsula, the middle of last month, I have had this abominable malaria, but a short sea-trip to Townsville and back has pulled me up again a bit.

So far as I can tell, I shall be starting as soon as the wet season is over i.e. about March or April, either for the Peninsula (its central portions, the Coen etc), or else for the Queensland – S.A. border (ie from Cloncurry to Camooweal, and so up to Burketown): but as ~~this~~ [insert] to which [end insert] will depend again on whether the floods are up or not. I must be back here in June (its end) for drawing up my Annual Report.

I need hardly say how delighted I should be to have you on the border-trip.

In haste, and thanking you again most sincerely for wishes and invitation.

Always gratefully yrs

W.E. Roth

NB Please remember me kindly to Martin

Letter D10

Brisbane

2 April 1902

My dear Spencer

Many thanks for yours of March 26th, and for the MSS returned – and with which I am glad you were pleased.

Re calling upon their namesakes, I will try and get further particulars, and see if I can trace it any further up the coast. I candidly admit now – as I did to you personally on the Changsha that there are traces of this totemism about, but I can assure you that they are mighty difficult to get hold of. Whether on the other hand, what we do find in North Queensland, is an archaic form (since, highly developed and specialised in Central Australia) or [insert] only [end insert] the last remnants of a complete system once practised all over the continent, is a matter I suppose which cannot be decided upon at present with any degree of certainty. I can assure you however, that I will try and find out all I can.

Re the natives and the white men – is a matter that has also puzzled me. They certainly have the idea with the first advent of the whites. I spent my Easter holidays with the Petries – Mr. Thos. Petrie of North Pine who came out as a boy in 1837 – to gather some information re the old Brisbane Aborigines – of which tribe only two are now known. It was the old gentleman's brother who "discovered" Darramboi (Davis, the convict) on the Mary River I think he said. Now, Mr. Thos. Petrie told me that he [insert] himself [end insert] often spoke with this Davis about the blacks he had been living with all those years, the ~~and~~ [insert] latter [end insert] explaining how the blacks had received him as one of their deceased warriors returned. The same idea is also prevalent all up the coast and in the peninsula, and it has often occurred to me that the idea may have originally arisen through pre-historic [insert] contact [end insert] with the New Guinea and Torres Straits Papuans who are certainly of a much lighter colour than the aborigines. These Papuans – we have evidence of this – certainly did come a long way down the Queensland coast following reef to reef. By means of the system of intercommunication, it therefore seems to me possible that the blacks were acquainted with a lighter coloured race – which was confirmed with the advent of the whites. ~~Though the simile may not be exact, I certainly see child~~ It is only from the fact of the idea of whites springing up from blacks being so deep-rooted, that ~~some~~ [insert] an [end insert] explanation ought to be sought: the idea seems too universal, to cast it aside without enquiry. Of course, you know the other explanation [insert] (first I think given by Dr Lang) [end insert] which is also feasible – from what I know in the north regarding the treatment of the corpse-(skinning, singing the flesh etc) [insert] ~~By the~~ Again, Tom Petrie tells me that the old Brisbane blacks used to explain a h.c. child, by reckoning that the mother must have been covered by a nigger when [insert] he was [end insert] wearing a white shirt! [end insert] By the by, Tom Petrie told me another very interesting thing about "Darramboi," which was to the effect that though he had been scarred – by similar means and fashion [insert] (pattern) [end insert] as the natives amongst whom he lived – none of his scars were raised. Indeed, I have never seen yet a European with a true "Keloid": this seems to confirm me in my conviction that there must be something different (probably physiological) between the two kinds of skin.

I agree with you about the ventriloquian business and will omit it: at the same time I am satisfied with Hislop's statement of the affair, but with you am satisfied that it must have been done by natives who were more or less civilised by contact with whites.

The account of ~~my~~ [insert] the [end insert] origin of man – the making of an artificial anus – was obtained in the neighbourhood of the mouth of the Normanby, -- Princess Charlotte Bay (East Coast).

No. I have got nothing in the shame of Daramulun or Baiame. As to Andrew Lang, I was very annoyed to see the way in which he had twisted my "Mulkari" of Boulia into a sort of Supreme Deity. I was not writing on Early Religion, and only in order to explain the context, described him as ~~the~~ a supreme supernatural beneficent being etc – or something after that strain – but as you ~~describe~~ say, Lang must needs "read into it much more than was justifiable".

Yes: I was much amused with the Adelaide 3-column interview. I am only too anxious to see the whole completed work.

My bulletin on "Game." – is now going through the press. I am taking up my Superstition M.S.S. on my long trip – and will get it all in order within the next few months.

By the by the mines department are sending up a geologist (and surveyor combined) with me – and on the whole we ought to do some good work. I am very anxious to see and describe the underground (hollowed out) dwellings on Alleyu Island (one of the Wellesley group) in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

With all good wishes, and trusting to hear from you soon.

Always sincerely yours

Walter E. Roth

Letter D11

26 April 1902

(becalmed somewhere off Princess Charlotte Bay!)

My dear Spencer

I see there are one or two matters in your last letter that I omitted to discuss.

Re menstrual flow and soiled grass stuck up in a tree. This of course is only a [insert] one of the [end insert] superstitions according to which the women at Cardwell declare their menses can be stopped: as however these cannot ever be stopped except physiologically (at pregnancy and the climacteric), and as they know full well that the men would touch nothing that passed from them ~~while~~ etc, they are quite safe in making the assertion in question. However, many thanks for drawing my attention to the matter – I will make it clearer in my final MSS.

Now with regard to my statement re the intelligence being situate in the ear., [sic] see also for further proofs of this [insert] in other tribes [end insert] my Bulletin No. 2 p. 7 bottom of right hand column, as well as p. 8 under MILKA, the ear. The parallel "He that hath ears etc" was given me by Bishop White, who assured me that this referred not to the acoustic properties of the persons addressed but to their sense of intelligence: this idea I subsequently got confirmed by two other clergymen.

While at Cape Bedford last week, I came across certain spirits who after making men and women of adult size, can cause them to shrink smaller and smaller, and so [insert] finally [end insert] get them within ~~the~~ [insert] a [end insert] woman who now becomes pregnant. Schwarz will get me the fullest particulars he can about this matter.

I shall have the complete MSS. of my Superstition Bulletin ready in about a month, but as I want to insert some illustrations – photographs of some charms etc in my collection which I cannot possibly get hold of until next November when I return to Brisbane, things will have to wait until then. In the meantime, I am putting together my notes on Domestic Implements and utensils, including wood- shell- and bone-work: so that if all is well, I hope to have two bulletins out by Xmas.

By the by, has it ever struck you how many names of ideas etc are all based upon names of parts of the human body. The body apparently appears to have been specialised – so far as names of its different parts are concerned – at a very early age. One cannot help noticing this very markedly in my vocabulary (2nd Bulletin) of portions of the human frame. I wonder if the same thing holds ground in other tribes.

~~By the by,~~ [insert] To return to matters non-scientific [end insert] Mrs Roth says she has written two or three times to your wife, but having received no reply is anxious about their having got astray. We saw as much as we could of young Dr O'Brien – what a nice gentlemanly fellow he is – and have given him introductions to all the nicest people we know ~~there~~ in Brisbane.



With love from the wife to Mrs Spencer and the children, and kindest remembrances from myself  
Always sincerely yours  
Walter E. Roth  
As soon as they arrive, I will send you one of my ~~new~~ [insert] last [end insert] Annual Reports – I want to convince you that the mission stations in [insert] North [end insert] Queensland are not psalm-singing “dolce far mete” institutions!!!

Letter D12  
Cooktown  
6th October 1902  
My dear Spencer

I have just returned from the very heart of the Peninsula where, in conjunction with the Commissioner of Police, I have been holding a magisterial enquiry into some murder cases: we have been a month away, and hence a large amount of official correspondence has ~~assembled~~ accumulated! Please pray excuse my not writing to you now as fully as I could have wished. No: we never got across to the Pellews, and I must candidly admit that I have never come across any “myall” natives of the Mitchell: they are still a very wild lot, and only a couple of months ago, surrounded at night a mounted police party consisting of eight or ten people fully armed – fortunately, no lives were lost on either side. On the other hand, it is on the mouth of this river, or somewhere in its immediate neighbourhood, that I hope Bishop White will see his way to making a missionary settlement.

I spent a good deal of my time [insert] amongst [end insert] the Batavia and Pennefather R. blacks (Gulf coast), and came across some extraordinary beliefs comparable in a certain way with those described by you from Central Australia – e.g. the bringing of the “soul,” etc from holes etc in the rocks where they had been placed by various Beings. Similar things were met with on the Eastern Coast. However, in the short ~~shape~~ [insert] space [end insert] of a letter [insert] such as this [end insert] there is no scope to describe all their curiosities: and hence, so soon as my MSS is completed, I will send you a type-written copy and shall be glad of any foot-notes or suggestions that you may care to make. I have already made reference to you in one or two places, but very incompletely.

I quite agree with you as to Andrew Lang drawing conclusions ~~other than~~ from writings. Other than those in my own particular case, because of my having (just for the sake of explaining matters a little) described Malkari (among the Boulia blacks) as being a supernatural power who makes everything etc – Lang, in the course of an address which was sent to me, brought this statement forward as testament to proof that these natives believed in a supreme God! I see that there must be an interesting discussion going on now concerning the question of Totemism (led off by Haddon) before the Association meeting in the old Country. Durkheim, in L'Année Sociologique (so I am informed) has been fighting the theory that the Arunta are primitive – as regards their totemic superstitions. So far as I am personally concerned, I doubt if we shall ever arrive at the true origin of totemism, or [insert] rather [end insert] what passes for it out here in Australia.

But to return. I cannot help smiling at your views of missionary work in [insert] North [end insert] Queensland, ~~as~~ I would appear equally ridiculous in your eyes were I to [insert] similarly [end insert] express an opinion ~~of~~ [insert] upon [end insert] it subject of ~~upon~~ which I knew nothing! In North Queensland – and I speak from personal knowledge (and [insert] I [end insert] am [insert] admittedly [end insert] ignorant of what goes on in the southern portion of the State) – the primary object has not “been that of inculcating amongst the blacks a knowledge of so-called Xtian ideas which they cannot understand, and only a very secondary idea has been that of teaching them under altered conditions [illegible] their own living.”

A perusal of my Annual Report which I am forwarding by this mail, may perhaps interest you, dealing as it does with the results of my inspections of the different missions. I look upon these stations rather as workhouses – no work no food! – and am always ~~enjoining~~ [insert] impressing [end insert] upon the superintendents the danger of over-educating the blacks under their charge. I am basing and organising all my work up here on the [illegible word crossed out] belief that  
(a) in the struggle for existence, the black cannot compete with the white  
(b) it is not desirable that he should mix with the white

(3) [sic] With advancing civilisation, the black will die out.

(4) while he lives, the black should be protected from the abuses to which he is subjected by the whites. (Of course you must remember that the Protector's duties up here are very different from what they are in other states: they are not the issuers of rations, or blankets (which are ~~done~~ [insert] distributed [end insert] by the Police))

Then again, you appear to be labouring under a woeful misconception as to the status etc of the missionaries (I am only speaking of N. Queensland) Certainly 4 out of the 5 superintendents are men of intellectual ability, and all have gone through a special course of training before having been appointed to their billets. There is no "pampering" [illegible word crossed out] or "pampering" of the blacks going on by these men I can assure you much less is there anything [insert] of the sort [end insert] going on by the Government. As compared with Victoria, our Executive spends (approximately) £7,000 on 25,000 blacks; ~~as compared with~~ £5,000 is spent by you on about 400!

My experience of the Roman Catholic Church out here is a very different one to yours. Noticing that our stations up here were run only by Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Lutherans, I made a point of approaching the then head of the R.C. Church out here -- the Coadjutor Bishop (I think he called himself -- and asking whether the denomination could not see ~~their~~ [insert] its [end insert] way to opening a [insert] mission [end insert] Station like all the others. The reply I got was something to the effect :...We have gone into the matter thoroughly, but are of opinion that the spiritual and temporal benefits derivable, therefrom, do not warrant the initial expenditure." It wasn't bad, was it?

Yes, I have been retrenched 15% off my screw, I could make much more in private practice, but I love my scientific work too much to chuck it now. I sincerely trust that these bad times have made no difference with you and yours.

By the by, did you ever get a sketch map from me concerning the geographical boundaries of the N.T and Queensland border tribes?

I am longing to have a good old chat with you -- I wonder when that will be though! At any rate let me congratulate you already on your book -- and don't you forget to send me a copy.

The wife has just come in and sees that I am writing to you. She wants me to say that she cannot understand whether any thing has gone wrong with her letters to Mrs Spencer and sends love to her, and the children. With kind remembrances to you and all of yours from me

Believe me

Always sincerely yours

Walter E. Roth

I hope I shall succeed in removing your bias re our Missions: for the sake of old friendship's sake. I know you won't hesitate to talk as straight to me as I have to you! Besides, if we can't have disputes, or any little differences of opinion, what's the good of being pals? Doesn't Terence somewhere say

"Querelae amatorium amoris renovitiae."?

Letter D13

Melbourne

Jan 30 .03

My dear Roth,

Your proof came yesterday aft. & today I have been through it. I think that some time ago I sent you up some notes in regard to part of it. It is first rate & most valuable & I congratulate you much on gathering together what will be I am sure of the greatest value to ethnologists.

The ngai and Koi part is the best of the whole and I am very glad that you are publishing the parts dealing with conception not being considered as the result of intercourse of the sexes. Such cliches [?] matters so far as Australia is concerned & will come as an 'eye-opener' to those who had a kind of idea that Gillen & myself were dealing with a few very modified tribes. I am persuaded that if only we could have got at the real ideas of most of our Australian tribes we should have met with this belief in some form or another.

Be sure & send a copy of this work home to Tylor as soon as ever you can: he is at work on the subject and I heard from him only two weeks ago asking if we had any further evidence. I told him

that we had plenty & that you had also & I am now writing to him to say that your work will shortly be published.

He will be delighted with your work & so will Frazer.

Will you please send me down as soon as ever you can a copy of the bulletin as I want to refer to it & in about four weeks from now shall be sending our work home to Macmillans.

The illustrations are first rate: one or two of them referring to the projection of evil magic are clearly similar to what we have in the central tribes. The pointing bones & sticks are almost identical.

There is one thing which I do not quite understand. Page 16 par. T4 you say (near the end) "the bushman here also employ etc" does this mean the whites? if not I think it would be advisable to indicate clearly who you refer to & if it does mean the ordinary white bushman then I would leave it out or at least modify it. The ordinary reader will certainly take the word "bushman" to refer to white men.

Also on p.15 par. 82 you say 'in the mother's belly.' I think that it would sufficiently describe matters & sound much better if you simply say 'in the mother.'

I see totemism sticking out in a good many parts of your work. As Lang would say "it saute aux yeux". Totemism in Australia may of course be a rather different thing from totemism in America but fundamentally the two systems are closely allied and sooner or later you will come to realize this. The idea of a very close connection between human beings & animals & plants & this is what Totemism really means. This idea lies at the root of many of the most important beliefs of our Australian tribes & until you have realized this you cannot possibly understand many of their most important & characteristic beliefs & customs. Personally I do not care what it is called. Totemism or Shamanism or anything you like.

By the by do you ever come across the papers of a man named R.H. Mathews. Most of his work I think is got from other people but he has published mainly in the R,S, of N.S.W. an interminable series of papers dealing almost exclusively with the class names & marriages of tribes galore. He has a most remarkable faculty of mixing up the classes & is a perfect fraud which once in Sydney I had the pleasure of telling him. Howitt & myself have agreed to ignore him and I am glad to see that you do the same.

I have in my study here the ms. of a big work by Howitt. It contains the results of about twenty years gatherings. He deals mainly with the S.E. Australian tribes & up into the centre as far north as Lake Eyre. You take the N.E. & Gillen & myself the central & northern tribes so that between the four of us half of Australia is pretty well worked out & from what I can see the greater part of the west falls into line with our tribes in the centre.

At the present time Martin & myself have our respective wives & families away at the sea-side and he 'meals' with me.

Like myself he is going wonderously bald but in addition I am beginning to turn grey. What with ethnology & museum work on the top of University work this is perhaps not to be wondered at but when you feel young it is rather a nuisance to look old. It is 18 years ago since we were in for those "schools" & I often wish that we could go back again & start afresh knowing what we now know. However if we have done nothing else I think that we have been able to add a little to the knowledge of early mankind & that our old University has no reason to be ashamed of us. It is a curious thing that only Two Oxford men have done work of this kind out in Australia.

Very much do I envy you your chance of work. I can only get out amongst the savages at intervals & mostly my time has to be occupied by teaching first year medical students which is about the most monotonous & soul killing work imaginable.

I did not reply to your previous letter but it much amused me. Of course I do not know any thing whatever about this Queensland missionary & he may be a person of vastly superior intelligence to the missionary who we know in Victoria & Central Australia – I most sincerely hope that he is – but what I meant & still mean is that it is a perfect farce attempting to teach the aborigine to read & write & quote 'scriptures' which he cannot understand. If this money wasted on him were spent in trying to teach him something by means of which he could gain his living it would be far better.

However we have just had a spell of hot weather. I feel too limp to argue or do anything requiring much exertion. I hope you & Mrs Roth have got through the summer well.

All of my time has been spent writing up G's & my own results & now thank goodness I am on the last chapter & am drawing hard at implements etc. If there be any thing which is tedious it is the description of those same implements but I presume it must be done.

Yours ever

W. Baldwin Spencer

P.S.

Be sure & send me a copy as soon as possible & don't forget Tylor.

Letter D14

[Home Secretary's Dept.

Queensland

Office of the Northern Protector of Aborigines]

c/o Home Secretary

Brisbane 8th Feb. 1903

My dear Spencer,

Very many thanks indeed for all your trouble for the hints and references which in almost every case I have followed:-- with regard to sections 67 and 68, see my notes on margin of attached slip.

In sect. 110, ham-string is correct: the blacks have an idea that when a person is sick, and [illegible word crossed out] [insert] too weak to [end insert] get on his feet, ~~that~~ the ham-strings have been cut (a punishment which is inflicted for various offences): it is only fair to state that I never saw one of these alleged bits of ham-string which is supposed to bring [sic] luck to its owner.

The other points over which you had doubts. I think I have now made perfectly clear by the addition of foot-notes.

I am taking the revised proofs back to the Government Printer to-morrow and as he will next be making them up into pages – I will get ~~further~~ 2 extra proofs struck off (just as they will appear when published) by the end of the week, and will send you and Tylor each an advance copy so to speak, together with the illustrations.

I have very good reason to ignore the gentleman whom you mention in your letter – (1) because he has always avoided meeting me straight forwardly (2) he has tried to do some dirty work with me – but it didn't come off, and (3) about 18 mos [sic] ago, he acted the common or garden blackguard as follows. A lady friend of mine, inspired with a little enthusiasm through the perusal of my grammar, took up the work and after a great deal of worry time and labour got together a neat little paper on one of the N.S.W. dialects. The gentleman in question happened to hear of her work, expressed his great interest in it, and asked for ~~the~~ its loan. He then ~~published it~~ [insert] read [end insert] this [insert] lady's [end insert] grammar as his own before one of the local Societies! He is a true parasite – no "mutualism" or "commensalism" about him.

I can assure you I feel very proud of your congratulations: you know me well enough to realise that when I say this I mean it. It's all kicks and very little ha'pence up here! – by the by, did you hear how I was attacked in Parliament last November, and how the Minister defended me, the debate reaching into 6 or 7 pages of Hansard. It was very funny. I tell you candidly that I tried to make this present bulletin a success – its the most difficult which so far I have attempted, but then it means notes which have been collected since 1894 when I first ~~wh~~ went to Boulia. I intend working in this district again this year – and hence hope to find something more about the re-incarnation etc business from these Boulia blacks. What disheartens me so however is that all these blacks are dying off so speedily and the younger generation knows nothing!

Please remember me kindly to Martin: I would much like to see the dear old chap again.

Let me congratulate you on having such nice fellows ~~under~~ about you like Frank Andrew and O'Brien: if you've got any more of that species, send them along.

Yes. I often think of the dear old times at Oxford, and how I wasted my opportunities. But I think I've now made up for all deficiencies and errors of early youth! – at least. I've worked hard since, and certainly tried to make up for lost time. These thoughts came back to me somewhat forcibly a few months ago when I heard of the death from cancer of poor Lady Ferguson – "Bee" Max Müller that was – my old "pal" of undergraduate days.

By the by, I'm going to ask you a favour old man. When you have time I would be awfully grateful if you could let me have a copy of the photo-group, with Moseley in the centre, that was taken at the Museum just before we went in for our finals: also please put underneath all the names, some of which I dare say I shall have forgotten. Like yourself, I have the signs of age coming on, but thank God my heart is young, and I can still enjoy Life and see and recognize all its charms and beauties. Added to this, I love my work, so what more does a man want?

My dear wife is looking forward to welcoming my boy Vincent who arrived in Sydney from Scotland yesterday. He is now thirteen, and it is 9 years since I have seen him, -- so that you can imagine the rejoicing when he arrives next Thursday.

I quite agree with your ~~with~~ in your views about teaching the aboriginals too much: -- views endorsed by the northern missionaries themselves: indeed glancing at my reports you will see that they are really reformatory and industrial schools. I quite agree with you as to the pampering, pampering and over "education" to which the blacks have been subjected in other states. At any rate, I shall soon have another annual report to send you -- so you can then see for yourself what progress I have been making.

I sincerely trust that you and yours are all keeping well, and have got through the last heat-wave all right, and with the kindest remembrances from us both to you all

Believe me

Always yours

Walter E. Roth

I will post ~~you~~ the advance proofs directly I get them, both to yourself and Tylor -- the latter wrote me on the same subject a few weeks ago and I am very grateful for the references and notes you supplied me with. I see in your letter you speak of Worgaia, -- I presume these are the Waagai of your "Central Tribes" -- which I call the Workai-a.

Letter D15

[Home Secretary's Dept.

Queensland

Office of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals]

c/o Home Secretary

Brisbane 3.1.03

My dear Spencer,

Just a line to say that I did not have time [insert] etc [end insert] to get the MSS of my next Bulletin type-written and I was also anxious to get ~~off~~ it off my hands while the opportunity offered. I accordingly sent it to the Printer's yesterday and expect to have proofs in about a week. I will send you one set of proofs under registered cover, and will ask you to kindly look through them and make any notes or references: but please do not keep them longer than two days. To save unnecessary delay I will also wire you when I post them,

With united new year's wishes

Always sincerely yours

W.E. Roth

The above address will find me till beginning of April