



62. The Native Tribes of South-East Australia. A Reply to Dr. Howitt.

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I should much like to be able to think that Mr. Lang had merely misunderstood my meaning as expressed in my summary, but the serious charge levelled against Dr. J. G. Frazer and myself rests upon a selection of four separated parts of that summary, the bisection of one sentence, and the rearrangement of others.

It is very hard to understand how Mr. Lang can have forgotten that which seems to me to have necessarily required the exercise of volition. A. W. HOWITT.

Australia.

Lang.

The Native Tribes of South-East Australia. A Reply to Dr. Howitt: By Andrew Lang.

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When revising the proof-sheets of *The Secret of the Totem* in September 1905 I observed a statement by Mr. Howitt (*Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, pp. 499, 500) which appeared to me to be contradicted by his own evidence. Often as I read his pages I could understand them only in one way. I took him to mean that the belief in what he styles an "All-Father" only occurs among tribes in a forward stage of what we regard as social advance. But Mr. Howitt's own testimony proved that the belief exists among tribes who have not arrived at that stage.

I therefore, in *The Secret of the Totem* and elsewhere, pointed out and criticised the apparent inconsistency. When I learned, from a paper by Mr. Howitt in *Folk-Lore* (July 1906), that he did not mean what to me (and to others) he seemed to mean, I publicly and privately apologised to Mr. Howitt for my misunderstanding, and I withdrew all my criticism based upon my error of apprehension.

Mr. Howitt remains unsatisfied. He "would much like to be able to think that "I merely misunderstood his meaning as expressed in his summary." This implies that, when he wrote, Mr. Howitt did not regard my mistake as unconscious and involuntary. If that is, or was, or is to be, his opinion (I can never more feel sure that I understand what Mr. Howitt means), so be it. But I proceed to quote the entire passage which Mr. Howitt accuses me of garbling. I shall next try to show that the passage is, first, misleading in style, and, secondly, is erroneous, or shall I say inadequate? in statement of facts.

Mr. Howitt's remarks I copy, beginning at the last paragraph of *Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, p. 499: "It seems quite clear that *Nurrundere*, *Nurelli*, *Bunjil*, *Mungan-ngaua*, *Daramulun*, and *Baiame*, all represent the same being under different names. To this may be reasonably added *Koin* of the Lake Macquarie tribes, *Maamba*, *Birral*, and *Kohin* of those on the Herbert River, thus extending the range of this belief certainly over the whole of Victoria and of New South Wales, up to the eastern boundaries of the tribes of the Darling River. If the Queensland coast tribes are included, then the western boundaries might be indicated by a line drawn from the mouth of the Murray River to Cardwell, including the Great Dividing Range, with some of the fall inland (*sic*) in New South Wales. This would define the part of Australia in which a belief exists in an anthropomorphic supernatural being, who lives in the sky, and who is supposed to have some kind of influence on the morals of the natives. No such belief seems to obtain in the remainder of Australia, although there are indications of a belief in anthropomorphic beings inhabiting the skyland. That part of Australia which I have indicated as the habitat of tribes having that belief" [I take Mr. Howitt to mean the belief in a supernatural being with supposed moral influence], "is also the area where there has been the advance from group marriage to individual marriage, from descent in the female line to that in the male line; where the primitive organisation under the class system has been more or less replaced by an organisation based on locality; in fact, where those advances have been made to which I have more than once drawn attention in this work."

This, I think, is the entire of the passage which, in *The Secret of the Totem*, pp. 197, 198, I treated in the following terms: "I quote a passage from Mr. Howitt, "which Mr. Frazer restates in his own words" (namely, in *The Fortnightly Review*, September 1905). "He defines 'the part of Australia in which a belief exists in an "anthropomorphic supernatural being, who lives in the sky, and who is supposed to "have some kind of influence on the morals of the natives. . . . That part "of Australia which I have indicated as the habitat of tribes having that belief' (namely, "certainly the whole of Victoria and of New South Wales up to the eastern boundaries of the Darling River") "'is also the area where there has been the "advance from group marriage to individual marriage, *from descent in the female "line to that in the male line*; where the primitive organisation under the class "system has been more or less replaced by an organisation based on locality—in fact, "where those advances have been made to which I have more than once drawn "attention in this work.'"

The reader may now compare Mr. Howitt's twenty-seven lines with my attempt to condense them. If in that attempt I have wronged him it was done unwittingly. What I wanted to get at was the last sentence in his twenty-seven lines, beginning "That part," and ending "in this work." It was here that (as I later learned with much regret) I misunderstood and misrepresented Mr. Howitt's ideas. I understood him to mean that all the tribes who, in the region defined, have the All-Father belief, have also all advanced "from group marriage" to individual marriage, from descent in the female line to that in the male line; that the primitive organisation under the class system has been more or less replaced by an organisation based on locality, and so on, as above. If Mr. Howitt meant *that* (as I firmly believed he did), then his statement was contradicted by his evidence, which proves that tribes with female descent, and "primitive organisation under the class system," have the All-Father belief as much as the advanced tribes with male descent and local organisation. But Mr. Howitt did not mean that, and he has explained that the south-east natives *without* the All-Father belief are mainly those who practise what he calls "group marriages"; what I call *Pirrauru* and *Piraungaru*.

As soon as I learned Mr. Howitt's real meaning I apologised, and withdrew all criticisms based on my error of apprehension. But, without his own explanation I could only understand his words as I did. I quote, for the first time, another passage of his which, without his explanation, would be to me equally misleading. *Native Tribes*, &c., p. 506: "In the tribes of South-East Australia the ancestors appear in "the guise of totems or theriomorphic human beings, in some respects resembling both "the Alcheringa ancestors and the Mura-Muras. *But it must be remembered that in "these tribes there has been a clearly marked advance in the status of society, from "group marriage to a form of individual marriage, from descent in the female to "the male line, and from a society organised on the class systems to one based on "locality."**

Mr. Howitt does not here really mean that among *all* these tribes there has been the advance to reckoning in the male line and to an organisation of society based on locality. He means that in *some* of these tribes the advances have been made. But he does not say that the advances have been made "in *some* of these tribes," he says that they have been made "in these tribes."

Am I wrong in thinking this phrase misleading?

Again, Mr. Howitt writes: "that part of Australia"—where the All-Father belief exists—"is also the area" where the social advances have been made. Now certain *parts* of "that part of Australia" make *one* of the areas in which the social advances have been made; they are not *the* area of the advances. These advances have been

* My italics.

made in huge northern, western, and central areas, in which, so far, the moral All-Father has not been found as an element of belief. The statement, therefore, of Mr. Howitt seems to me if not erroneous, at least quite inadequate. It also gives the impression that the All-Father belief co-exists with the social advances, whereas the advances are found in very large regions without the belief, and the belief is found in regions where two, at least, of the advances have not been made.

With regard to Mr. Frazer, if he did not misunderstand Mr. Howitt's meaning in the same way as I did (and as a distinguished reviewer did, who "paraphrased Howitt, pp. 500-506"), then I must regret having misunderstood him in precisely the same way as I misapprehended the ideas of Mr. Howitt.

I find that I quoted Mr. Frazer thus (*Secret of the Totem*, p. 199—citing *The Fortnightly Review*, September 1905, p. 552), "Mr. Frazer puts the case thus, 'it can "hardly be an accidental coincidence that, as Dr. Howitt has well pointed out, the "same regions in which the germs of religion begin to appear have also made some "progress towards a higher form of social and family life.'"

Now in Australia from the central Arunta to the northern sea, the advances to "individual marriage," to male descents, and to local organisation, have been made, but—where are the "germs of religion"?

On the other hand, among many south-east tribes the advances to male descent and to local organisation have *not* been made, yet "the germs of religion" (the All-Father belief) are flourishing there. There is a want of coincidence, whether accidental or essential, between the germs of religion and the social advances.

I am much honoured by Mr. Howitt's promised criticism upon numerous passages in my book. I hope to profit greatly by his censures, and will gladly acknowledge any changes in my opinions which he may produce. But if he is not more successful in apprehending and stating my ideas than he was in a recent critique published by him elsewhere, I may take silence for the better part.

ANDREW LANG.

REVIEWS.

Australia.

Thomas.

The Native Races of Australia (*Native Races of the British Empire* Series).
By N. W. Thomas. London: Constable, 1906. Pp. xii + 250. 23 x 14 cm.
Price 6s. net.

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This book, or rather the series it inaugurates, indicates, it may be hoped, an awakening of interest on the part of intelligent people in the numerous races living under British rule. Amongst the many anomalies of which Englishmen appear at times to be even proud, none is perhaps more striking than the absence of interest in, or even knowledge of, the many different peoples who form so large a part of that empire the praise and glory of which they are never tired of singing. This is well exemplified by a fact to which our attention is called each recurring year, viz., the empty benches when the House of Commons is called upon to discuss the affairs of India. It would be pleasant to believe that the launching of this series of manuals is indicative of a change in this regard taking place in the public mind and that the works themselves are destined to arouse and spread an interest in the many highly interesting peoples in different stages of culture to be found in the King's dominions beyond the sea.

In fifteen chapters Mr. Thomas has given a synopsis of the facts which seem best established regarding the physical appearance, mode of life, social organisation, and primitive culture of the Australian aborigines. The work bears the impress of having been very carefully prepared, and of many original works relating to the