

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Dostoyevsky Smith Willis
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Henry Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Gogol Busch
Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato Scott
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Dickens Plato Scott
Andersen Andersen Cervantes Burton Hesse Harte
London Descartes Wells Voltaire Cooke
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Irving
Bunner Shakespeare Shakespeare Irving
Richter Chambers Irving
Doré Chekhov da Shakespeare Irving
Swift Dante Shaw Wodehouse
Pushkin Alcott
Newton



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Kinship Organisations and Group Marriage in Australia

Northcote Whitridge Thomas

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DEDICATED
TO
MISS C. S. BURNE,
WHO FIRST GUIDED MY STEPS
INTO THE PATHS OF
ANTHROPOLOGY

PREFACE.

It is becoming an axiom in anthropology that what is needed is not discursive treatment of large subjects but the minute discussion of special themes, not a ranging at large over the peoples of the earth past and present, but a detailed examination of limited areas. This work I am undertaking for Australia, and in the present volume I deal briefly with some of the aspects of Australian kinship organisations, in the hope that a survey of our present knowledge may stimulate further research on the spot and help to throw more light on many difficult problems of primitive sociology.

We have still much to learn of the relations of the central tribes and their organisations to the less elaborately studied Anula and Mara. I have therefore passed over the questions discussed by Dr Durkheim. We have still more to learn as to the descent of the totem, the relation of totem-kin, class and phratry, and the like; totemism is therefore treated only incidentally in the present work, and lack of knowledge compels me to pass over many other interesting questions.

The present volume owes much to Mr Andrew Lang. He has read twice over both my typescript MS, and my proofs; in the detection of ambiguities and the removal of obscurities he has rendered my readers a greater service than any bald statement will convey; for his aid in the matter of terminology, for his criticisms of ideas already put forward and for his many pregnant suggestions, but inadequately worked out in the present volume. [viii] I am under the deepest obligations to him; and no mere formal expression of thanks will meet the case. I have been more than fortunate in securing aid from Mr Lang in a subject which he has made his own.

I do not for a moment suppose that the information here collected is exhaustive. If any one should be in a position to supplement or correct my facts or to enlighten me in any way as to the ideas and customs of the blacks I shall be obliged if he will tell me all he knows about them and their ways. Letters may be addressed to me c/o the Anthropological Institute, 3 Hanover Sq., W.

NORTHCOTE W. THOMAS.

Buntingford,
Sept. 11th, 1906.

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Allg. Miss. Zts., 1

Am. Anth., 2

Am. Phil. Soc., 44

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Aust. Ass. Adv. Sci., 45

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Social organisation. Associations in the lower stages of culture. Consanguinity and Kinship. The Tribe. Kinship groups; totem kins; phratries.

The passage from what is commonly termed savagery through barbarism to civilisation is marked by a change in the character of the associations which are almost everywhere a feature of human society. In the lower stages of culture, save among peoples whose organisation has perished under the pressure of foreign invasion or other external influences, man is found grouped into totem kins, intermarrying classes and similar organised bodies, and one of their most important characteristics is that membership of them depends on birth, not on the choice of the individual. In modern society, on the other hand, associations of this sort have entirely disappeared and man is grouped in voluntary societies, membership of which depends on his own choice.

It is true that the family, which exists in the lower stages of culture, though it is overshadowed by the other social phenomena, has persisted through all the manifold revolutions of society; especially in the stage of barbarism, its importance in some directions, such as the regulation of marriage, often forbidden within limits of consanguinity much wider than among ourselves, approaches the influence of the forms of natal association which it had supplanted. In the present day, however, if we set aside its economic and steadily diminishing ethical [2] sides, it cannot be compared in importance with the territorial groupings on which state and municipal activities depend.

If the family is a persistent type the tribe may also be compared to the modern state; it is, in most parts of the world, no less territorial in its nature; membership of it does not depend among the Australians on any supposed descent from a common ancestor; and though residence plus possession of a common speech is mentioned by Howitt as the test of tribe, it is possible in Australia, under certain conditions 1 , to pass from one tribe to another in such a way that we seem reduced to residence as the test of membership. This

change of tribe takes place almost exclusively where tribes are friendly, so far as is known; and we may doubt whether it would be possible for a stranger to settle, without any rite of adoption, in the midst of a hostile or even of an unknown tribe; but this is clearly a matter of minor importance, if adoption is not, as in North America, an invariable element of the change of tribe. Although membership of a tribe is thus loosely determined, tribesmen feel themselves bound by ties of some kind to their fellow-tribesmen, as we shall see below, but in this they do not differ from the members of any modern state.

But in Australia the importance of the tribe, save from an economic point of view, as joint owner of the tribal land, is small compared with the part played in the lives of its members by the intra-tribal associations, whose influence is recognised without, as within the tribe. These associations are of two kinds in the lowest strata of human society; in each case membership is determined by birth and they may therefore be distinguished as *natal associations*. In the one case, the *kinship groups* such as totem kins, phratries, etc., an individual remains permanently in the association into which he is born, special cases apart, in which by adoption he passes out of it and joins another by means of a legal fiction 2 . The other kind of association, to which the name *age-grades* is applied, is composed of a series of grades, through which, concomitantly with the [3] performance of the rites of initiation obligatory on every male member of the community, each man passes in succession, until he attains the highest. In the rare cases where an individual fails to qualify for the grade into which his coevals pass, and remains in the grade of "youth" or even lower grades, he is by birth a member of one class and does not remain outside the age-grades altogether.

In the element of voluntary action lies the distinction between age-grades and *secret societies*, which are organised on identical or similar lines but depend for membership on ceremonies of initiation, alike in the lowest as in the highest grade. Such societies may be termed voluntary. The differentia between the natal and the voluntary association lies in the fact that in the former all are members of one or other grade, in the latter only such as have taken steps to gain admission, all others being simply non-members.