

V 1b, 1

TOTEMISM OF SOUTHWESTERN ABORIGINES

TOTEMISM OF SOUTHWESTERN ABORIGINES

Origin of totemism - question of a supernatural agency

Connection of totems with system of social organisation (phratries, marriage laws etc.)

Phratry totem, general totem, family totem, individual totem (with examples)

Names derived from totems

Identification of totem with human totemkin

TOTEMISM OF SOUTHWESTERN ABORIGINES

The oldest theory concerning the origin of Totemism amongst native races is that of Garcilasso de la Vega, an Inca on the maternal side, who in his history of the Incas, states that totems had their rise in the efforts of early human groups to differentiate each from the others.

The groups needed some differentiation, and this was supplied by the application to each group of some animal or plant name, and the origin of such group name becoming obscured in time, the intelligence of each human group only saw a certain relation between itself and the animal whose name it bore. Dr. Andrew Lang, in his most recent work on the subject, "The Secret of the Totem", agrees with this theory, for he is of opinion that totemism began in the assumption of groups of men of the names of natural objects, and as each group became conscious of its possession of the name of a plant or animal, the belief was evolved that some mysterious connection existed between the group and the animal or plant whose name it bore.

The processes of evolution amongst the Australian aborigines are very complex, and are apparently not the result of one century or age, or one over-mind, so to speak, in that century or age, but of a collective wisdom embracing many ages, whereby, without having kings, chiefs or overlords, except their sorcerers, a system of rules applying to every detail of native life, to kinship, marriage, and totems, to food, its distribution and prohibition, to hunting, fighting, visiting, has been evolved which leaves our own elaborate social organisation far behind.

With regard to the system of totemism amongst the Australian aborigines, whence it arose is still a question exercising the minds of some of our greatest ethnologists. In the forthcoming Cambridge Ethnological Expedition to this State, the subject of totemism amongst the Western aborigines occupies an important place. Dr. Andrew Lang, who had partly revised my work on the Native Tribes of Western Australia, dealt very exhaustively with the chapter on Totemism, not only because it clashed with some of his own and other writers' conclusions, but also from

the absence of theory of surmise, and the accumulation of hard facts represented in hundreds of totemic pedigrees obtained in the camps of the natives throughout the State. Living and mingling with them daily in their own camps, and working amongst them during the past eighteen years, I have had a unique advantage over other writers who have only had access through general works to a special line of study, and this has enabled me to grasp the totemic system of our western natives, and present it in the clearest possible light without touching upon the esotery or mysticism which may or may not attach to it. I have not sought for a possible esoteric meaning to this or that totem. I have only alluded to the mysterious relationship which exists in every native mind between the man and his totem, whether that totem is Phratry, Class, District, Family or Individual.

With reference to the mystic connection between the name of the group or individual, and that of the animal or plant of the same name, Professor Rhys and others agree that amongst savage races the name was not only a part of the man who bore it, but it was that part of him which is termed the soul - the breath of life, and Dr. Lang, reasoning from these writers says, "name is the soul of its bearer, and if the totem also is his soul, then the name and the soul and the totem are all one."

As far as I have ascertained, there are in the West no elaborate ceremonials connected with the increase of totemic animals and plants, such as are described by Messrs. Spencer and Gillen in their two works on the South Australian tribes, but as all my inquiries have hitherto been conducted in districts whose climatic and other conditions afford an abundance of native foods throughout the year, it cannot positively be asserted that no elaborate totemic practices occur in the so-called desert interior of the State, particularly that part of it which adjoins the districts of South Australia where the highly organised totemic ceremonies are in vogue.

I am rather inclined to believe that in the little known regions of the Eucla and Eastern Divisions, where the rainfall is scanty and intermittent, and where in consequence animal and

vegetable foods are scarce during a great part of the year, ceremonies of a somewhat similar nature to those described by Spencer and Gillen will be found to be practised in order to obtain a magical increase of the totemic food products of these regions.

It will be well here to give a little insight into the social organisation of the Southwestern tribes in order that their totemic system may become clearer. I am confining the totems to the Southwestern district.

The earliest type is the division of the Southwestern natives into two moieties or phratries as they are generally called, these two phratries bearing the distinguishing names of White Cockatoo and Crow. Now from my own observation amongst them, there cannot be any doubt that these two names were supplied primarily from the coalescence of two races, a fairer and a darker race; for even with all the ages and ages of mixing and intermarrying amongst them, the White Cockatoo can still be distinguished from the Crow type. Mendelism may explain something of this continued adherence to type, but it may be interesting to mention that the Rev. J. Matthew of Victoria, author of "Eaglehawk and Crow", has also found unmistakeable evidence of the coalescence of two races in the Victoria tribes, Mr. Matthew calling the mixtures a curly and straight haired race, whereas I call the mixtures a fairer and a darker people.

The marriage of the two phratries is exogamous, that is, a White Cockatoo can only marry a Crow, and vice versa, no other marriage being allowed amongst them. Each member of the group is proud of his phratry name and proclaims it on all occasions. In some parts of the S.W. these two phratries are subdivided into four, but without interfering with the marriage law of the primary phratries. Then again the descent of the children varies. In the more Southern districts the children follow their father, that is, if the father are Crows, the children also are of the Crow phratry, or if the father is White Cockatoo, the children are also of his phratry. In the Southwestern area, the descent is maternal, that is, if the mother is of the Crow phratry, the children are also Crows, and if she is a White Cockatoo, the children enter

the White Cockatoo phratry.

In the Northern part of the State there are four Divisions, each bearing different names, but so far I have not identified these names with any animal or bird. In these four divisions two only can intermarry, each two producing the other two throughout all generations. Let us call these four divisions Smith, Brown, Jones and Robinson. Smith and Brown marry, producing Jones and Robinson. Jones and Robinson marry, producing Smith and Brown, and so on for ever. That is the general organisation. Then the blood relationships come in which forbid consanguineous marriages. For instance, a Smith man and Brown woman have a Jones son. The Smith man's own sister, also a Smith, marries a Brown man, and they have a Robinson daughter. You see that the Jones boy and Robinson girl are apparently of the marrying classes, but these two cannot marry because of the blood relationship between them. There is a term in all dialects which applies to this "forbidden degree", as it may be called, and not until white settlement took place was this law broken. This will suffice to give an idea of the general social organisation.

As regards the totems of these people. The general name applied by the Southern natives to what we call their totems is borungur - meaning elder brother, and there you see the blood relationship existing between the aborigine and every natural object, for it is almost safe to say that every natural object is the totem, borungur or elder brother, of some person, tribe or phratry. In the South, every man of the Crow phratry is wordung borungur (crow elder brother). Every White Cockatoo man has the white cockatoo as his phratry totem.

Whether the totemic system of the Southwest represents the earlier or later development of totemism, may be left to scientists to determine, but along the coast and in the inland areas of the S.W. a man's totem is his meat, if it is an edible totem. Totems are not sacred therefore in the matter of food, but the phratry totems are tabu as regards marriage - they are exogamous, that is. Now in the minds of all S.W. natives, the connection

between themselves and the two birds whose names they bear is so real that when a white cockatoo or crow alights on a tree near a native camp, and utters its raucous note, conversation is hushed, and after the bird has flown away, discussion ensues as to its errand, the direction from which it came being also noted, also whether its coming portends evil or perhaps only a friendly visit from some neighbouring tribe, these matters being for the sorcerer of the family group to determine. It is only when these birds come singly that their visit is portentous; a flock of white cockatoos alighting or circling near a camp will have many *kallees* thrown at them.

Within the primary phratries of the S.W. are the four matrimonial classes or subdivisions before mentioned, called Ballaruk, Nagarnook, Tondarup and Didarruk, the first two being included in the Crow phratry, the second two, Tondarup and Didarruk, being of the White Cockatoo phratry. Each of these subdivisions have what may be called class totems. All Tondarup and Didarruk have the rain as their hereditary class totem, bestowed upon them, according to themselves, by their *demma goomber* (greatgrandparents or ancestors). The rain totem descends from mother to children in those areas where the descent is agnatic. The Nagarnook of the Swan, Murray, Vasse and Gingin districts had the emu as their class or subdivisional totem, the alternative name for the Nagarnooks of these districts being *wejuk* or emu people.

The Ballaruk were supposed to have the *ballawera*, a now extinct species of squirrel-like opossum, as their class totem. These totems were hereditary and exogamous. The edible totems were eaten by their human totemkins; indeed, the Nagarnooks were supposed to have been able to change themselves into emus at will, and going into a flock of these birds to kill as many as they required for food.

All natives living on the seacoast had the sea as their general totem, not phratry, as both phratries lived on the coast, and both claimed the sea as their *borungur*. The fish in the sea were not general totems, only the sea itself. They were *waddarngur* - sea people.

Those natives whose grounds ran along the rivers were beelgur, river totem people, but the fish in the rivers were not included in this totem. Then again, certain groups or tribes living in certain food producing districts, or districts where a special wood useful for making spears, or other weapon was plentiful, had these products as their district totems - the same word, borungur (elder brother) being used throughout. In the area where there was an abundance of honey-bearing banksia the members of that area were mungaitch borungur, or banksia totem people. The people living in the spearwood area were spearwood totem people. In some places where, owing to special food attractions, opossum, swan, kangaroo, were numerous, these animals and birds became the district totems of the people upon whose grounds they were. In Dandarraga, Goomaling and other places, the goomal or grey opossum was very plentiful, and in the neighbourhood of Lake Bambar near Gingin, a favourite breeding ground for the swan, this bird was the district totem, and so on. All of these totems which were edible were eaten by their human totem kins. The banksia district totem people invited friendly tribes to come to the banksia feast. The swan totem people called their friends to their grounds at the swan breeding season. The opossum totem people also had a feast for their friends when the favourite food of the opossums had ripened, and these animals became plentiful. Mēn, a species of gum, was found extensively in the York and Beverley districts and in the gum season, visitors from friendly areas flocked to the gum feast. These district totems would be called by scientists "totemkins within the class and phratry." They appear clearer to me by the designation I have given them.

Within the district again, special families had other totems, which might be called family or local group totems. On the seacoast the kalda or seamullet, the melok or salmon, the schnapper and other large fish frequenting the inlets and estuaries, became the totems of certain families, descending to the male relatives of those families; the females being taken to the country of their husbands were only "life" totemkins.

The children of these family totemkins were generally given a name at birth having some connection with the action of the fish

totem of their fathers, the father having observed such action at or shortly after the birth of the child. As for instance, kalda was the sea mullet totem of Woolgurt, and the name Baabur was given by him to his son, from having seen the mullet leap out of the water - baaburr being indicative of the noise it made when rushing through the water.

The origin of many of these family or local group totems appears to be comparatively recent. One such origin is legendary, and is as follows :- In demma goomber times, two dogs, a male and a female, came to Nyeerrgoo, the present Victoria Plains, from south. They were nearing some scrub when they heard a noise, and going in the direction of the sound they found two yoongar (natives) throwing their kailees. The dogs pounced upon the blackfellows and ate them, but the two men at once disagreeing with them, they were forced to eject them, which they did at a certain spot. The men turned into white stone. After a while the dogs became thirsty and proceeded to dig for water. The male dog dug north and east, but he could not find any. The female dog dug waddarn-al-dalongin = towards the sea, which was southwest and found plenty of good water. The family or local group on whose ground the water was found were made dog totem people by their father and father's brother, the female dog, not the male, being their totem. This totem descended to the children for ever, irrespective of sex. There are however but four dog totem people now living, two of these being half-caste. Their names were given from some action of the dog, some of the names being as follows :-

- Dikkijan Dogs crunching leaves (from dikkee-dikkee = crunching leaves)
- Beenaran A dog digging (from beena, to dig)
- Wabberan Puppies playing about (wabba, to play)

This dog totem was not eaten by its human totemkin, except they were very hungry or very greedy, their reason for not eating it being that it had brought them water. The spring that the dog found is now to be seen at Nyeerrgoo.

The karna, a species of wild turnip which grew abundantly on the Victoria Plains grounds was the district totem of the Nyeerrgoo people.

Then comes the individual or personal totem. When a baby is born, should some special circumstance happening at the time force itself upon the attention of the mother's brother (uncle), grandmother, or father of the child, a name will be given it from such circumstance. For instance, a female kangaroo, called warr or warra, in the S.W., is seen grazing or sitting; bal bal nyin - it is sitting, one of the men will say. The baby is called Balbuk, and has the warr as its personal totem. You notice that the children are not named from the totem itself, but from some action of the totem.

A little woorark, a species of marsupial now extinct, is seen standing and gazing at the camp, "yalgai yookin", the action is called, and the baby is named Ngilgee, and has the woorark as her individual totem. An old grandmother stoops to drink from some flood waters, and some one calls out, "gab yoorra" - the water is dirty. The child's name is Yoorin, and muddy flood waters are her personal totem.

Names may be given to children from the family or local group totem, from the personal totem, or the name may be dreamed by a grandmother or uncle (mother's brother).

Now a Swan man of the White Cockatoo phratry possesses the following totems. The white cockatoo is his phratry totem. Being of the Tondarup subdivision, the rain is his class totem; living on the river bank, the river is his general totem; the banksia growing plentifully in his district is his district totem, and the burngup, wallaby or other animal which was seen at his birth will be his individual totem.

To receive the name of an animal, plant or other object, is in the native mind to be endowed with the essence, spirit, or being of that object; to be under its special guardianship, and in short to become one with it in some mysterious sense. Its young are called "children" of whom the totemist may be the mother or father. Tyler calls the totem a system of nature worship. Bagshot and others call it a clan deity which watches over and attends to the clan in some superstitious way. The term religion has so many definitions that one cannot say totemism has a religious aspect, and yet it is most certainly on the frontiers of

religion. A man is so identified with his totem that he cannot abandon it any more than he can abandon his soul or breath. The totem only leaves him when life itself is going. Their totems are nearer to them than their phratries, for the phratries are general, the totems individual.

All edible totems were the food of their human totem kins in the S.W., but the totemic relationship restricted indiscriminate slaughter, for no native could wantonly injure or destroy his totem, nor could he kill for the pleasure of killing; he must only kill to eat, and they will not kill its young, for the young of their totem are the same to them as their own children.

When a kangaroo totem man hunted a kangaroo singly and killed it, should he be obliged to sleep on his tracks he cut off a paw of the animal, and placing it at some distance from the little fire he lighted, he slept between the fire and the paw, the fire guarding him on the one side, the paw of his totem on the other.

When a man of the White Cockatoo phratry totem dies, his relatives do not refrain from eating his phratry or district totems, but they will not eat his local group or family totem, nor his individual totem for a season, nor will they mention his name for a season. In the case of a dead man of, say, the eaglehawk totem, his people will not eat the male eaglenawk for a season, but they will eat the female bird.

Seamullet or salmon totem families will not eat their totem on the death of a relative, for that season, but on their next visit to the district they may eat the totem, and so on with other family totems. With regard to the individual totem, Balbuk's relatives did not eat the warr of her district for a season after her death, but they ate the yongar or male kangaroo, and so with the other personal totems. Balbuk ate the warra during her lifetime for it was her "daaj" or meat, she said.

When the time comes for the resumption of the totemic food, the removal of the abstinence is accomplished in various ways: By rubbing the mouth with the fat of the animal; by drawing a line of charcoal across the cheeks and nose, or by refraining for a long time and then resuming the eating of the animal without

any ceremony. In the Swan district, when a number of young men were about to resume the eating of a kangaroo at the same time, a kangaroo was killed and put into a native oven to cook. While it was being cooked, a stick was used to stir or rake up the coals, each mooloowarra (abstainer) helping to stir the fire. When the food was cooked, all partook of it without any further ceremony.

As an instance of the close connection which exists in the native mind with regard to the family or individual totems :- a few days before Balbuk's death she was lying outside her hut when suddenly a warra, her personal totem, appearing to come from nowhere, stood erect about a hundred yards away from her and looked across at her. Balbuk gazed at it in silence while it stood motionless, other members of the camp not daring to move. After a moment or two the camp dogs wined it and the warra disappeared. Balbuk believed that it was her totem which had come to warn her, and she accepted the warning and met her fate in brave silence, for she interpreted its message to mean her death. Not all the medical attention of the world's best specialist would have kept Balbuk alive after her totem had come to warn her.

To show you how the totem is identified with the human totem-kin, I will mention Joobaitch's death. Joobaitch was the last of the once-numerous Guildford and Helena River tribe. When he was dying, he attributed his coming death to evil magic, sent him from two different directions; from Dandarraga by an opossum totem man, and from Northam by a kangaroo totem man, both these people having a grievance against him owing to a long ago breach of some native law. Shortly before his death I was sitting beside him, when he suddenly opened his eyes, gazed at me as if to fix my attention, and then proceeded to scratch himself in the ribs after the manner of a male kangaroo. His relatives, who were near, said, "Old man got bulya from yongar borungur." I asked Joobaitch if this were so, and he said, "Yes," "Where?" I asked. He motioned with his hand towards Northam where in the early days a number of kangaroo totem people resided.

A day or two afterwards Joobaitch, now very near his death, gathered his fingers together and made a distinct opossum pad on the dusty floor, "Goomal borungur send you bulya too?" I said. A faint nod was the only reply. "From Dandarraga?" Again the affirmative nod, and Joobaitch, satisfied that he had named and located his murderers, left to his relatives the task of avenging him, and calmly resigned himself to death. Joobaitch's personal totem was the burngup, a species of wallaby or opossum, now extinct.

In the case of family and individual totems, should one of these be found dead by a human totemkin, the finder knows that either his or her death, or the death of some relative of the same group totem will shortly follow. The totem has gone before its totemkin.

When I was at the Southern Cross camp, I found a native there, an emu totem man, in the last stage of consumption, and while conversing with the older men the sick man's uncle told me of a dream he had had in which he saw an emu walking towards him, but before it came quite close to him it fell down, and lay still where it had fallen. Gweeya then knew that Koolong, his nephew, would soon die. The family were just waiting at the camp for Koolong's death, preparatory to moving on to a fresh part of their run. Koolong died shortly after my visit.

These then are some of the totems of the West. Every bird and beast and plant is the totem or elder brother of some class, group or individual. There are, however, one or two birds exempt from totem kinship, and of these the blue pigeon is one. I have never found a blue pigeon totem person in any of the camps visited in the Southwest, where the bird is called nganga we'nee (dead mother) although what the connection was between the pigeon and the dead mothers of the tribes I could not discover. The present day natives have many myths and legends about the blue pigeon, but none of these throw any light upon the mysterious exemption of this bird from totemkinship and from the usual fate of edible birds, for in neither the north nor the south is the blue pigeon killed or eaten.

It is not that the spirits of dead mothers enter into and take the shape of the pigeon, for the spirits of all dead natives must go to the home of the dead beyond the sea. Research began almost too late amongst the native inhabitants of the more settled southern districts, and one has to be thankful that so much was secured before the final silence had settled down upon the aboriginal inhabitants.

Much has been written relative to a supposed supernatural agency for the origin of totemism. In S.E. Australia, Bunjil was the name given to the Supreme Being who instituted the totems, and ascended into the sky with his people afterwards. In N.S.W. Baiame was the god who founded the totems and made the totemic laws, and in other Australian tribes various accounts attribute super-human agency or half-beast - half-human agency for the classes and originating the phratry totems. He is called in the S.W. mammangurra - father of all birds, but there is not a tittle of evidence to show that he was at any time venerated or propitiated as a supreme or supernatural being. And there is only traditional evidence in the York and Beverley districts that the eaglehawk formed a phratry of himself; if ever he formed one of the principal phratries, it was at a period so remote that all record is lost, and only the legends giving the eaglehawk precedence of all other birds have been preserved. Yet it is interesting to learn that the two primary phratries in Victoria are stated by the Rev. J. Matthew to have been Eaglehawk and Crow.

With regard to our functions in respect of our various edible totems, what might be called co-operative societies for the increase of the totemic animal or plant existed to a certain extent in some parts of the southwest. The duty of the human totemkins was to foster the totem animal or plant that formed their food supply. "Let us do magic and so obtain plenty totem food," they said, and so they increased their supply in various ways, either by singing for their increase, by dreaming their increase, or by following some formula, handed down to them for untold generations.

District totems, such as the honey-bearing banksia, may be increased by the totemkins first painting their bodies with wilgee or red ochre, and then taking some leaves and a few small branches of the banksia tree, they roll these up and place them in the forked branches of the trees when a great quantity of flowers will result. The opossum district totemkins rub their bodies with opossum fat and going in amongst the trees which the opossum must affect, they take their nose bones and scratch the tree trunks in a manner similar to the claw marks of the opossum. The swan totem men, also the kalda or seamullet totem men sing the increase of their respective totems, making the peculiar motions of bird and fish as they sing. When this is done a great number will come, and many friends will be invited to the feast. One might say that these primitive practices represented the beginnings of totemism. Personal totems are not sung for in the S.W. nor may women sing for the increase of any totem. If a man whose individual totem is the wallaby dreams that he sees a great number of these running about, then he knows that a great many wallabies will come.

In the northern regions, amongst edible fruit, seed or vegetable totems, the flower is supposed to be the mother of the fruit. In the South if the fruit or plant is plucked before it is ripe, the totem gets "sulky" and will not come and great rain will fall.

The Western aborigine, unlike the eastern, cannot explain his totem, nor has he any myths to account for its origin. The germ of totemism must have arisen when man was in a very low state of culture such as is no longer found on earth, and to try to explain its origin, one must only have recourse to conjecture.

We can assume that the group which first gave itself animal or bird names was human, just as we are; that these early men were rational beings, had feelings, passions and a language in which to express these just as we ourselves possess.

We can assume also that groups of these early humans, fierce, jealous and unsociable, living in small communities owing to the necessity for obtaining their daily food, developed slowly the idea of exogamy or marriage outside the group, and that later on, having applied animal or bird names to each separate group, they conceived the idea that a certain kinship existed between them and the animal or bird whose name they bore, and that gradually the name-giving animal or bird received the respect and regard now given to it as the totem or blood relation of the group. More especially might this apply to a group finding itself in the midst of an area prolific in certain foods. The idea would be slowly evolved that these foods especially belonged to such group, and thus a district totem might come into being.

The native is by nature deeply mystic, and the totemic traditions which he reverences without in many cases there being any outward or visible sign of his veneration, play a greater part than many of us know in the realities of life as they present themselves to his intelligence. He interprets every movement of his totems, and familiar as he is by heredity, instinct and unconscious training in the habits of bird, beast and plant, any unfamiliar feature in connection with their habits etc., is ominous to him, for he sees evil magic busy at work to compass his destruction, through his totem, and so he rushes to the sorcerer of his own tribe and relates the unusual happening, requesting him to find out from whence or whom the magic had been projected into his totem.

The mystic connection between the man and his totem is also shown in their belief that the animal or bird becomes such a part of their own personality, that when a man dreams of a lizard he knows that a lizard totem man is about to pay him a visit, for the totem comes in advance of its totemkin. When he dreams of seeing a snake or other animal, reptile or bird, wounded, dying or dead, he will shortly hear of the illness or death of a man of one of these totemkins.

A group or individual is united to its totem by a blood bond, hence the blood relationship term applied to all totems. This universal belief not only tends to promote kindness towards the totemic animal or plant, but also limits the hunting of the totem to the necessities of subsistence. No man can mock his totemic animal or bird nor can he wantonly destroy it and this mysterious rapport is ever present in the Southern native's mind notwithstanding that his totem is his food.

We might call such a system as that which I have imperfectly endeavoured to show, a sort of crude ideality in the aborigines, which led to the association of the phratry, class, family and individual, with some form of animal life, and which from that slowly developed into a veneration for these forms, to nearly all of which are ascribed a human intelligence.