

Chapter Four

The Initiation of Australian Anthropology: An Interlude

“...you and I,
To some secluded spot shall forthwith hie;
And there, amid the damps of Afric’s plains,
Or in Australia, where it seldom rains,
Shall study and acquire, if so we can,
The ways and morals of the earliest man:
Debased in intellect; but lithe in limb,
Dance the war-dances which we learn from him;
Observe his habits and in notebooks note ’em,
And try to steal his most respected totem.”

G.B. Grundy

In the preceding chapter I examined the roots of the evolutionary approach to the study of Aboriginal religion. In the next chapter we shall watch that approach flower. But we shall not see it bear fruit. It was to prove to be an infertile approach.

This chapter is a necessary interlude. It is not so much concerned with theories of Aboriginal religion as with a radical improvement in the quality of the ethnographic data about the Aborigines, which had at least partially resulted from these early evolutionary theories. This chapter is thus concerned with the growing interdependence of field-workers in Australia with American and European anthropological theorists. It is concerned with the initiation of anthropological investigation in Australia. This

resulted in ethnographic works which were of an extremely high standard, and it led to some of these field-workers virtually being accepted as full 'tribal' members. This chapter is thus also concerned with the 'initiation' of Australian anthropologists.

It is indisputable that the individuals who in this period did most to deepen our understanding of Aboriginal religious life were Fison¹⁶ and Howitt, and W.B. Spencer and Gillen. Nonetheless, there were other notable authorities on the Aborigines. Beginning with Brough Smyth's two-volumed *The Aborigines of Victoria* (1878), we might then mention J.D. Woods (ed.) *The Native Tribes of South Australia* (1879), G. Taplin (ed.) *The Folklore, Manners, and Customs of the South Australian Aborigines* (1879), E.M. Curr *The Australian Race* (4 vols, 1886-7), R.J. Flanagan *The Aborigines of Australia* (1888), J. Fraser *The Aborigines of New South Wales* (1892) and several other works. Even more comparable with the works of the two great ethnographic teams were W.E. Roth's *Ethnological Studies Among the North-West Central Queensland Aborigines* (1897) and J. Matthew's *Eaglehawk and Crow* (1899) (see Elkin, 1975).

There are two reasons for my exclusive reference to Fison, Howitt, Spencer and Gillen in this chapter. Firstly, Spencer and Gillen's *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899) was unsurpassed in quality, and it has been regarded by some as the first book to be published based on a relatively intensive study of a primal society (Kaberry, 1975, p. 73; Richards, 1939, p. 273) (closely followed by Haddon's Torres Strait Expedition, from which the first volume was published in 1901). Even Howitt's *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (1904) cannot match Spencer and Gillen's works, since Howitt was often forced to rely on inadequate secondary sources to supplement his own investigations. Spencer and Gillen refused to publish material they had not personally collected. In 1969 Elkin wrote:

The publication in 1899 by Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London, of Spencer and Gillen's "*The Native Tribes of Central Australia*" was an epoch-making event, affecting the scholarly fields of ethnology and comparative religion ... This was because it presented for the first time a 'living' record of the social organization, ritual and mythology, and craftsmanship of an Australian tribe, the Arunta, in the middle of Australia. Its vivid descriptions of initiation, totemic and burial rituals have not been equalled since (1969a, p. 81).

The second reason for my exclusive reference to these two teams of field-workers, is that they were in intimate contact with overseas anthropologists. Howitt corresponded with Lubbock, M'Lennan, Bastian, Darwin, Van Gennep and Lang, and maintained personal friendships with Wake, Morgan, Tylor and Frazer.

Spencer's Scientific Correspondence provides an invaluable testimony to the intricate relationship between field-workers and anthropological theorists in this period. The volume contains extracts from letters Spencer wrote to Balfour, Lang and Marett, plus over one hundred pages of correspondence between Spencer and Frazer.

Another author who might have qualified to be included in this chapter on the grounds of her association with overseas theorists was Katherine S. Langloh Parker (later Katherine S. Stowe) (see Drake-Brockman, 1953). She said that initially

... my anthropological reading was scanty, but I was well acquainted with and believed in Mr. Herbert Spencer's 'ghost-theory' of the origin of religion and the worship of ancestral spirits. What I learned from the natives surprised me and shook my faith in Mr. Spencer's theory, with which it seemed impossible (1905, p. 3).

Later her theoretical guide was Andrew Lang (whose brother was a medical practitioner in Australia). Lang wrote introductions to the first two of her delightful collections of Australian legendary tales, as well as the introduction to her more scholarly work *The Euahlayi Tribe* (1905). It should not be taken as a depreciation of Parker's works that she is not mentioned in the following pages. Rather, this is due to the fact that her books were generally less influential than those of Fison and Howitt, and Spencer and Gillen. I will now provide some biographical sketches of these individuals.

1. Fison, Howitt, Morgan and Tylor

As a member of the secret society known as the Grand Order of the Iroquois, Lewis Henry Morgan developed an interest in the life and customs of the Iroquois Indians. His investigations into their culture developed into the first scientific account of an Indian tribe: *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois* (1851). Then, while he was in Michigan in 1858, Morgan discovered that the Ojibway Indians, who were linguistically unrelated to the Iroquois, had the same rules governing the designation of kinship relationships. Morgan had a suspicion that other Indians might also reveal such affinities, and so he sent questionnaires to missions and military posts throughout the United States. The results astounded him. Encouraged by his success, he asked Professor Joseph Henry, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institute, to secure governmental permission to distribute his questionnaire throughout the world. One of these questionnaires reached a Wesleyan missionary in Fiji, who in 1869 replied by sending Morgan details of the Fijian and Tongan kinship systems. This missionary was Lorimer Fison.

In 1871 Fison returned to Australia (where he had lived from the time he left England in 1856 until 1861), where he continued his investigations for Morgan. Fison arranged to have a letter published in the *Australasian* of the 15th June, 1872, which invited information from anyone who knew, or had access to information about, the Aborigines. Alfred Howitt was perhaps the only person to reply to this letter.

Howitt had first encountered Aborigines at Albury in 1854. They disgusted him. In 1861 he was appointed head of the expedition to rescue Burke and Wills and their party. The only survivor was John King, who had to be rushed back to receive medical care. However, Howitt found himself with much more leisure time when he returned to bring back the remains of the expedition. It was on this occasion he made his first close acquaintance with the Aborigines. He had learned their language from his guides, and he now witnessed their undisturbed life-style. His attitude was softening, but the following passage reveals the he was far from being a sentimentalist.

You may feel pity for the blacks, but they are such an idle, incorrigibly treacherous, lying race, that I am getting into a state of aversion towards them, and sometimes ... I am almost tempted to wish that they would try to surprise us, that we might once and for all have it out with them (quoted in Howitt Walker, 1971, p. 187).

Howitt's attitude was further mellowed when he was made local correspondent for the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in 1868. This position demanded he increase his understanding of native life and custom, but his knowledge was still uneven. From about this same period he began to be acquainted with some of the issues of contemporary anthropology. Between 1868 and 1874 he read on *The Origin of Species*, *The Descent of Man*, *Prehistoric Times*, *The Origin of Civilization*, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind*, and perhaps *Primitive Marriage*.

Then in 1872 he made Fison's acquaintance. In that same year Morgan published an article entitled 'Australian Kinship'. Leslie White has said that in this article Morgan

... was one of the first, if not the first, anthropologist of any stature to write on the subject of Australian social organization. As a matter of fact, it would be little exaggeration to say that Morgan, with the aid of his protégés, Lorimer Fison and A.W. Howitt, whom he taught and guided through a decade of correspondence, founded the science of Australian ethnology (1947, p. 400).

1872 seems an appropriate date, if not for the birth, then at least for the conception of Australian Aboriginal anthropology.

After they had met, Fison and Howitt developed a circular which they distributed to help Morgan accumulate information on kinship and marriage. However, in 1876 Morgan wrote to them suggesting they write their own book on the marriage systems of the Aborigines. The result was, of course, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai: Group-Marriage and Relationships, and Marriage by Employment* (1880) for which Morgan wrote a 'prefatory note', and to whom the book was dedicated. Tylor, who had arranged a publisher for the book, praised it, although not uncritically. M'Lennan and Lubbock were predictably opposed to the Morganesque views on group marriage and kinship. However, Fison felt comforted by the fact that they had only attacked his data, and not his deductions from these data. He felt he had taken enough care to be sure of his facts. He wrote to Morgan:

Mac's critique pleased me by affording me much quiet amusement, at his absurdly 'pooh-pooh' style. It is the veteran school master, spanking his naughty little anthropological boys, who have been impertinent enough to question the wisdom of their teacher (in Stern ed., 1930, p. 442).

I cannot dwell on the subject of kinship and marriage here, even though, as we shall see in the next chapter, it was integrally related with the controversies that arose about Aboriginal religion. Rather, I must move on and note a new development in Howitt's interests — the investigation of Aboriginal religion. Fison had returned to Fiji in 1875 and so the anthropological team, but not the friendship, had been dissolved. Then, in 1881, Morgan died. I have already noted Morgan's total lack of interest in the study of religion (n. 13) and hence he would not have proved the ideal patron for Howitt's new interests. Ominously enough, it was in the last letter Howitt wrote to Morgan before he died that he mentioned his new discoveries concerning Aboriginal religion (in *ibid.*, pp. 449-53 ff.). To put this in perspective it will be necessary to back-track a little.

When Howitt contributed a small section to Brough Smyth's *Aborigines of Victoria* (1878, vol. 1, pp. 62-4 ff.), his knowledge of the secret ceremonies, which he had gained from Tulaba, an elder of the Brabrolong tribe, was limited to the public rites which women and uninitiated boys attended. Howitt was no doubt aware his knowledge was imperfect, and he therefore asked the elders to re-enact their ceremonies which had been banned for so long. An account of these rites is to be found in *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*¹⁶ (1880, pp. 194-199 ff.). Howitt reports that at the end of the celebration 'I said jokingly to him [Tulaba] "I am *jerra-eil* now". He replied, "Yes, now you are my brogan"' (*ibid.*, p. 198n.). But in reality, Tulaba still withheld many secrets. What is recorded in *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* is once more limited to the public rites, except for a reference to the *turnدون* or bull-roarer.

How had Howitt found out about the bull-roarer? He tells us it was revealed to him by Turlburn (Long Harry). Here is Howitt's account:

I once happened to meet Turlburn ... on the plains between Sale and Rosedale, and stopped to have a talk. After a while I brought up the subject of ceremonies, and he finally said 'there is one thing you do not know'. We were sitting by a little bridge which crossed a shallow gully, with open country around us and a straight road for a considerable distance. Looking all around, he then said, 'come down here', going under the bridge and speaking in a low tone of voice. I went there and sat down, and he then, with much mystery, and a watchful air, lest anyone might come, told me of the *turndun*, that is the *bull-roarer* and of the part it plays in the ceremonies (1904, p. 510).

When Tylor (who had, incidentally, attended séances with Howitt's father in 1872) (see Stocking, 1971a, pp. 89, 92) read the account of the bull-roarers in *Kamilaroi and Kunai*, he wrote to Howitt in an effort to encourage him to provide further information about them. Mulvaney has said

Tylor's interest and requests were expressed opportunely, for Morgan was ailing and died late in 1881. The fact that Howitt had recorded the existence and ritual importance of bull-roarers is testimony to the priority of his own observation, but it is probable that his new patron influenced the course of his future fieldwork by focusing his attention on the subject (1970, p. 207).

With the bull-roarer, Howitt held the key to two new worlds: the religious mysteries of the Aborigines and the mysteries of the anthropological study of religion.

Howitt used his knowledge of bull-roarers to secure further information from an Aborigine named Ienbin. In his last letter to Morgan he says,

I obtained the complete confidence of this man by speaking to him of the secret ceremonies of Initiation and showing him, of course with proper mystery, a *turndun* I possess. He then said, 'I see you know it all'. He regarded me therefore as one of the initiated (in Stern ed. 1930, p. 449).

Howitt then sent Ienbin to assemble the 'Head Wizards' where he could meet them *en route* to his administrative duties. Negotiations were made to hold a *kuringal*. Howitt had finally convinced the elders of the authenticity of his status by showing them a home-made bull-roarer which was a facsimile of one he had played with as a child. He told the elders:

This I used when I was a lad, and you know that these *mudthi* were first made by that great one (pointing upwards), and that he ordered your fathers to hold the *kuringal*, and to make your boys into men (1904, p. 517).

The groups gathered at Bega in April 1883. Howitt was head of the Kurnai contingent. Anachronistically enough, he was informed by telegram when all was ready. When he arrived his own group had not yet showed up. Preparations were delayed, and since Howitt was short of time he was forced to persuade the elders to compress the ceremony (*ibid.*, p. 528f.). This was likewise the fate of the ceremony held near Wendell in the following year, which was shortened from 3 weeks to 5 days (*ibid.*, pp. 616ff.).

Howitt's days of field experience were soon to end. Even before the second ceremony was held, the Board for the Protection of Aborigines were looking unfavourably upon his activities. Matters were made worse when some newcomers to the Hagenauer's mission failed to return from the ceremony held near Wendell. Howitt's plans for a third ceremony never eventuated, and the Protectorate withdrew their support from his investigations.

Howitt published his findings in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* between 1883 and 1887. This material was later revised and supplemented by secondary sources to produce *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (1904). This brief biographical sketch might best be concluded with the apt evaluation of one of his friends: 'Howitt is a splendid man, and has done more towards the elucidation of anthropological problems in Australia than any other man' (in Marett & Penniman eds., 1932, p. 72).

2. Spencer, Gillen, Tylor and Frazer

If there was another individual who had 'done more towards elucidation of anthropological problems in Australia' it was the author of this compliment — Walter Baldwin Spencer. Spencer once wrote to Howitt,

Had it not been for your early work which gave me an insight into the organization of Australian tribes I should probably never have started anthropological work at all or at least as Tylor and Mosely had given me an initial turn in this direction I should have had to spend years in learning the fundamental things which you had already worked out (quoted in Mulvaney, 1971a, p. 312).

It was most appropriate that the dedication of Spencer and Gillen's first book read: 'To A.W. Howitt and Lorimer Fison who laid the foundation of our knowledge of Australian Anthropology'.

In the previous pages on Howitt I tried to give a fairly detailed account of his gradual 'initiation' into the secret life of the Aborigines. I hope this helped to convey the qualitative changes in field-work during this period. However, it would be superfluously illustrative to try to give a similar account for Spencer and Gillen,

and thus I will confine myself here to providing some relevant biographical notes.

Spencer was born in Lancashire in 1860, and following a brief excursion into art, turned to pursue a scientific career. In 1881 he went to Oxford where he majored in zoology. However, it was his incidental academic interests — philosophy, theology and particularly anthropology — which are of concern to us. He attended anthropological lectures by H.J. Mackinder and Tylor. 'Tylor', he said, 'is the best anthropologist in England' (quoted in Marett, 1931, p. 21), although on another occasion he maintained that the comparative anatomist H.N. Moseley knew even more than Tylor about anthropology. In 1887 Spencer was appointed the Chair of Biology at Melbourne University.

When an applicant for the Chair of Biology in the Melbourne University [he recalled] Dr. Tylor, with whom I have been working in connection with the removal of the Pitt Rivers collection to Oxford, in a letter that he gave me, expressed the belief that he thought I might be able to do some work of value if ever I chanced to come into contact with savage peoples (1928, p. 185).

In May 1894 Spencer joined a scientific expedition that W.A. Horn was leading into Central Australia. Spencer later recollected that

It was at Alice Springs, where, except for a journey down the telegraph line to Oodnadatta, the Horn Expedition came to an end, that for the first time I met my friend Frank J. Gillen in July 1894 (ibid., p. 184f.).

Spencer had the ideal background to take advantage of Gillen's experience, who had had constant interaction with the Aborigines at his isolated telegraph station. The passage continues:

... Before coming out to Australia it had been my good fortune to come into contact with and work under Dr. Tylor, then reader in Anthropology at Oxford. All that I knew of anthropology was gained from personal contact with him and from my old chief in Oxford, Professor Moseley ... My anthropological reading was practically confined to two works, Sir Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* and Sir James Frazer's little red book on *Totemism* ... Many are the volumes that have been written on Cultural Anthropology since *Primitive Culture* and *Totemism* appeared, but these two, in years gone by, each in its own way, served to guide and stimulate their students, working some in the study, others in fields far distant from Oxford and Cambridge (loc. cit.).

In November 1896, Spencer returned to Central Australia where he and Gillen made plans to do research amongst the Arunta and their neighbours, the Urabunna. Spencer was immediately accepted by the Aborigines as Gillen's 'younger brother'. The result of their investigations was the epoch-making *The Native Tribes of*

Central Australia (1899). Frazer, who had regularly corresponded with Spencer since 1897, secured a publisher for the book, and both he and Tylor read the manuscripts and made various suggestions.

In 1901 Spencer and Gillen spent a further twelve months in the field. They began at Oodnadatta in the centre of Australia, and headed northwards with the ambition of reaching Darwin. They were compelled to alter their plans, however, and when they reached Powell Creek they struck eastwards, following the Macarthur River until they reached Borroloola in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Instrumental in sending Spencer and Gillen on this expedition was a petition penned by Frazer and signed by 77 English anthropologists, scientists and politicians. The petition is worth quoting at length as an illustration of the role overseas anthropologists played in advancing Australian field-work.

We, the undersigned, being convinced that the scientific study of the institutions and beliefs of savages is of the greatest importance for the understanding of the early history of mankind, desire respectfully to represent to the Government of Victoria that it is in its power to contribute effectually to advancement of science by co-operating with the Government of South Australia in a scheme for investigating some of the Aboriginal tribes within the territory of the latter Government ... Of these tribes very little is known, and unless an investigation of them is undertaken promptly, it is to be feared that, like the Aborigines of Tasmania, they may pass away before any trustworthy account of them has been placed on record. The loss thus entailed on science would be grievous as well as irreparable; for in spite of the disappearance of so many of the Aborigines, Australia still offers one of the most interesting fields of observation now open to the student of primitive man; and it is to Australia, more perhaps than to any other quarter of the globe, that anthropologists are now looking for the solution of certain problems of great moment in the early history of society and religion (quoted in Mulvaney, 1971b, p. 5f.).

The crowning success of this petition was the publication of *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* in 1904.

This was the last excursion on which Gillen accompanied Spencer. In 1911, when Gillen was already fatally ill, Spencer was appointed leader of a Commonwealth Government scientific investigation into the conditions in the Northern Territory. In this capacity he traversed the area from Darwin southwards and then eastwards along the Roper River to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Then, at the end of the same year, he returned to the Territory as Special Commissioner and Chief Protector of the Aborigines. This provided him with further opportunities to study the natives. The result of these investigations was Spencer's third book, *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia* (1914).

Finally, in 1926 Spencer returned to Alice Springs to revise his study of the Arunta. This trip was partially stimulated by some controversies that had arisen after C. Strehlow had published evidence at odds with Spencer and Gillen's account (see Spencer & Gillen, 1927, pp. viii-ix ff.). When Spencer published *The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People* in 1927 he found no need to alter any of his earlier statements.

3. A Note on J.G. Frazer

Spencer dedicated *The Arunta* 'To our master Sir James Frazer'. In turn Frazer had said

It is no exaggeration to say that, among the documents which students of the early history of man will in future be bound to consult, there can, from the nature of the case, be few or none of the more capital importance than *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899a, p. 95).

It is obvious that there was an intimate contact between Australian fieldworkers and overseas theorists. So far, I have been concentrating on this association from the point of view of the ethnographer. I would now like to briefly examine these relationships from the perspective of the anthropological theorist. In particular, I intend to make a stand on behalf of the 'armchair anthropologists'. I will confine my defence to J.G. Frazer, both because he is the armchair anthropologist *par excellence*, and because I believe he made an immense contribution to Australian Aboriginal anthropology. I hasten to add that I consider Frazer's theories of the origin of magic and religion to be quite uninspired. But as Frazer said, 'it is the fate of all theories to be washed away like children's castles of sand by the rising tide of knowledge' (1911-1915, vol. 10, p. xi). My argument is that we need to look at these early anthropologists from a different perspective in order to discover their real contribution to the science of man, and in particular, to the understanding of Aboriginal religion.¹⁷

Evans-Pritchard has suggested that the fact that early evolutionary anthropologists had never done field-work was a major factor in the maintenance of an unsatisfactory evolutionary hypothesis. He says:

I am sure that men like Avebury, Fraser and Marett had little idea of how the ordinary English working man felt and thought, and it is not surprising that they had even less idea of how primitives, whom they had never seen, feel and think (1965, p. 108f; cf. *idem.*, 1951, p. 72).

To my mind, such a criticism ignores the unavoidable state of early anthropology and over-idealizes that modern schizophrenic who

claims to be equally an empathetic observer of other cultures and a master of theory. I think it can be shown that little good would have resulted if Frazer had traded his pen for a horse and journeyed into Central Australia.

It should be emphasised that Frazer was very conscious that extreme care was needed in constructing theories, especially by those 'who study savages at a safe distance, and have never perhaps seen one of them in their lives' (1909, p. 299). He warns us of the difficulty in interpreting savage customs, and adds:

It is hoped that this warning will be laid to heart by all those who view savages through a telescope ... If our glass be a good one and we apply our eye to the end of it steadily, undistracted by the sights and sounds about us, we shall see and hear strange things, things very unlike those which may be seen and heard ... in the grassy courts and echoing cloisters of an ancient university town (*ibid.*, p. 301).

How clear was Frazer's glass? Did he understand savages?¹⁸ Perhaps not, but for our purposes all that matters is Spencer, who knew more about the Aborigines than any other person of his time, thought he did.

It is astonishing [said Spencer], how, when once you have spent any time amongst savages, you divide Anthropological writers up as you read them, into those who understand savages and those who don't. Tylor pre-eminently does, so does Frazer (in Marett & Penniman eds., 1932, p. 135).

When Spencer wrote these words he had only been corresponding with Frazer for two months. Later, their ideas coincided much more. Thus, in 1902 he wrote to Frazer:

I feel more than ever convinced that, judging from our Australian tribes as a fair sample of savages, your theory of magic preceding religion is the true one (*ibid.*, p. 75).

I believe that Spencer may have been the *only* person to adopt this theory of Frazer's, which is not surprising, since the theory virtually hung on the Arunta evidence. Once again, what is commonly referred to as Frazer's second theory of totemism had, in fact, been simultaneously and independently developed by Spencer (see below). Frazer quite rightly spoke of it as 'our theory of totemism' (*ibid.*, p. 43). That it is an inadequate theory is irrelevant. The point is that Spencer's intensive field-work had not 'magically' saved him from those theoretical pitfalls usually attributed to armchair anthropology. Had Frazer done his own field-work his theories would have been, if anything, worse, since he lacked Spencer's fine ability to extract information from his Aboriginal informants.

Thus Frazer 'actually worked as their co-worker, though from the other side of the globe' (Marett, 1931, p. 31). It was a

necessary division of labour. Frazer encouraged Spencer to avoid theoretical speculation in his ethnographic volumes.

I am not sure it is advisable to mix up discussion of general questions with the account of particular tribes [he said]. Indeed, I incline to think that the usefulness and value of books like yours is rather impaired by the importation of general theories and discussions. What we want in such books ... is a clear and precise statement of facts (in Marett & Penniman eds., 1932, p. 23).

Recording ethnographic facts was the field-worker's task; comparative theoretical studies was that of the anthropologist at home. Frazer had no doubt as to which was the more important. He wrote to Spencer:

Works such as yours ... recording a phase of human history which before long will have passed away, will have a permanent value so long as men exist on earth and take an interest in their own past. Books like mine, merely speculative, will be superseded sooner or later ... by better inductions based on fuller knowledge; books like yours, containing records of observation, will never be superseded (ibid., p. 22).

What, then was Frazer's contribution to anthropology? It was not his theories *per se*, of which he said, 'I hold them all very lightly' (1911-15, vol. 10, p. xi). For Frazer, theories were primarily a framework by which to arrange facts. A clear illustration of this point is provided by noting that in the third edition of *The Golden Bough* Frazer republished a theory of totemism that he himself had previously criticised and rejected. Since he had first published the theory he had learned of Arunta totemism.

... and with the new evidence [he said] my opinions, or rather conjectures, as to the origin of the institution have repeatedly changed. If I have reprinted my earliest conjecture, it is partly because I still think it may contain an element of truth, and partly because it serves as a convenient peg on which to hang a collection of facts which are much more valuable than any theories of mine (ibid., vol. 11, p. 218, n.3).

What made Frazer influential was his vast knowledge and his thematic organization of data. He had a keen sense of the important and the relevant. Since naive Baconian induction is impossible, and since a fieldworker's vision is limited by what he is looking for, Frazer's knowledge of recurrent themes in man's religious life made his suggestions regarding likely areas of investigation quite invaluable.¹⁹ Thus Spencer wrote:

We have been careful to dig as deeply down as possible ... but with natives it is most difficult to tell when you have got to 'bed rock', and if there are points on which you could suggest our working we should be grateful to you. I need hardly say that *The Golden Bough* has been most useful to me (in Marett & Penniman eds., 1932, p. 9).

And, if anyone might question Spencer's credentials as a field-worker, here is Malinowski's testimony:

His [Frazer's] genuine interest in every new fact discovered in field-work, and his ability to stimulate the field-worker by correspondence, is well known. The letters which I received from Frazer during my sojourns in New Guinea and Melanesia helped me more by suggestion, query and comment than any other influence (1944, p. 182).

If one was willing to accept Marett's dictum 'that the value of anthropological theory is largely to be gauged by its effect on the field-worker in the way of teaching him to use his eyes' (1929, p. 11), then we would have to rank Frazer as one of the greatest theoretical anthropologists of any era.

This chapter was, as I have said, a necessary interlude in this history of anthropological attitudes towards Australian Aboriginal religion. I hope I have demonstrated that (with respect to the Australian evidence) the basic difference between first and second generation evolutionary anthropologists was the latter's intimate contact with Australian field-workers who were uncovering facts of monumental importance. Tylor and Lubbock and other early evolutionists, of course, were corresponding with these field-workers, but the new information was not instrumental in the formulation of their theories, and was merely added to the old superstructure.

In the next chapter it will become evident that the studies made by Spencer and Gillen on the one hand, and Howitt on the other, were the raw material for the next decade of anthropological controversies about Aboriginal religion. In the final analysis these controversies hinged on one evolutionary question: 'are Spencer and Gillen's or Howitt's natives more primitive?' Theories stood or fell by the answer. But, as we will see in the conclusion, the question was never answered, for it was an invalid one.

I have covered the background, and will now turn to the theoretical issues themselves.