

Native Camp

Ooldea

E.W. Line

28 July 1930

George Robertson Esq

Messrs Angus and Robertson

Melbourne

Dear Sir,

I have to thank you heartily for sending me a copy of Mr Gribble's book Forty Years with the Aborigines. I think I met Mr Gribble in years gone by somewhere in Western Australia. I will read the book with interest.

As to my own MSS., I should dearly like to have a chat with you. I really have a lot of "sellable" material in the myths and legends collected from groups all over Western Australia, the Great Bight, and south Central Australia, but I've never had the time to collate them for book publication, though I've been asked many times "where my books can be obtained". You will know Mrs Langloh Parker's Legendary Tales, but most of those are sort of "threaded" with missionary lore of one kind or another. Mine are purely pagan and altogether "aboriginal".

I have to thank Mr Hurst of the Australasian for introducing you to me. I must collect some cuttings and send them to you for your opinion. I am not at all a "missionary" in the usual sense of that much abused term. I began my investigations (not missionary work) in 1900, and in 1904 the Western Australian Government invited me to write

a "History of the Native Tribes of Western Australia". This work took eight years, six of them being work in the field and camp, two of them as Assistant Ethnologist (lent by the W.A. Govt.) to the Cambridge University Expedition. I studied every bibliography in the W.A. Public Library in my first two years of government service. Then in 1912, when the book was completed, a Labor ministry came into power and refused to publish the book, which the previous government had passed for publication. Premier Scaddan, however, presented me with the entire MS. to publish at my own expense, and a thousand pounds would have seen it through the press then. However, I went on with my field work in W.A. and S.A., and the whole book is still in MS. Also over a hundred different dialects from Kimberley to Eucla, the Right, and Central Australia. All that MS. would not pay. I want a good financial backer for that part, but I think the myths will pay - and I know that any book of mine will find a ready sale in Australia, especially Western Australia, where I am so well known. If only the aeropianing Mr Mackay would stand behind me in the matter of the History of the W.A. Tribes and the vocabularies, and I could get in personal contact with you. Those could be published as Professor Spencer's were published.

I am being very frank with you - but Mr Hurst's kindly introduction puts you on a plane where frankness is possible. I thought of asking Lady Moulden, who was Lady Hackett, to stand behind the publication of the larger books. Her former husband wished the book to be published and guaranteed £500 in 1912, and I was to find the other £500 by the sale of my leasehold property in the north-west. That fell through, owing to my departure (1912) for Eucla and Nullarbor Plain to continue

my investigations there, and meantime Dr Hackett died and the proceeds of my properties went in feeding the blacks and carrying on my work. I have all the original MSS., and there is a great deal of it - "sellable stuff" - I mean apart from its "scientific" side, but I can't even get access to it to send you bits of it. My MS. boxes are scattered here and there among friends. My idea about Lady Moulton was that she might like to add all my MSS. to the W.A. University her former husband, Sir W. Hackett, has founded, and so provide a foundation for a Chair of Anthropology in the amount of authentic MS. provided by me. (My accuracy has never yet been challenged.) But I am diffident in asking this thing - it would need \$10,000 today to publish all the books. What I should want is a nice big room with pigeonholes into which I should put my various subjects, the wherewithal to leave me free to do just this work, and the necessary sums to launch the books. All this is apart from the myths.

Now I may tell you, in confidence, that an Adelaide professional man was very keen to join me in the publication of the myths, but he did not approach me personally, only through the agency of one of the daughters of Adelaide's late Under-Treasurer, Thomas Gill. That was only a few years ago. I did not then entertain the idea, and told my friend so. I only met the man once, when I went to Adelaide in 1914 to attend the Science Congress. You will know him, I am sure - Dr Ramsay Smith. He has lately retired from the Public Health Department. Do you visit Adelaide, and do you know Dr R.S.? I met a very nice daughter of his in 1918. I wonder if he is still keen on coming in with me in the publication of these myths. Myths are becoming increasingly interesting

owing to the continued discoveries of science as to their true meaning and antiquity, and I have collected such a great number, many of them - particularly the south-west (Western Australia) and the nor'-nor'-west (Kimberley) - from groups that are now extinct, and there isn't a hawering of anything but pure aboriginal in every one of them. I obtained them from old groups or remnants of groups who had no contact with missions, etc.

All this you will (and truly) say is beside the question of a book of myths - The Australian Myth Book? I will read Mr Gribble's book carefully and mark its points. I may tell you that the late Andrew Lang revised the MS. and indeed was engaged on it when he died. I had some trouble with his executors over the MS. but got it all safely back except a map or two. I will look over the cuttings and send you as many as I think you will care to look at at a time. There is one now waiting publication in the Australasian - "How the Water Came to Nyarrgu" - which in itself I know would interest you. The myth lives. I can send you the ragged pencilled MS. of it, but my eyes have given me trouble and I cannot write it, and though I have a lovely Underwood portable, I can't type until my eyes strengthen.

Yours faithfully,

Daisy M. Bates