Letters to E. S. Hartland

R. H. Mathews

From the Edwin Sidney Harland Papers (MS 16889C), collection of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

'Carcuron'
Hassall Street, Parramatta
New South Wales

February 8th 1907

Dear Mr Hartland

Your kind letter of 16 Sept.r last reached me on 20th October, as well as your reprint. I have been very busy about many things since then and somehow put off writing to you sooner.

I thank you very much for your suggestion that I should publish all my works, adjusted up to date. I have sent the part of my work which comprises N S Wales and Victoria arranged in the order in which I wish to publish it, to my son in England, asking him to interview some publishers, and hope he will succeed. I am telling you this in confidence because I don't want my enemies in Australia to know anything about my movements. I shall write to my son by the same mail as this letter goes by and ask him to communicate with you, and ask your advice. I very much regret that I did not do so before, because you would have known the likely publishing offices to approach.

I saw your name on the Folklore Society's prospectus for 1904 and I presume you are still with them. I posted some folk tales of the N S Wales tribes to them some time back. The Secretary wrote to say he would submit it to the Editorial Committee. Perhaps you would kindly see that my contribution gets a fair 'hearing' as I would like the F. Soc. to publish what I sent. I know scores of similar stories which I could send them.

By this mail I am forwarding you a copy of my 'Eth. Notes & c.'[1] and also a copy of my 'Notes on the Native Tribes of Australia'[2] for your own use. I suppose you saw the copies I sent the Anthrop Inst. of my Ethn Notes Queensland Tribes'[3] and 'Sociology of Some Aus. Tribes'.[4] I asked the Inst. to review them in 'Man' and I suppose they will do so during the next *few years*. The 'American Anthrop[ologist]' reviewed them last September or earlier. By this mail I am sending the Inst. a copy of 'Notes on Some Native Tribes of Aust', and am asking them to review it in 'Man'. They may do so perhaps next year or the year after. But you'll see it reviewed in the 'Am. Anthrop' in 3 months time, about.

I suppose you saw my article in the American Antiquarian, vol. 28.[5] You'll see another in the Jany-Feby issue.[6] You remember the brutal review N W Thomas gave me in 'Nature' of 31st May '06. He was then writing his 'Natives of Australia', and he tried to make as little of my work as possible because he was using Spencer's, Howitt's and [Katherine Langloh] Parker's books as his basis. The motive is very apparent. His book is full of gross errors, some of which could have been avoided if he had consulted my works. For example at p 94 he says 'the heavy stones were brought a considerable distance, with great combined labour'.[7] If he had read my scientific account he would have seen that all the stones were *on the spot*, and were merely rolled into position.

I shall be pleased if you will write me quickly and tell me how my 'Folklore' is getting on at the Society, and any other matters you may choose to refer to. If my son has not already arranged for the publication of my book, you will hear from him as soon as he gets my letter, which goes by the same mail as this. I will enclose a letter for you in my son's letter, so that you will be more fully in possession of the facts.

Very sincerely yours
R. H. Mathews

'Carcuron'
Hassall Street, Parramatta
New South Wales

February 12th 1907

Dear Mr Hartland

I am sending this letter through my son Mr G. M. Mathews, whom I mentioned in my last letter.

He has been endeavouring to place my book for publication. It was submitted to Macmillan & Co, who after keeping it 18 weeks regretted that they could not undertake its publication, although they admit that it 'contains much valuable information'. Judging by the lapse of time, 18 weeks, I think they submitted it to Howitt or Spencer, who it is needless to add would condemn it to make room for their own books.

I am troubling you because you will know exactly how to set about this undertaking, and the prestige of your name will be of very great value. There can be no doubt that my labours should be published. You will remember that you advised me to take the step in your letter of Sep. last but my MS was then in the hands of Macmillan, or else I would have sent it through you.

I am writing to my son by this mail, and he will probably show you my letter, which goes somewhat into detail. I am in a hurry to catch the mail, but my son can tell you anything further.

Yours faithfully,
R H Mathews

Hassall Street, Parramatta
New South Wales

April 9th 1907

Dear Mr Hartland

Referring to previous letters regarding the publication of my work on the Aborigines, I daresay you and my son have been doing your best to place the book on the English market. I should think that every man who is studying the Aborigines of Australia would purchase my book. There is more new material in my book than there is in Howitt's.[8] If you take down Howitt's last volume there is *nothing* really new in it. I think I know as much about the Aborigines as any man in Australia, and I can safely say there is nothing in Howitt's book which has not already been made known either in my pamphlets or his own pamphlets or in the works of other writers. In *my* book there are several chapters which have never been published by anyone but myself, either for the first time or in my previous pamphlets. In Mrs Parker's book there is a good deal which had never been published before, but some of her statements are wild and incorrect. But if you take Howitt's book, chapter by chapter, you will not find anything which you could not find elsewhere. This is absolutely true. At the same time I am glad to have Howitt's book, because it brings together what he has enquired into himself and what he has obtained from others. Then as to Spencer & Gillen, their book, like Mrs Parker's, while reporting some new facts, contains many gross errors, which I need not touch upon.[9]

I am sure it was Spencer who created a prejudice against me in England. He was there in the middle and latter part of 1898 and did all he could to injure me because I was doing work in the Northern Territory. It will be found that my work is quite as accurate as his own. Time will show.

Any mail may bring me a letter from you saying what you recommend me to do. You will have obtained suggestions from some publisher and I will endeavour to carry out what you advise.

I could quite easily make my book larger, but I thought it best to confine it to New South Wales and Victorian Tribes, intending to bring out another work on the Tribes of the other Australian States. I have a large mass of information regarding all the states which has not yet been published anywhere, but it seems to me better to publish a series of smaller books than to publish one large one.

(1) I could send enough mythology of all the Australian states to make a good sized volume, say 200 pages if you advise me to do that. I would, I think, incorporate native songs with them. (2) Then I could publish a separate book on the Australian languages. I have some grammars of all the Australian States, which with corresponding vocabularies would make a volume of say 200 pages.

There does not seem to me to be any occasion for illustrations in any future books on the blacks. Spencer & Gillen have given us enough of that. But I see N W Thomas' book on 'Natives of Australia' has a lot of unnecessary and practically useless illustrations. If that were the *only* book one intended to buy, the illustrations might be necessary, but forming one of many books on Australia, the illustrations are not required. Lang's 'Secret of the Totem' has no pictures, neither has Thomas' 'Organisation & Marriage'. I am quite satisfied for my book to have none, beyond the copies of rock pictures and similar things, which are of course indispensable.

As soon as I get a letter from you I will write again. Of course you know that I would send the publisher a map of NSW and Victoria if he publishes the MS you have charge of with my son.

Yours faithfully
R H Mathews

Hassall Street, Parramatta
New South Wales

July 2nd 1907

Dear Mr Hartland,

My son sent me your letter to him re my book for publication and I beg to thank you very heartily for your advice. I have written to him for the MSS but it will not reach me for a month yet. I shall then go over it and perhaps re-submit it in a different form.

By this mail I am sending W. H. R. Rivers[10] a few sheets of MS on Sociology, with Blood pedigrees of 6 families for 3 generations. I presume you know I must have collected a number of genealogies to enable me to arrive at the conclusion that the two Bloods were found mixed with both cycles (phratries) and the four sections—that is, that the Bloods divisions are quite independent of the other divisions. We cannot expect the natives to give a reason for the Blood divisions any more than they can of the origin of the cycles, sections or totems. We can only report facts as we find them.

I may explain that Dr. Rivers wrote to me, sending me 'separates' of his work in Torres Straits & c and asked me to gather some genealogies. So I have sent him the genealogies I gathered some years ago when I discovered the Blood divisions. I am asking him to get my short article published in 'Man' or 'Folk-Lore' because the Anthrop. Inst. Council will not meet again till November next and I can't wait till then.[11]

I had intended to send the short paper to you, but as Rivers wrote to me I thought it better to enlist his sympathy with my work. I know that you are with me, and I think Thomas is. You have no doubt seen my article in Nature of 9th May and Thomas's remarks thereunder.[12] He has acted quite manly with me and now I shall treat him as a friend. He has also quoted me briefly in his 'Kinship and Marriage'.[13]

May I ask you therefore to cooperate with Dr. Rivers in getting the MS now sent to him published in either 'Man' or 'Folklore' as early as possible, as I wish to show that I am willing to meet the wishes of English ethnologists on all points upon which they may be kind enough to make suggestions upon.

I don't know whether you hold with Spencer & Gillen that descent in Central Australian tribes is through the man. I shall be able to show you that they are quite wrong. But we will say more of this later on.

I have mentioned to Dr. Rivers that I would let you know I had sent the MS to him and that I thought you would co-operate with him in getting it published.

Trusting that I am not intruding too much on your kindness and thanking you for past kindnesses.

I am

Yours faithfully
R. H. Mathews

Hassall Street, Parramatta
New South Wales

August 10, 1907

Dear Mr Hartland

By this mail I am sending you, registered, the MS of an article on 'Sociology of the Arranda and Chingalee Tribes' and am venturing to ask you to 'communicate' it to either *Folk-Lore* or *Man*, whichever of the two you can get to publish it the first.[14] Most of the English Societies have a habit of 'referring' all their papers and such 'references' occupy, say, 6 months. I could say 'yes' or 'no' to such a paper as I am sending you, just in the time it would take me to read it through.

If I can secure *speedy publication* for a few articles such as the one I am now sending you, some of my enemies may see they have come to a wrong conclusion—have been grossly misled. I cannot but regret that several English writers seem to have swallowed the statements of Spencer & Gillen and Howitt about *male descent*. Of course there is such a thing as my being mistaken in my conclusions, but I don't think so, for the following reason. Ever since 1898 the fact has been thrust upon me that Spencer and Howitt looked upon me as 'the opposition candidate' and never lost a chance of doing me an injury. I was thus kept continually 'on my mettle' and took every precaution—double precautions—to keep my statements unassailable. When I found it necessary to amend any of my results I did it immediately, so as not to give my enemies a chance of correcting me. I referred and re-referred the information sent me by old residents of Central Australia back to them for further sifting and inquiry. Half a dozen of my best correspondents were and are located in different parts of the Chingalee, Binbingha, Wombaia and Inchalanchu country peopled with tribes of the 8-section system and they all gave the same results, quite unknown to each other. I also had two excellent men among the tribes of the Victoria river and three more in the Kimberley district of Western Australia where the 8-section system prevails. I was the 'head and front' of the investigation and my men worked and re-worked under my directions. This has been going on for 13 years (since 1894) as shown by my pamphlets. I had the warning continually before me that any mistake of mine would meet with no mercy. When my men differed from S & G I sent them copies of what S & G had said and asked them to try again—to check and re-check.

On the other hand Spencer & Gillen were wallowing in their fancied security, with everybody patting them on the back, until at last they really believed that they knew everything and no one else knew anything. They even succeeded in forcing the same opinion on many of our English ethnologists. On the contrary I was always looking out for something that would either show me I was wrong

or that I was right. If I am wrong I want to find it out before anyone else can find it out.

In conclusion, if you can get the MS now sent printed in 'Man' or in 'Folk-Lore' you will help me very much to establish my reputation as one of the reliable Australian workers. Please write at once and tell me what you can do.

With thanks and kind regards

Yours faithfully
R H Mathews

PS. The MS of my book has not yet reached me, but will soon do so, as I asked my son for it a few days after I got your letter to him.

Hassall Street, Parramatta
New South Wales

August 10th, 1908

Dear Mr Hartland,

Your letter of 17th May reached here just at the time I met with a serious driving accident, which broke three of my ribs and a shoulder blade. I am only just able to get about again. I am very thankful for all the items of news you have given me.

I am sending you several 'separata' which will place my views about the marriage laws of Central Australian Tribes more fully before you, and hope you will thoroughly investigate all I have said, in order to test whether my conclusions are sound or not. Mr Strehlow is about publishing a work in which he tells me he is supporting Spencer & Gillen's views as to *male* descent. Mr Strehlow has sent me much MS information, from which I arrive at a diametrically opposite conclusion to his. My conclusions are supported by the reports of several residents of the Finke river and Alice Springs, in the Arranda country.

The Jany-March No. of 'Folk-Lore' has reached our Public Library, containing my article on the Arranda and Chingalee Sociology, but ***no*** *separate copies* have yet come to my hands. You will doubtless remember that I forwarded the MS through you, and either you or a friend of yours recommended its publication in 'Folk-Lore'. Possibly the Editor has sent you the 'separata' because of your communicating the MS. In any case will you do me the favour to enquire about the 'separata'. I presume 'Folk-Lore' supplies copies to authors of papers. I hope they will not disappoint me.

Then as regards a short article I sent 'Folk-Lore' on the Tales of the Aborigines I would like you to remind the Secretary or Editor. The paper was accepted for publication more than a year ago. Not only so, but in the same letter the Secretary asked me for further contributions and thanked me for the legends. I cannot understand the delay and will be really grateful if you can expedite the printing of my legends as soon as possible if they are not in type by the time you get this letter.[15] Please write me shortly.

Yours faithfully
R. H. Mathews

P. S.—I am of opinion that Strehlow's phratry names Alarinja and Kwatjarinja are not correct. They are only Father and Son designations like S & G's [Spencer and Gillen's] 'phratries'.

Poor old Strehlow has been out in 'the wilderness' so long that he feels sure that because Schulze, Dr. Stirling of the Horn Exped., and S & G all three agree that there is a *paternal* descent, he thinks it really must be so.

No doubt the blacks told Schulze and all those who have religiously copied him, that descent was through the father—meaning that a man belonged to his father's tribe, inherited his father's country, was taught his father's initiation ceremonies, and was instructed by the men about the totems. If we ask any Kamilaroi, Ngeumba, Wiradjuri & c he will make the same answer as the Arunta man, for the same reason.

Don't pin your faith to Strehlow just because he is *on the spot*.

Hassall Street, Parramatta
New South Wales

August 24, 1908

My dear Mr Hartland

I wrote you a few weeks ago re my papers on descent, which latter I forwarded to you. As soon as you come to a conclusion in regard to my views of the case I shall be greatly obliged if you will write and tell me plainly what you think. Again, if you learn that anyone else has given his conclusion on my reports, please write at once and let me know his views and the work where they are printed. By complying with these requests you will lay me under a lasting obligation, as I am very anxious to know whether my conclusions are approved or not.

Corrigenda

In vol. 41 JR Soc NSW, p 78 and 79.[16] Jack Onze belongs to the section *Kumbo* and *not Ippai*. Same Volume, p. 151, Table B, Paiarola's father was a *Knuraia* and *not* a Pananka.[17]

I forgot to make these corrections in the copies I forwarded to you with my last letter.

Yours faithfully,
R. H. Mathews

Hassall Street, Parramatta
New South Wales

Septr. 27th 1908

My dear Mr Hartland

Referring to my letter of a few weeks back, I am again reminding you that I shall feel grateful if you will let me know *as early as possible*, what decision the English ethnologists come to regarding my views of the descent of the children in the Central Australian Tribes.

My researches and conclusions have been published with sufficient fullness in the 'separata' I sent you recently. Strehlow's report is I presume also published by this time. Spencer & Gillen's conclusions have long been before the public.

I am very anxious to know whether my views have any points of value in them, or whether I am thought by ethnologists to be altogether wrong. If I am entirely in error I do not wish to publish any further particulars until I see the views of my critics and gain enlightenment from them. On the other hand, if any views are upheld by competent authority, it will give me courage to go on in the work I am engaged in.

Kindly, let me know your own criticism. If you have seen Dr Rivers or Dr Haddon and have heard them express any opinion in journals or newspapers, please let me know what they have published.

You see how desirous I am to know what you English authorities think of my labours.

Very sincerely yours
R. H. Mathews

ENDNOTES

[1] Probably RHM 1903-04, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Northern Territory', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, vol. 16, 1900-01 or 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of Western Australia', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, vol. 19.

[2] Probably RHM 1906, 'Notes on Some Native Tribes of Australia', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 40.

[3] Probably RHM 1904-05, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of Queensland', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, vol. 20.

[4] RHM 1905, 'Sociology of some Australian Tribes', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 39.

[5] RHM 1906, 'The Totemistic System in Australia', *American Antiquarian*, vol. 28.

[6] Ibid.

[7] A reference to the Brewarrina fish traps.

[8] Howitt, A. W. 1996, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra [1st pub. 1904].

[9] Presumably a reference to Spencer, W. Baldwin and Gillen, F. J. 1968, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, Dover, New York [1st pub. 1899]. Spencer and Gillen co-wrote several other books.

[10] William Halse Rivers Rivers (1864-1922), English anthropologist and psychiatrist.

[11] Published as RHM 1908, 'Social Organisation of the Ngeumba Tribe, New South Wales', *MAN*, vol. 8, no. 10.

[12] RHM 1907, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria [Letter to the Editor]', *Nature*, vol. 76, no. 1958.

[13] Thomas, Northcote W. 1966, *Kinship Organisations and Group Marriage in Australia*, F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne [1st pub. 1906].

[14] Published as RHM 1908, 'The Sociology of the Arranda and Chingalee Tribes (Northern Territory Australia)', *Folk-Lore*, vol. 19.

[15] Probably RHM 1908, 'Folk-Tales of the Aborigines of New South Wales', *Folk-Lore*, vol. 19.

[16] RHM, 'Social Organisation of the Ngeumba Tribe'.

[17] RHM 1907, 'Notes on the Arranda Tribe', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 41.