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Notes on Australian Science Fiction

Letters from Frank Bryning and Michael J. Tolley .. 2

H. G. Marriott Watson. Erchomenon, or The Republic
of Materialism .. 4

-- The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, or The
Witch's Cavern .. 6

Edward Bellamy. Looking Backward, 2000-1887 .. 6

-- Equality .. 7

Richard C. Michaelis. A Social Tangle .. 7

William Morris. The Revolution .. 7

Other Looking Backward connections .. 8

Edward Bellamy. Doctor Heidenhoff's Process .. 9

Peter Glasson. The Quest of Pependola .. 9

J. E. Macdonnell. The Invisibles .. 10

-- Operation Missat .. 10

Some short stories .. 10

...Or Not, as the case may be

George Bernard. Moment of the Predator .. 11

Ladbroke Black .. 11

Russell Braddon. The Inseparables .. 12

NOTES ON AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION

FEEDBACK.

We hear from Frank Bryning:

"You have recorded my Place of the Throwing-stick as anthologised four times. Since Aliens in their Land it has also appeared in If Called by a Panther (John Wiley, Sydney 1976. Illustrated 'Metricated' version for schools); Australian Short Stories (Longman-Cheshire, 1982; and Portable Australian SF (University of Qld Press, 1983. All six anthologies after Coast to Coast asked for the story. All except Portable Australian SF were 'literary' anthologies, not SF. Four of them are collections for 'educational' purposes, including Stories and Afterthoughts, which acknowledges Coast to Coast but makes no reference to SF -- nor to The Ruim by Porges or Or Else by Kuttner as SF although they are also in it...

"Of course I appreciate the 'literary' cachet with which all this anthologising endows the story, but I wrote it as SF, consciously using one of the fundamental themes of SF, namely the confrontation of the technology of one age with the technology of another. Without any hint of mine Rorabacher states it very well in her Introduction:

"'Perhaps the most unspoiled tribesman is Murr-yarra in Frank Bryning's Place of the Throwing-stick, but he ironically comes into mortal conflict with the most modern of the white man's importations, the rocket, on the range which binds the Stone Age past with the Space Age present through the name Woomera -- aboriginal for spear-throwing stick. Despite the element of science fiction contrivance here, no other story so sharply points up the contrast between the two dispensations.'

"I am grateful for such discerning comment. Maybe she got a hint from Coast to Coast's acknowledgement to New Worlds. Or maybe she knows a bit about SF.

"I don't know if the story was the first SF to appear in Coast to Coast. After Oscar Friend couldn't sell it to the US SF mags, who told him it wasn't their

kind of SF but it was a good story and should go to the 'slicks', he tried Satevepost, Colliers, Red Book etc. but they wouldn't have it. So I sent it to New Worlds. Ted Carnell apparently didn't know any better and accepted it as SF. Then I became ambitious to get my 'indigenous-Australian SF' story into Australian literature and sent it to Coast to Coast.

"Maybe I was lucky that Dal Stivens was editor of C to C that year. As you will know, he is an exponent of tall stories and fantasy...he had published some of this in Fantastic Universe around 1954-57 when I was appearing there (and also the young Robert Silverberg). ...In 1982 when two of his stories were reprinted in the Longman-Cheshire Australian Short Stories with Place of the Throwing-stick, I checked up and found that he and I have appeared in the same anthologies or magazine issues no less than eight times."

Frank also reminisces on Bernard Cronin:

"As a Victorian I knew his early novels and Australian Author significance from school days. In his last few years I had some correspondence with him from Brisbane and met him a few times, since my then agent in the US Oscar Friend had been Cronin's agent for a long time...He was a very amiable bloke, whimsical, bluff, hearty, with a thick grey thatch; had a degree in Agriculture and was a farmer in Tasmania. Was religious but would have nothing to do with any church denomination; thought Bernard Shaw and Wells were villains for helping to break down christian belief, leaving us all open to elemental spirits and satanic forces with no higher faith to protect us. He was on the side of fantasy rather than hard core SF: no such thing as scientific fiction, it's all fantasy however plausible we try to make it. It's fun to write and to read -- but don't think there'll ever beflight beyond the atmosphere, such affrontery won't be permitted -- you'll see. Tower of Babel over again. (That was about 1956.) Place of the Throwing-stick was not, therefore, science fiction, but 'a good story: it makes people think.'"

Takes all kinds to make a world.

Notes on Australian Science Fiction

We hear from Michael J. Tolley: "I was surprised to find you spelling consistently John David Hennessy, not Hennessey, which is the spelling I've seen before. I suppose Hennessey is correct." Shock! Horror! Your secretary made a mistake. Yes, the name is actually Hennessey, the spelling got reformed in my scrawled notes.

ERCHOMENON, or The Republic of Materialism, by ****. Sampson Low, London 1879. viii, 226 p. 7½".

**** was the Rev. Henry Crocker Marriott Watson (1835-?), This book like many others of its era has a dream ending, one of the conventions like the manuscript found in the bottom drawer which served to cushion the shock of the unfamiliar. In this case the narrator has a hallucinatory visit to the world of the year 2426. As we might guess the book is a religiously motivated anti-utopia.

"The reader who honours me by perusing the following pages", Watson warns, "will find that he is introduced to a new world, and that he is surrounded by a condition of things utterly unlike anything he has before known. He may feel that the writer has not made the most of these new circumstances for displaying the marvels of scientific and political progress in the far-off days.

"It is not too much to say that recent scientific discoveries outstrip even the imaginings of the most ardent imagination. The telephone, the phonograph, the microphone, the electric light in its suitability to domestic wants, are the very poetry of science; and they suggest that the human mind may continue to march forward in the path of progress until even life and death shall yield up their secrets. What scope for the play of the imagination! Yet, in these pages I have steadily refrained from luxuriating in descriptions of such coming marvels. I have barely hinted at the state of political questions, under the circumstances supposed in these pages."

The disclaimer is too strong as far as politics is

concerned. The 25th Century world is unified in a well functioning advanced socialism and we are told quite a lot of how it works, though as always the explanations raise more problems than they deal with. The state apparatus is said to be vestigial, with a small executive body to carry out the decisions democratically decided by popular vote, but this is not consistent with the extent of organisation and active public services seen. Nothing corresponding to marriage exists, venery being informal and children managed by the community. It is stressed that religion is absent and this is supposed to be related to the quite considerable dehumanisation of public policy. Watson is most negative about the very common resort to euthanasia and processing the dead for fertiliser.

Watson doesn't seem to have read Marx, judging by the issues he doesn't mention, and the only theorist mentioned is Comte who was taken fairly seriously in his time. How industry and trade function we are left to speculate on, but it is an affluent urban milieu with money in use. Public transport includes flying machines, and we do get other glimpses of the marvels of future science.

Regimentation is not obvious. Neither a ruling party structure such as we would now expect nor contending groups pushing and shoving can be found, but evidently real alternatives are voted on and differences of opinion on policies are allowed for. Disgruntled people can even nonconfirm and if necessary operate alternative lifestyle settlements.

A more readable book than most of its class, with enough technological prediction to give it a place in our history.

The title, you ask? Search me. There were two minor ancient Greek cities named Erchomenos (or Orcho-menos after spelling reform) but I find no connection.

Notes on Australian Science Fiction

The DECLINE AND FALL OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE, or The Witch's Cavern. Trischler, London 1890. 291 p. This anonymous book is also known as the work of the Rev. Watson. I have not been able to examine a copy but George Locke describes it thus:

"A student of a scientifically advanced Australia of 2990 undertakes an expedition to barbaric England, and while there finds himself transported back to a time when England was still a going concern."

And speaking of socialism...

BELLAMY, Edward, 1850-98. Looking Backward, 2000-1887. 1st. Ticknor, Boston 1888. 470 p.

1st British. W.Reeves, London 1889. 247 p.

1st Australian. E. A. Petherick, Melbourne 1889? (No copy available, but believed to be a reissue of the Reeves ed.)

Edwards, Dunlop, Sydney, Brisbane & London n.d. (189-) vi, 7-192 p. 7½" PB. This was printed in England.

E. W. Cole, Melbourne, original date unknown. 7th ed. n.d. (1912?). 5-159 p. 7½" PB

Judd Pub. Co. Sydney 1920. 3-220 p. 7½" PB. "Slightly revised by E. E. Judd." Reprinted 1932

Socialist Labor Party of Australia, Sydney 1942. Reprint of Judd edition.

This book is mainly a series of conversations explaining the world socialist system operating in the year 2000 to a man revived from a coma lasting from 1887. The device of sleeping a long period to introduce a future setting had been used before, but Bellamy's extremely popular book established it as a standard plot element used by countless science fiction writers. Looking Backward does introduce some inventions however, for example a system of entertainment and cultural broadcasting using the telephone system.

Many books directly inspired by Looking Backward were written. The many parodies, sequels and imitations expressing criticism of Bellamy's theories led him to write his own continuation, Equality.

EQUALITY. 1st Appleton, N.Y. 1897. 412 p.
The first known Australian edition of this less successful work was by Judd, 1932. 406 p. 7½" PB; The next was by the Socialist Labor Party, 1943. 8-418 p. PB. Its interest from any point of view is now very slight: it is entirely a rehash of the political ideas presented in the original book taking account of criticism. The world situation is transformed beyond Bellamy's imagination, and there has been a lot of practical experience with different forms of socialism -- although, to be sure, no one has ever tried anything that looked like Bellamy's society of polite reasonable altruism. All but the most naive reader can now see the unreality of his scheme, and it has at most historic interest. In fact, by 1932 the world had long left behind any chance it might have had.

MICHAELIS, Richard C. A Social Tangle, being a sequel & reply to Bellamy's Looking Backward. E. W. Cole, Melbourne, nd (1890?). (vi), 7-(64)p. 7½" PB. A Preface signed W. T. Pike is dated 6 Oct 1890.

-- reissue, described on cover as "enlarged edition..." with text unchanged but two short unrelated pieces by Colonel Robert Ingersoll and E. C. Stanton bound in. E. W. Cole nd.

This was originally issued under the title Looking Further Forward, an Answer to Looking Backward by Edward Bellamy. Rand McNally, Chicago 1890. vii, (9)-123 p. 7½". Whether the Australian text was the same is not known, but the shrinkage to half the number of pages is suggestive. Michaelis edited the Chicago Freie Presse, and also wrote a German version published as Ein Blick in die Zukunft, also by Rand McNally, 1890. 173 p. 8".

It is entirely political, adequately described in Cole's cover blurb: "The hero, learning more about the 'realised utopia', finds that things are not running nearly so smoothly as he was led to believe..."

MORRIS, William, 1834-96. This versatile author, poet, artist, designer, printer, better known today for his

Notes on Australian Science Fiction

medievalistic romances, *The Well at the World's End*, *The Wood Beyond the World* and the like. But he was also an advocate of socialism and one of the first crop of dissatisfied readers of *Looking Backward* to offer their improvements. *News from Nowhere* was published by Reeves, London 1891. 238 p. There is no record of an Australian edition of the full work, but I found the following pamphlet.

The REVOLUTION, Being Two Chapters from News from Nowhere, by William Morris. Preface by Michael Sawtell. Social Crusade Mission, Sydney 1930.

Again, this is entirely political speculation only remotely related to science fiction.

Generally the books written in response to *Looking Backward* make dull reading today even if they had interest in their time. But books that can be seen as influential to some extent are a very numerous field and the connection gives an added interest. Some took the concept of sleeping a few generations away to wake in a different world, some dispensed with it and simply went straight into the story, some thought of variations such as the simple rustic visiting the center of civilisation or the visitor from Mars. There might be a longer period for all the changes to take place, but the year 2000 was kept by many as a handy one. Here are some examples.

- Vogel, Sir Julius. *Anno Domini 2000, or Woman's Destiny*. Hutchinson 1889
- Donnelly, Ignatius. *Caesar's Column*. Schulte 1890
- Mr. Dick, pseud. James Ingleton, the *History of a Social State AD 2000*. Blackwood 1893
- Mears, A.G. *Mercia, the Astronomer Royal*. Simpkin Marshall 1895
- Glyn, C. *A Woman of Tomorrow*. Women's Printing Society 1896
- Wells, H.G. *When the Sleeper Wakes*. Harper 1899
- Rousseau, Victor. *The Messiah of the Cylinder*. McClurg 1917
- Sladen, Douglas. *Fair Inez*. Hutchinson 1918.
- Shanks, Edward. *The People of the Ruins*. Collins 1920

Notes on Australian Science Fiction

Egbert, H. M. Draught of Eternity. Long 1924
England, George Allan. Darkness and Dawn. Small 1914
Coblentz, Stanton A. After 12,000 years. FPCI 1950
Weinbaum, Stanley G. The Black Flame. FP 1948
Manning, Laurence. The Man who Awoke. Ballantine 1976
Nowlan, Philip Francis. Armageddon 2419. Avalon 1962
de Camp & Miller. Genus Homo. FP 1950
Binder, Eando. Lords of Creation. Prime 1949
Heinlein, Robert. Beyond This Horizon. FP 1948
Cook, William Wallace. A Round Trip to the Year 2000.
Argosy 1903, Hyperion 1974

But this has led us away from consideration of Australian publications. Bellamy wrote other books of more interest to us. The following alone appeared in Australia, on the strength of his reputation through Looking Backward.

DOCTOR HEIDENHOFF'S PROCESS. E. A. Petherick, 1890. (5)-139 p. 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ " PB HC & PB. This is about a device to obliterate unwanted memories, not one of the more desirable inventions I can think of.

GLASSON, Peter. The Quest of Pependola. East Coast Press, Sydney 1978. vi, 136 p. 7" PB

This is four generations more recent than the preceding group of books, but resembles them far more than it does contemporary writing. It is of marginal interest: set in an indefinite future apparently about 400 years hence, with obviously higher technology though described in a vague and superficial fashion -- everything in this book is vague -- but its attention is on what you'd have to call moral personal development and human relations.

The political and social life of the age does not come into any clearer focus than the scientific or economic aspect. But one sees a hierarchical peck-order of prestige and authority if not an explicit governing structure. It does not seem to be a unified world, there are less advanced communities and scope for change.

Granted that the book is not intended as SF it

Notes on Australian Science Fiction

is hard to evaluate in terms of its real intentions when they are so obscure. Solemn debates and reflections mostly take the place of action, and it is difficult to get through the verbiage. As often found in books such as this based on the author's private world-view, there is a lack of a clearly expressed ideology. He takes it for granted that we know what he's on about instead of setting out his policy. And he wavers between visualising the new problems arising in an imagined society and worrying about where we've gone wrong in our own past.

MACDONNELL, J(ames) E(dmond) 1917-

The Invisibles. Horwitz Sydney 1970. 127 p. 7" PB

Operation Missat. Horwitz Sydney 1966. 7-162 p. 7" PB

Two more in the series about Mark Hood, super-spy, in action against the forces of evil. In The Invisibles they are filching fissionable material for a novel application: a nuclear powered heat exchanger capable of starting a tornado or small scale hurricane for wicked purposes. I dunno. There is a Caribbean setting and some supposed Voodoo and hypnotism to add a bit of color. In Operation Missat a missile-carrying satellite has been put into permanent orbit for use if needed, and naturally enough terrorists organise to take it over.

SLIM PICKIN'S

Short stories of SF interest are sometimes found in otherwise uninteresting books. They should be noted, whenever found. It's all part of the overall picture, and sometimes they have merit.

ROBERTS, Morley 1857-1942

Midsummer Madness. Eveleigh Nash, London 1909. 7-255 p

7½". This collection of nine stories includes The Fog, in which there is an unexplained persistent fog heavy enough to put London in complete darkness. A group manages to escape the disaster, for such it is, by balloon after some days. This is an idea which occurred to a few other people in the 1890's and later,

the best known example being *The Doom of London* by Robert Barr of 1892. The pollution of the period suggested an unpleasant possibility, and to an Australian confronting the murk after being accustomed to see across the street out in the colonies it would have been an obvious thought. A pity Roberts (or someone) didn't develop the thought into a book.

SHAW, Charles 1901?-

A Sheaf of Shorts: Australian Short Stories. Dymocks Sydney 1944. 178 p. PB with jacket 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". It would be easier to read this collection of 29 without the author's assurance of how good they are, but be that as it may one is *The Robot on the Scoot*. It deals with not a true robot as generally understood, but an animated figure able to walk and do a few actions on vocal command. Only barely feasible now (if anyone chose to design it) this was certainly for the distant future in 1944 or some time earlier, but the story is puerile.

WORKMAN, James

Shock Stories. Horwitz Sydney 1962. 9-130 p. 7" PB
Seven shockers including two on SF themes. *Trade-in Bodies* has an electronic personality-transfer device. *The Fungus and the Flower* is about a cultivated carnivorous plant.

...OR NOT, AS THE CASE MAY BE

BERNARD, George 1949-

Moment of the Predator. Horwitz Sydney 1980. 352 p. 7" PB.

It hasn't happened yet, but it has long been a distinct possibility that terrorists would in one way or other get the use of a nuclear weapon. As no new techniques are suggested this does not qualify as SF.

BLACK, Ladbrooke (Lionel Day) 1877-1940

I have noted already that this British author was wrongly listed as Australian, and now I can see how the error originated. Black, known in SF for *The Poison War* (Sampson Low, London 1932) published a

Notes on Australian Science Fiction

variety of books. They included two, *The Love of an Anzac* (1920) and *The Prince of Poisoners* (1932) with content related to Australia. Prof. E. Morris Miller listed him accordingly in an Appendix: Alphabetical list of non-Australian authors of novels associated with Australia, in his *Australian Literature*, v. 2, p. 966. Frederick T. Macartney's less systematic and less reliable *Australian Literature* has the author listed as Lionel Day, with Ladbrooke Black as a pseudonym, and without giving his nationality. So it goes.

BRADDON, Russell (Reading) 1921-
The Inseparables. M. Joseph, London 1968.

Braddon's *The Year of the Angry Rabbit*, a rather silly pseudo-scientific satire of mutant giant rabbits, a deadly plague used for biological warfare, and Australia becoming the dominant world power, is as well known as it deserves, but *The Inseparables* has also been mentioned as SF. Not so. It belongs to the class of books where the supposed action is all hallucination. A visitor to the site of Dachau meets four apparitions of death-camp victims and has long and tedious discussions with them about war, atrocities, guilt and responsibility. To me such treatment merely trivialises the issues. But in any event, there is no connection with science fiction.

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