EIGHT PAGES

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Leave us face it. This publication is being perpetrated solely in order to satisfy my activity requirements and would never see the light of day, were it not for the strange prejudice against deadwood that seems to prevail among the more active FAPAns. With the aim of rendering this chore as quick and painless as possible, I am descending to the abominable practice of composing on the stencil. That fact and the last minute rush will be responsible for the somewhat uninhibited (tr.: sloppy) manner of my remarks, but if the spectacle of an uninhibited Russell is too ghastly to bear, you can always do with these pages what should be done with the majority of FAPA publications.

Yes, I am sorry to say, I don't think much of FAPApubs. Why do I stay in then? Because during any given year there is generally just enough good stuff--a modicum, but discernible--to induce me to renew my membership. During the past year, for example, we were treated to two items of a certain amount of lasting value: the fragment of Swisher's essay on time-travel, and Butman's "Modern Mythological Fiction." The former seems to be a nearly definitive treatment of its minor subject, and the latter, despite its faults, does examine in some detail a theme I have never before seen treated--the influence of Theosophy upon fantastic fiction. Furthermore, there were several publications that I enjoyed reading, though I shall probably never care to refer to them again: Speer's Sustaining Program and Matters of Opinion, Laney's Fan-Dango, Stanley's Fan-Tods, Warner's Horizons, Wesson-Crane's The (Unspeakable)Thing, Swisher's a, Youd's Fantast's Folly, Koenig's Reader and Collector, Rothman's Plenum, Davis' Blitherings, Rosenblum's Browsing; and, in varying degree, Leibscher's Walt's Ramblings, Ashley's En Garde, and Wilimczyk's Ad Interim. (None of the above are in any particular order; I must admit there were more of them than I thought, though most of them had portions that were either dull or outside my range of interests, like discussions of jazz and mathematics.) The rest I plowed through with varying mixtures of interest and boredom, except for the publications of Farsaci and Croutch, which gave me the horrors. A number of the good publications are available to me in VAPA, which is my idea of a good a.p.a. Incidentally, I see I forgot to mention what was to me the best item of all in the past four mailings: the symposium, "Words of Wisdom on the Weird."

Well, you may ask, if I think FAPA is so lousy, why don't I try to improve it by putting out a good publication of my own? I made a half-hearted stab in this direction a

year ago with a set of book reviews called The Fantasy Critic, but the comments on it, though unanimously favorable, evinced little interest in discussing the literary aspects of fantasy. Perhaps I should not have expected any discussion in this case, since probably few FAPAns had read the books in question, but I do believe, simply from a perusal of the mailings and particularly the reviews of publications, that despite the sizable book-collector contingent in FAPA, there are almost none with a sufficiently deep and thorough interest in literature to make possible discussions or controversies on literary subjects. The brain-trusters are almost exclusively interested in the scientific-sociological-philosophic aspects of science-fiction, subjects which I don't know enough about to discuss without more preparatory research than I feel inclined to do. It would be difficult to discuss with them the literary side even of science-fiction, since they seem unprepared to grant it any real importance in comparison with the "idea" side. Although, come to think of it, it might be interesting to try to prove the case for the purely literary. (Careful, Russell, don't get carried away and talk yourself into something that's going to mean work! You know you are safer looking down on FAPA than mixing with it!)

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Let's lead off with some poetry, reprinted through the ignorance of the copyright owners. In the days when science-fiction fascinated me, I used to keep on the lookout for stfnic poetry encountered during my rare dips into the bards. Here is one written in 1931 by Paul Engle, a young Iowa poet, and published in his first volume, Worn Earth:

Elegy for Earth

Some day the last lone man will lie and stare
At death, and know that in him ends the scheme
Of life on earth, that thought itself supreme;
And he will die with no one left to care.
All forms of life that once swarmed anywhere
Will vanish as the memories of a dream,
And the great winds of silence then will stream
Through the vast hollows of the darkened air.

And after this quick life we once called ours
Has passed, will the world travail in some storm
Of restless elements and fill its crust
With breathing earth again, wild beasts and flowers?
And will some curious life in some strange form
Dig down and read this story of our dust?

That wasn't so very good, though I rather like the last two lines of the octet. Here's another poem by Engle, written probably a couple of years later, that was rather a favorite of mine for expressing something of the spirit of science-fiction reading:

Orion

Orion, tonight forsake your distant walking
And with your shining feet plunging the earth
Stoop to my humble house and pick me up,
I who have looked into your massive face
Long years of nights, and with my scared hands clutching
Tight at your belt, stride through the length of heaven,
The dog star yelping at your heels, beyond
The rainy Hyades.
Thrusting back the stars
Seek the farthest corner of the sky
Where the red of Mars dulls like a sumac leaf
The wind turns over, and Aldebaran
Is as a tiny flame seen flickeringly
In the deep wilderness of a friend's eye;
Where the hours with which we torture out our lives
On the cruel rack of days drift by like clouds
Casual in noon, beyond the sight
Of men who look to the sky and call with white
Teeth for rain.
And I can be alone
With your great golden body, where the bright
Fillet of the Milky Way is bound
Over the dark curved forehead of heaven, and time
Spills away forever on the worn stones
Of the inviolable years where foam
The sunlit and dissolving lives of men.

Then swing your club until it smashes down
The stars and heaps them at your feet like flaming
Eyes accusing the blood-burned hands that tore them
From bodies of living fire, and with an arm
Upholding my frail flesh and your flashing club
Circling over your head, lunge through the vast
Universes wherein our dazzling sun
Would blench to shadow--on through space as empty
As a rat skull hollowed by a raven's beak
To set me in the troubled towers of earth,
And strike with clenched fist once the ground, then leap
Again to heaven.
In later years when tired
Utterly of myself, and men and all
Their writhing sorrow and the earth's insistent
Hanging on to life, then I will go
To the dark hill behind my house and lift
My hands up to the sky till they are silvered
With the pale starlight, and wave wanly to you,
Calling, "Orion, Orion, here am I."

And you will nod with the proud peace of those
Who are not of, but are, eternity,
And dip your club three times in fiery answer.

Although literal-minded fans may at first be repelled somewhat by the basing of the poem on mythology instead of science, and by the occasional incongrous barnyard imagery caused by Engle's upbringing on a farm, I think that the poem, especially in its latter portions, expresses rather well the awe one feels in gazing deeply up into the night sky. That spirit seems to have vanished from science-fiction nowadays, and I don't think stf is any the better for the loss.

I have a fragment from Robinson Jeffers' "Ode on Human Destinies", dealing vaguely and saccherinely with interplanetary travel, but I think I shall mercifully pass over it, for the sake of Jeffers' reputation, as he is usually a pretty good poet. Let us, instead, turn to the reliable pen of good grey Alfred, Lord Tennyson:

The Kraken

Below the thunders of the upper deep;
Far far beneath in the abysmal sea,
His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep
The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee
About his shadowy sides: above him swell
Huge sponges of millenial growth and height
And far away into the sickly light,
From many a wondrous grot and secret cell
Unnumbered and enormous polypi
Winnow with giant fins the slumbering green.
There hath he lain for ages and will lie
Battening upon huge seaworms in his sleep,
Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;
Then once by men and angels to be seen,
In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.

While we're pitching reprints around, I'd like to sneak in an excerpt from an essay, "Of Art and the Future", in Sunday After the War by Henry Miller (New Directions, 1944). Milty Rothman at least will remember Henry as the author of Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn, those roseate little tomes that turned so many GI's in Paris into bookhunters. Here he has a fling at prophecy:

> An era of chaos and confusion, beginning in 1944, will continue until almost 1960. All boundaries will be broken down, class lines obliterated, and money become worthless. It will be a caricature of the Marxian Utopia. The world will be enthralled by the ever-unfolding prospects seeming to offer nothing but good. Then suddenly it will be like the end of a debauch. A protracted state of Katzenjammer will set in. Then commences the real work of consolidation, when Europe gets set to meet the Asiatic invasion, due about the turn of the century. For, with the culmination of this war, China and India will play a most prominent and important part in world affairs. We

have roused them from their lethargy and we shall pay for having awakened them. The East and the West will meet one day--in a series of death-like embraces. After that the barriers between peoples and races will break down and the melting-pot (which America only pretends to be) will become an actuality. Then, and only then, will the embryonic man of the new order appear, the man who has no feeling of class, caste, color or country, the man who has no need of possessions, no use for money, no archaic prejudices about the sanctity of the home or of marriage with its accompanying tread-mill of divorce. A totally new conception of individuality will be born, one in which the collective life is the dominant note. In short, for the first time since the dawn of history, men will serve one another, first out of an enlightened self-interest, and finally out of a greater conception of love.

The distinctive feature of this "Epoch of the threshold", so to speak, will be its visionary-realistic quality. It will be an era of realization, accomplishment and vision. It will create deeper, more insoluble problems than ever existed before. Immense horizons will open up, dazzling and frightening ones. The ensuing conflicts will assume more and more the character of clashes between wizards, making our wars appear puny and trifling by comparison. The white and the black forces will come out in the open. Antagonisms will be conscious and deliberate, engaged in joyously and triumphantly, and to the bitter end. The schisms will occur not between blocs of nations or peoples but between two divergent elements, both clear-cut and highly aware of their goals, and the line between them will be aw wavering as the flow of the zodiacal signs about the ecliptic. The problem for the next few thousand years will be one of power, power in the abstract and ultimate. Men will be drunk with power, having unlocked the forces of the earth in ways now only dimly apprehended. The consolidation of the new individuality, rooted in the collective (man no longer worshipping the Father but acknowledging sources of power greater than the Sun) will dissolve the haunting problem of power. A dynamic equilibrium, based upon the recognition of a new creative center, will establish itself, permitting the free play of all the fluid, potent forces locked within the human corpus. Then it may be possible to look forward to the dawn of what has already been described as "The Age of Plentitude".

General semanticists are hereby invited to wade into the above. I suspect that Henry really did have some ideas in mind in that second paragraph, but I've not yet been able to figure them out. One thing that has always struck me is the large number of prophecies that say a colossal war, often identified as between the East and West, will come at about the turn of the century. I believe Nostradamus and the Egyptian pyramids began that particular dating, but it has been taken up by quite a few science-fiction authors too, though my memory doesn't serve me well enough to say which ones. Someone like Donn Brazier with an eye for Hidden

Meanings should investigate that theme. I am inclined to fear that man won't be able to contain his impatience to use the Bomb, the Dust, the Bacteria, etc., for as long as fifty years.

Norm Stanley in the Fall Fan-Tods mentions the parallel between our present-day preoccupation with politics and our ancestors' concern over religious quibbles a few centuries ago. Henry Miller's second paragraph above reminds me of a suspicion I have that when men finally come to take matters of government and economics for granted and solve such problems purely in an engineering spirit, the major conflicts will be over questions of philosophy and values, something like the dispute between the Timebinder element and the scientific-rationalist element in FAPA. We have seen a little of that sort of thing in the ideological differences in the last war, but the Nazis really had no philosophy, and the average man on each side did not concern himself about the philosophic basis for his cause. Eventually, however, ordinary men will be well-enough educated to be strong partisans of certain philosophies; let us hope they will be too well-educated to go to war over them.

* * *

Well, it's getting late, friends, and Burbee must be wondering why I haven't brought these stencils over for him to mimeograph yet, so I think I shall fill out the rest of these pages with an old book review which I had originally intended to incorporate someday into an article on science-fiction dealing with the New Dark Ages theme--an article I shall probably never write, since the N.D.A. appears likely to arrive before I can get started. I had hoped to reply to Norm Stanley's highly dubious defense of pulp fiction and attack on book fiction in his Fall Fan-Tods, but fear I won't have time to do so; he will have to rest content with my assurance that he is full of prunes.

The Collapse of Homo Sapiens by P. Anderson Graham. London & New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923, xii,276p.

Plot: In a brief Note, the "Editor" (presumably the author) reveals that the manuscript which comprises the book was given him in 1920 by a nameless acquaintance who had successfully predicted the war of 1914 and who looked as if he had been through some harrowing experience and was approaching his end. In the manuscript itself the narrator tells how his grandfather, a religious mystic, had him educated by a skeptical curate, and his father, an epicurean historian, provided him with an ample income so he could indulge his studies of the occult, which he pursued in the hope of realizing his intense desire to live for two thousand years. But the interstellar intelligence with whom he finally got into communication in June, 1919, hinted that the human race might not last that long and instead translated him two centuries into the future, by apparently metaphysical means. He found the London countryside entirely reverted to the wilderness, the city reduced to rubble and ruins, and the

furtive human beings degenerated into stunted, cannibalistic savages. At his horrified request he was quickly returned to the present day, but half a year later his desire to know the bitter truth made him pray again for a view of the future.

((Beg poddon, Speer, while I revert to the present tense --it's necessary to distinguish the future experiences of the hero from the 20th-century event he hears about.))

He finds himself back in the same desolated landscape, near a group of savages who are being fed by a man in armor. Upon his discovery the latter, an elderly man named William Cecil, takes him in hand and, though suspecting him of being deluded regarding his origins, tells him of the Settlement, a group of still civilized people struggling to reclaim their devolved neighbors from barbarism and to rekindle the glories of the British Empire. A more pessimistic man, Captain Hart, who claims that the earth has become man-sick and no regeneration is possible, takes the narrator to the Settlement by a difficult boat-trip down the barely navigable Thames and tells him that when (presumably in the twentieth century) England's energies were dissipated by trade unionism and games ((I don't know whether this was the author's or just the character's peeve)), the black, brown, and yellow races of the world formed a military alliance and launched a sudden war of extermination against the white race with advanced weapons and powerful explosives, catching England entirely by surprise and nearly achieving their end, though after three years of murderous occupation of the island they withdrew, and nothing more was ever heard from them or the rest of the world.

Exploring the primitive, hard-working Settlement, the narrator finds that the young people no longer believe the legends of twentieth-century mechanical marvels, reads an account of how one of the founders of the Settlement showed the others how to build shelters and live in the wilderness, and hears from an old man how a great flood half a century ago devastated the countryside and how subsequently a young man who liked to recite Bible passages accidentally started a religious revival that was a source of much embarrassment to the practical-minded leaders of the community. Captain Hart's spritely daughter Bessie takes the narrator to see Dr. Turnbull, the village historian, who decides he is sane after all and lets him read an ancient manuscript written by his twentieth-century ancestors at the time of the invasion. Just after the first Dr. Turnbull had sent his wife out of Glasgow for fear of a Bolshevist revolution, the city was bombed and the inhabitants massacred, but the doctor escaped unseen and made his way carefully across the countryside to Aberfoyle, where he was found by his wife, who had escaped death by hiding in the rocks with her baby and her maid. They saw groups of children being turned out in the woods by their elders to fend for themselves, in the hope that some would escape discovery, and Mrs. Turnbull witnessed a conversation between a colored officer and a Scots traitor who was being warned that even he was unsafe from the fanatical exterminators. The maid led the Turnbulls to a hidden shack in the hills, where they stayed for three years, till messen-

gers came from a southern settlement and took them there. The narrator also reads a magazine article preserved by Dr. Turnbull, which describes an attempted Anarchist revolution in London a few years before the war of extermination, and how it was suppressed by a terrifically powerful explosive invented and dropped from the air by a ruthless, domineering scientist named Binyon, who refused to sell his secret to the government and disappeared from England immediately after his successful demonstration.

Bessie then takes the narrator to visit Lady Crosby Scarlett, who lets him read a long manuscript detailing the adventures of her ancestors, Sir John and Lady Scarlett, who escaped to a gully in the moor at the time of the massacre. Sir John encountered an educated colored aviator and beat him in a fist fight, whereupon the humiliated Indian fulfilled his vow and committed suicide. The couple then found refuge in a large cave formerly used by illicit distillers, where they were presently joined by a Professor, a Squire, and their two servants. As time went on, they saw the steady extermination of white soldiers, banded outlaws, and furtive individuals, though some wild, timid children survived in the woods; and after three years, messengers from the Settlement led them to it across a silent and ruined England. The narrator stays on with Dr. Turnbull for two months, falling in love with Bessie, but one evening while she is telling him that the superstitious villagers are blaming his alien presence for their misfortunes, a mob comes and demands that he go, and the interstellar intelligence takes him back to the present day with his notes.

Evaluation: The book is written fairly well in a conventional English style with much gossipy narrative of physical events and little introspection or psychologizing. The author wastes some time, especially in the manuscripts, on trivial events, but this may have been done to lend verisimilitude to the MSS as being the typical products of average people which might survive instead of more important accounts. The Turnbull and Scarlett MSS, however, give too mediocre and limited a depiction of the war of extermination to make the whole affair seem plausible, though the theme is not so far removed from the realms of possibility that it could not be made believable. The author, of course, suffers from lack of science-fictional training, so makes little effort to strengthen the sociological plausibility of his story, and shows a lack of understanding of the structure and dynamics of modern society typical of casual writers of twenty years ago. Still, he was ahead of his time in envisioning Armageddon, particularly as the result of racial tension--his war of the colored races against the whites is original (it is on a much higher plane than Yellow Peril drivel, since here the colored races state their case accurately and credibly through the Indian aviator--by "colored" the author seems to mean Indian rather than Negro), and it is far more believable today than it doubtless seemed two decades ago, since the author's colored soldiers behave not too unlike some of the Japanese forces in the last war.

Confound my longwindedness! Since I refuse to produce more than my minimum activity requirements for membership, you are to regard this as an extension of page 8.

The Collapse of Homo Sapiens is very disjointed in structure, of course, the first half dealing with the hero's experiences two hundred years from now, and the second half consisting of three manuscripts from the present century. Perhaps the author hoped to convey the effect of a series of brief, chaotic, accidental glimpses of a horrifyingly catastrophic future and thus make the story memorable through its very limitation of points of view. But he fails to make his fearful and dismal events come alive for us, because he shies away from detailed descriptions of the horrors of the war, such as would give the novel the power of shocking and prophetic realism, and he is incapable of creating unique, significant characters whose impressions and reactions during the holocaust (and afterwards in the long night of stirring amid the ruins) would have given the novel a universality above that of speculative fantasy. Though his characters are moderately believable in a conventional sort of way and have a certain amount of attention given to their psychological behavior and individual traits, the whole story lacks that urgent emotional tone which comes when the author really lives his characters' lives, feels their emotions, and is lifted and inspired out of his workaday life by the poignancy of their story. Despite the very thorough collapse of civilization in the novel, there is missing that gripping atmosphere of desolation that made "Final Blackout" memorable despite its silly militaristic theme and other faults--but then the scene of "Final Blackout" was nearer to our own times and more realistically and brutally depicted. All in all, The Collapse of Homo Sapiens started off with a good basic idea--a future England reduced to barbarism by a racial war of extermination--but then, instead of developing logically, detailedly, and realistically, wandered all over in an uncertain haze because of the author's inability to handle so epic a theme.