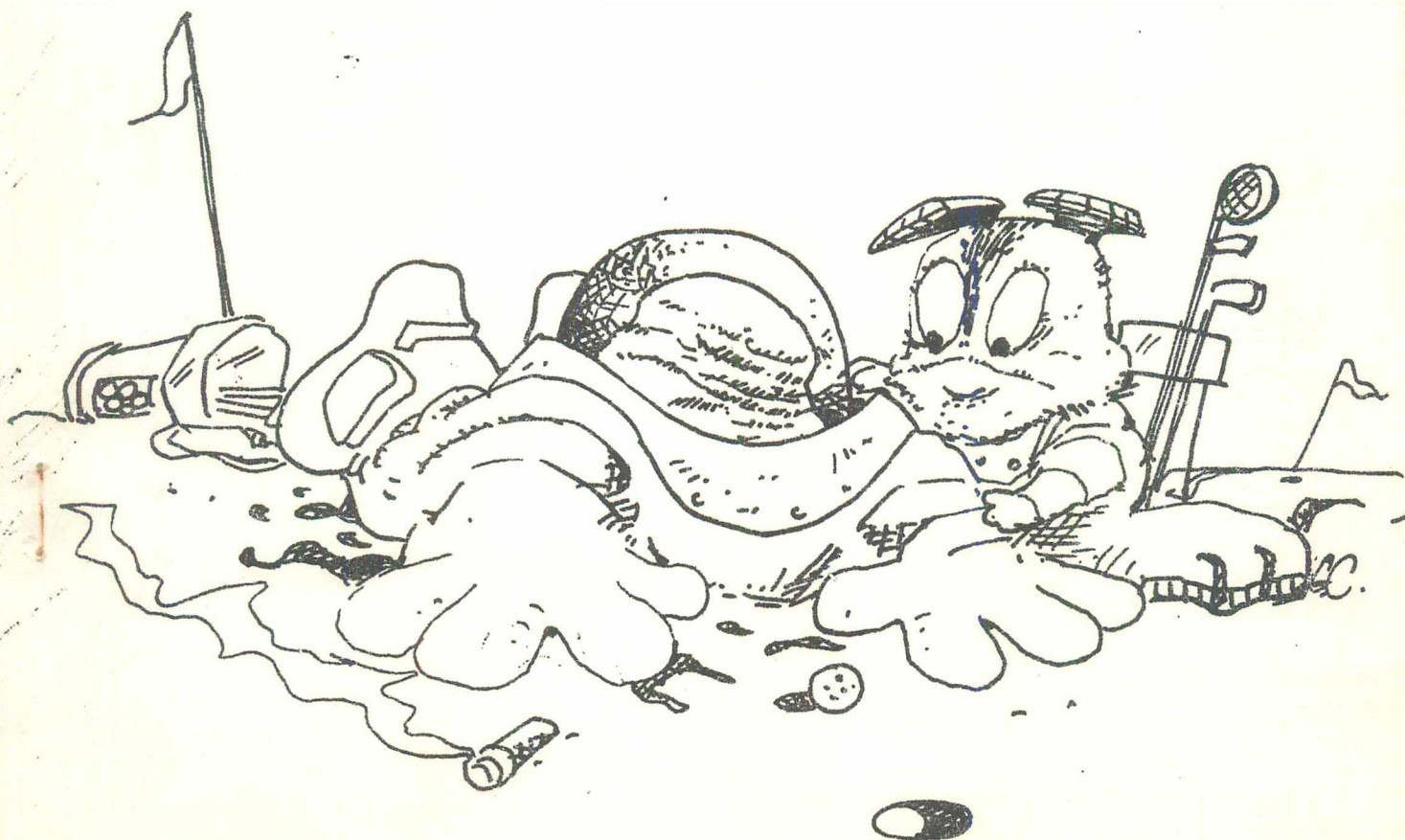
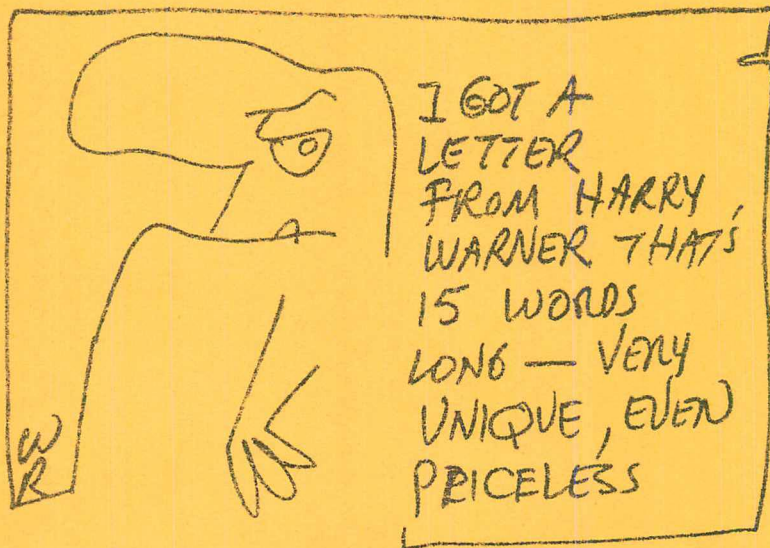


Philosophical Gas



Philosophical Gas

14



So now you know what a bright young bloke I was at the age of 18. I am very proud of that 96 for Greek, and still annoyed that it wasn't 100. I lost four marks because we were asked to decline some verb or other, and I declined it only in the masculine gender, not thinking that the feminine and neuter were also required (and I knew them, too).

Oh well. Now I have that document anyway, and it might be useful sometime. I can't take on the work with the University of New England, because it costs rather more than I anticipate having in February next year, and because I can't see any end to my fannish commitments just yet. Maybe in '74 I'll have a bash at it.

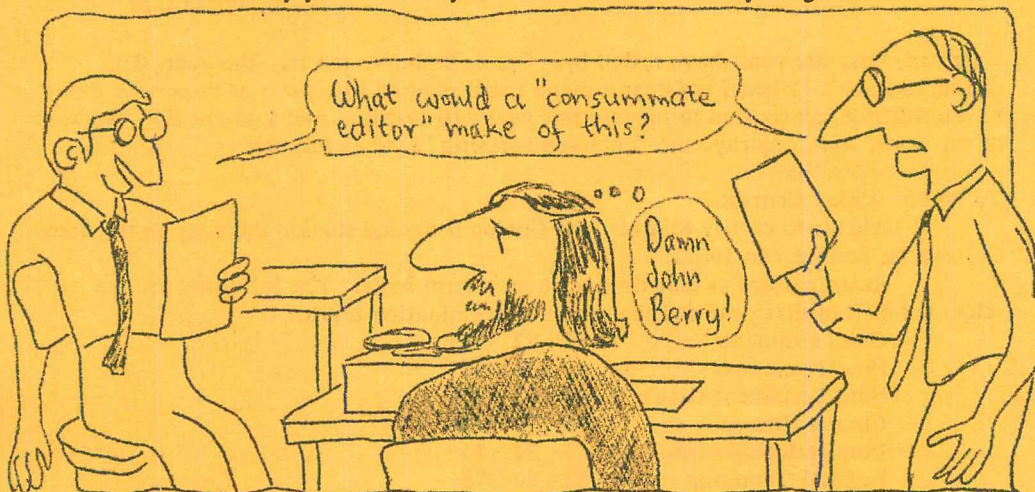
But it's awfully tempting to gaffate and do a bit of academic study. At present my qualifications consist of Victorian Intermediate Certificate and four Leaving subjects. If I put in a year on Classical Greek, and passed, I would automatically achieve Matriculation status, with a language - which would qualify me for entry into an Arts course in any Australian university. I think I could do it, too. Classical Greek is rather different from "New Testament" (more accurately, "koinē") Greek, in grammar and so on, but at least I have a fair vocabulary somewhere in the recesses of my mind, and I think I could pass the first year in this subject at least. Certainly the Greek alphabet gives me no trouble at all, and if the university insisted on accents (which the ancient Greeks didn't use, dammit) I could probably master those. Koinē Greek, if you are interested (and even if you aren't), was a sort of pidgin Greek current around the first centuries before and after Christ. It was widely used in commercial circles. For many centuries it was believed that the New Testament was written in some kind of holy language, since it certainly wasn't classical Greek, but discoveries during the 18th and 19th centuries showed that it was just a debased lingo for the use of barbarians, and not the least bit holy.

Anyway, all this scholarly talk is just academic - if you'll pardon the expression. I have no chance of raising the money I'd need to do the course next year, and I have the feeling that fandom will see to it that I won't have the time.

Maybe I'd better just give up any idea of academic attainments and wait for the honorary Litt. D. someone will feel bound to confer on me about half a century from now - if I live that long.

. . .

Look, I really am sorry about this, but since I prepared the results of the 1972 Anzapopoll I have had a burning ambition to score some points, if not win, in the poetry category. Not that I write poetry, you understand, but I have a fair amount of doggerel and ill-conceived verse lying about, which some voters next year might mistake for the real thing. I am also after a few points for art, so I will fill this page with something or other. Fiction? Surely you realize by now that I don't write anything else?



Published by John Bangsund; Parergon Books PO Box 357 Kingston ACT 2604 Australia

AN UNPROTECTED ARM IN A CAGE OF BUSH-FLIES!

What a title for a fanzine. If I didn't have so many fanzines running at the moment I would think seriously of using that. It's an advertisement for some spray-on insect repellent, and I haven't seen it for years. It came on right after the Prime Minister's policy speech, and besides seeming somehow appropriate at the time, it took me right back to the days when I had a tv set.

Lots of things have been taking me back lately. For example, I conceived the idiotic notion of doing some study via correspondence with the University of New England recently, and was advised that I should produce evidence of my (ha'!) scholastic career. So I wrote to the College of the Bible, and received the following from the Principal:

COLLEGE OF THE BIBLE
of Churches of Christ in Australia

Principal:
E. Lyall Williams, MA
Telephone: BL 6541

Elm Road
Glen Iris SE 6

14/11/72

Dear John,

Enclosed herewith is a certification regarding the work done by you in 1957. The years have rolled by. I trust you keep well and are finding expression in your work. Do you still play the piano ad lib?

I keep very well. At present the atmosphere is relaxed. Examinations are over and we are on the last week of the term waiting for Graduation on Friday night with the various social gatherings tucked in as usual during this week.

I hope you are successful in being able to do some university studies.

With kind regards,
Yours sincerely,
E. L. WILLIAMS

Dear me, yes, the years have rolled by. Or, as Bellerive put it, "the years doth rolleth onward". When I get near a piano I still play ad lib, yes - as those who went to the Adelaide convention in January this year will testify. And I do not find expression in my work, no. Anyway, the "enclosed herewith" read as follows:

To Whom It May Concern,

This is to certify that Mr John Gordon Bangsund studied theology in the above College for one year in 1957.

Examinations at that time were on a term basis. The following are the subjects taken in that year and the terminal examination results:

Old Testament	80	77	81
New Testament	83	81	83
New Testament Greek	96	92	89
Church History	65	77	92
Homiletics	65	74	75
Pastoral Theology	83	80	78

THE BALLAD OF THE READERS

Invocation & Apology

Calliope! Fair Muse of Verse!
Lend power to my Rhyme
(And make my readers all confess
I'm born out of my time).
Forgive Thou my effrontery
By writing downright whoreson
And speaking of these lofty things
In the style of Henry Lawson.

(Note: The polite fiction is
maintained that Hansard is a
more or less verbatim transcript
of Parliamentary proceedings.
For this reason the sub-editors
are referred to as "readers".)

* * * *

The Ballad

Across the stony syntax,
Across the rolling drone,
Alf, Bob and John, the readers,
Make marks that are their own.
And well their headphones fit them,
And light of heart are they,
For Byrne and James and Mulvihill
Have lost their voice today.

Their encyclopædic knowledge
Is wondrous to behold,
But they work in symbiosis,
Our three readers brave and bold:
Bob's specialties are politics
And science; John is best
On music, books, theology;
And Alf knows all the rest.

Of all the wise committees
They've meetings heard galore,
And rarely is a question asked
They haven't heard before.
They hum a song of someone
They hope will lose his seat,
But even if he doesn't
They'll ne'er admit defeat.

"What means 'resile'?" "What's OTC?"
They cry, and someone's brain
Yields up, "Like in resilient"
And "O'erhead Travelling Crane".
"But what is NEF?" says one
Whose mind has gone on strike;
The other two in chorus say,
"Any effin' thing you like!"

Beyond the hazy thinking,
Against the tortured prose
And yon blue line of wisecracks,
Each chunders as he goes.
But thitherward the readers
Proceed with all their might:
They'll turn the stuff to English
Though it take them half the night!

And so the long day passes,
With strain on eye and ear.
One wonders what these gifted men
Are doing, working here.
Such knowledge! Such percipience!
But Alf and John and Bob
With characteristic modesty
Say, "Well, we need the job".

Now mighty is their muscle
And fertile is their brain,
But like the wee corpuscle,
Their labour is in vain:
The Member's twisted lingo
They alter out of sight,
But when the Member sees it
He thinks he said it right!

There must be some more reason;
Modesty's not enough.
Why do our brilliant readers
Rot their minds with all this stuff?
The Judæo-Christian ethic
Is the seat of their complaint:
They hate it when they're working
And feel guilty when they ain't!

Of all the words in Hansard
One word in four is theirs
(And if they need a fifth word
There's an Oxford full of spares).
In English they are fluent,
Likewise Strine and Hansardese,
And a smattering of fourteen more
From Greek to Japanese.

One day when they depart this life
And wing their way on high,
They'll be called to that Committee
Which meets up in the sky,
And the great Recording Angel
Will say, "O'er is your strife!"
But... we need a little subbing
On this bloody Book of Life!"

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

Number 15 : February 1973

Published for FAPA by John Bangsund PO Box 357 Kingston ACT 2604 Australia

The numbering of this um journal has gone sadly haywire, and it's all Leigh Edmonds's fault. On 15th December I sat down to start the next issue, and typed No.18 on the masthead because I knew Leigh had put No.11 incorrectly on the ANZAPA list last mailing. However he had mistaken 14 for 11, not 17, so I've missed three issues and here's one of them.

FAPA 141 arrived, naturally, the day after I had a postcard from Gregg and answered it immediately, including in my reply the advice that FAPA 141 had not yet arrived. It also arrived the same day (I think) as Mr Nixon announced his Peace With Honour in Vietnam, and it rained like it was out of fashion and there was a sheet of iron missing from the verandah so the dunny flooded, and I was not in the best mood when I started reading the mailing. I'm still not. Bear with me.

I think I might be getting old or something. The only thing I've read in FAPA 141 (and I haven't read the lot yet) which I found at all congenial was Gregg's Rambling Fap. Now this might simply mean that I need something congenial rather than provocative or scintillating or whatever, but it alarms me. Tonight I have been reading REG, and - Ghod forgive me, Dick! - I was utterly crapped off with it. A few days ago I read most of Terry Carr's Fanthology 64, and was mostly bored. Two, maybe three, items I would love to have published; the rest was just good better-than-average fanzine stuff. Was that really the best of 1964? Have fanzines improved since then? Or am I just getting old?

I haven't read John Berry yet, mainly because it looks as though he's writing about his travels again, and I'm not in the mood for travel stories. I haven't read Milt Stevens either, because it looks like a long worldcon report, and I'm not in the mood for long worldcon reports.

I haven't read Sam Moskowitz, mainly because SaM didn't write anything. Maybe all these years I've missed the point about belonging to an apa. Maybe the done thing is to publish eight pages every now and then, written, typed and duplicated by someone else. Thank Ghod for Rick Sneary and Tom Collins: if it wasn't for Tom I would have had easily the most pages in the mailing - almost enough for ten years - and I would have been awfully embarrassed. Tom's stuff is just great, what I read of it, but not exactly my line, and in any case he sent me a copy a couple of months back.

Paul Wyszkowski, where are you? (How does it feel to be missed?)

A few folk have asked me questions, and since you should also have PGs 14 and 18 in this mailing, I will try to answer those questions and stop carrying on like an elderly disenchanted fart.

Harry Warner: Yes, it is possible to find out when surface mail to North America closes. From Sydney there are usually two or three mails each month, to New York and Los Angeles and/or San Francisco. I don't know whether these are the same ships that carry mail from Melbourne, but I suspect so. If you think that's primitive, it works the other way, too. Unless fanzines are airmailed from the USA, they tend to arrive all at once. When I was working in the bookshop, back in 59-60, we used to tell customers that books from America would take 8-12 weeks getting here, and as far as I know that is still the case.

(Tell me, Harry: You publish 96 pages in FAPA every year, and so, more or less, do quite a few other members. Is this really the Done Thing?)

Dick Geis: Don't know why it is, Dick, but the less I enjoy REG the more I enjoy the other things you write - such as your (like mine, infrequent) letters and your comments on FAPA. I am almost as insatiably curious about my "ill-fated marriage" as you seem to be. When I've worked it out I'll let you know. The only thing I can say with some certainty is that my fanac didn't cause the breakdown. Anything would have served as an excuse - stamp-collecting, church-going, studying for a degree - anything that kept me away from her. Does that partly answer the question?

Earl & Jan Evers: (Same subject.) Yes, I agree with you. If it wasn't funny I wouldn't have written about it. I'm better off out of that marriage, yes, but I miss marriage.

Hank Luttrell: (Same subject.) Hi, Hank. Lovely job you had done on those A75 badges, and I'm sorry I haven't written to thank you. You should be hearing all kinds of scandalous reports about Lesleigh's trip through these parts, and I just wish some of them were true. It's just our exaggerated way of saying we sure did love Lesleigh. Sue Smith recently published the first issue of "Girls' Own Fanzine", mainly devoted to the subject, "Would you marry a fan?" I could be wrong, but the consensus seemed to be negative. You marry a person, and if he/she happens to be a fan, you cope. Nice talking about it anyway.

Roy Tackett: (Same subject.) If Harry consigns me to a footnote I'll have his balls. I have already gaffed - for several weeks in 1969 - and, if memory serves, we have already Howdied - back about 1967 - but we ain't shook, and I look forward to doing just that in 1975 with a little luck.

Mr Justice Speer: (Same subject, among others.) No, I think I'm wrong in calling you "Mr Justice", Jack; your position probably corresponds roughly to that of a stipendiary magistrate in Australia. Sounds good, though. ::: "Migrant" is not obscene, except when herd. ::: Gawd, yer an ignorant lot there in Americky! "Plimsoll line" and "Hansard" are defined in most English dictionaries, and I sort of got the impression you had a few lying around. The former is the line painted on a ship, above which the water may not go when the ship is loaded; the latter is (a) the record of parliamentary debates in most countries of the Commonwealth, and (b) the Parliamentary Reporting Staff which produces that record. ::: Yes, poorfreeding is frustrating. ::: Our divorce laws are in the process of being liberalized - soon enough, I am pleased to say, to allow my divorce to go through more quickly than Diane and I expected. Under the old law you could apply for divorce on the grounds of adultery after six months, desertion two years and separation five years (oh, insanity immediately). So Diane and I waited out our two years before she took out the petition against me. On any grounds, whether defended or not, a discretionary statement was required (look it up in Blackstone). When the law is finally changed (courtesy Lionel Murphy, our new Attorney-General), the only ground for divorce will be irretrievable breakdown of the marriage. For the moment, undefended cases are now heard in chambers rather than in full court, which speeds up the process and makes it less expensive, and that is how Diane and I stand to gain. Also, discretionary statements are no longer required in undefended cases. ::: Barry Humphries is infinitely funnier than me, but he's a professional. ::: The Blind P is the sixth mark used to indicate footnotes, when superior numbers are not used. No, it isn't the paragraph symbol. It looks like this: ¶ and it is used after the asterisk, dagger, double dagger, section mark and parallel. ::: The poems were meant to be contrasted, and meant to appear equally valid. I am very pleased that you noticed that and commented on it. ::: I don't know anything about Chinese. I quoted one of the standard translations of Lao-Tze. ::: US\$1.00 is now worth approximately A\$0.80. Figures quoted in Scythrop take into account cost of living and (in the case of A\$4 = US\$2.50) other factors. ::: "Swag" also means a lot; "orientated" and "preventative" aren't used in newspapers, but I use them; a "hostel" isn't exactly a boarding house. ::: Australia is mostly dry. It's easy to forget that the area of Australia is around 90% of the area of the USA. You know, it's bigger than Texas, it really is. ::: Wish I could go on commenting, but the stencil tells me it's time to quit. Thanks for all your remarks, Jack.

And a Merry Christmas and Custard to all.

1. The first of these is the fact that the United States has a large and growing population of people who are not citizens of the United States. This is a result of the large number of immigrants who have come to the United States in recent years, and the fact that many of these immigrants are not naturalized citizens.

1. The following information is being furnished to you for your information and use only. It is not to be used for any other purpose. It is not to be used for any other purpose. It is not to be used for any other purpose.

[illegible]

4. *Conclusions*—The results of this study indicate that the use of a single, low-dose, short-acting benzodiazepine, such as lorazepam, is an effective and safe method of sedation for the conscious, cooperative, and nonventilated patient. The use of a single, low-dose, short-acting benzodiazepine, such as lorazepam, is an effective and safe method of sedation for the conscious, cooperative, and nonventilated patient.

The Fanzine Phenomenon

JOHN BANGSUND

John Bangsund publishes fanzines including (Scythrop) in his capacious bathroom in Kingston, ACT. To support this activity he works as a sub-editor with Hansard. He has recently published John W. Campbell: An Australian Tribute.

"The mystique of the group—the surrogate of love." Thus Andre Maurois, summing up brilliantly one aspect of that remarkable fellow Balzac. It could almost have been written of that strange phenomenon, science fiction fandom—and its prime vehicle, the fanzine.

A fanzine is a magazine produced by fans. In particular, since they coined the Orwellian word in the first place, a fanzine is a magazine produced by science fiction fans. It is, one might say, a kind of little magazine—but not usually the kind of little magazine that Michael Wilding wrote about in this journal a few issues back. It is more like the sort of publication John Willett wrote about in the 1967 *Penrose Annual*: "Little magazines are essentially magazines—or vaguely magazine-like publications that can be anything from a young portfolio to a single sheet—which are produced for fun, love or conviction, in defiance of alleged economic good sense. . . . No editor, however, has yet managed to make such a magazine look other than shoddy . . .".

John Willett presumably had not seen many fanzines when he wrote that. In general, what he has to say about his little magazines is true of fanzines, but I have quite a few fanzines in my accumulation which are more elaborate in appearance than *The Australian Author*, for example.

Science fiction has existed for a long time—if you are in any doubt about that, read W. H. G. Armytage's excellent *Yesterday's Tomorrows* (a volume, incidentally, in which fanzines are referred to as such, without quotation marks or explanations)—but Hugo Gernsback gave it a name. (Well, actually he preferred "scientifiction", but that didn't last.) It is not a good name, but it serves. Since 1926, when Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* launched the genre as something distinct from the mainstream of literature, something special, there has grown with it the curious complex of relationships, the amorphous, heterogeneous, constantly changing yet undeniably existent universal non-organization, called fandom.

There was nothing unique about the fan clubs started by Gernsback, his successors and competitors. Fan clubs have existed for a long time,

and will spring up (or be organized) wherever there is enthusiasm (or a need for it). There is nothing unique about fan magazines either. They go along with the fan clubs. They serve their (usually commercial) purpose. They spring up, they flourish, they die. Their memorial is the nostalgia of the few.

The early sf fan clubs ranged from the commercially-promoted Captain Galaxy's Space League kind of thing to the British Interplanetary Society, which started off messing about with backyard rockets and is now a most respectable institution. Today there are still clubs orientated basically to particular magazines (such as the enormous Perry Rhodan club in Germany) or television series (such as the proliferation of Star Trek clubs, which still linger on). Most of these clubs, of course, consist of enthusiastic youngsters who sometime or other will decide that their studies or their jobs are more important, or will discover sex or pot or classical music or something, and they drift away from the club and become more or less normal people. Some, however, graduate into fandom.

The three recognizable outward manifestations of fandom are fanzines, conventions and clubs and groups of various kinds. I will not talk about conventions and clubs here, beyond mentioning that there are usually about three conventions each year in Australia, and last time I looked there were about a dozen clubs. The convention is the annual World SF Convention, and Australia is bidding this year in Toronto for the honour of holding it in 1975.

Fandom consists of people whose initial mutual interest is science fiction. They might lose interest in sf, but as long as they remain interested in each other they are fans. At any given time, probably most of the Big Name Fans have relegated sf to a minor interest. They have become more interested in marriage, religion, literature, politics, mediæval brass rubbings—it could be anything—but they remain fans. Along with the greenest 15-year-old neofan who has just been transported into ecstasy by the writings of Andre Norton, A. Bertram Chandler or J. G. Ballard (and won't shut up about it!), they attend conventions and enjoy themselves hugely, and they write for, publish or at least receive in the mail, fanzines.

Historically, the fanzine is said to have started when the sf magazines reduced or eliminated their letter columns. I do not know whether that is correct, but there is something of the personal quality of a letter about most fanzines, and certainly this is true of the best.

There are as many kinds of fanzine as there are people who publish them. In purpose, they range from the letterzine (a duplicated letter-

substitute) to the ultimate in fan publishing—the pro fanzine (large circulation, professional reproduction and content). At what point the pro fanzine turns into a prozine, I am not sure. The British *New Worlds* started as a kind of fanzine, became a quite professional magazine by issue No. 4, was impossible to label in its latter years, and is now a quarterly paperback. The Spanish *Nueva Dimension* is widely distributed, most handsomely produced, and it pays (un-handsomely) for material, but I regard it as basically a fanzine. The Japanese fanzine *Uchujin*, the Hungarian *Pozitron* and many others, are similarly professional in approach.

In subject matter, fanzines are as diverse as the world we live in. If you can think of it, someone has written about it in a fanzine. In writing style, the range is from almost illiterate to surpassingly brilliant, but you do not find much of those extremes. The average is workmanlike. In appearance, fanzines range from the sloppiest, most indecipherable mess to utterly professional work, superbly laid-out, sometimes using full colour artwork. Again, the average is workmanlike, the majority using stencil duplicators of some kind. Experimentation is characteristic. Fanzine production is a craft. For some, the medium is far more important than the message, the craft more important than the content.

A special kind of fanzine is the apazine. Amateur publishing associations (hence “apa”) were not invented by and are not unique to fandom, but the activity flourishes here as perhaps nowhere else. Such an association usually has an “official editor” or mailing officer, to whom each member sends a stated number of copies of his publication for distribution to the rest of the members. Communication, the interplay of diverse personalities, is the essence of the tannish apa. Apart from talking and drinking with fans, this is for me the most pleasant and rewarding of fan activities. I am a member of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (USA), the Off-trail Magazine Publishers Association (UK) and the Australian & New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association. There are many others.

Fanzines are published just about wherever sf is read—and that means practically everywhere. The majority probably (the English-language majority certainly) emanates from America. How many fanzines are there? I have no idea. Thousands perhaps. For a start, the three apas I belong to have a total membership of about 120. The “Fanzines received” column of the American newszine *Locus* usually runs for several pages. Frequency of publication? Many have maintained a monthly schedule for years, some even weekly, but most appear irregu-

larity. Lee Hoffman's *Science Fiction Five-Yearly* has never missed a deadline.

It would be difficult to say how many fanzines are published in Australia. Amongst the better local publications are Bruce Gillespie's *SF Commentary* (nominated for the Hugo Award last year, and our best and most regular fanzine); David Grigg's *The Fanarchist*, Eric Lindsay's *Gegenschein*, John Alderson's *Chao*, Ron Clarke's *The Mentor*, Dennis Stocks's *Mithral*, John Foyster's *Chunder*, Shayne McCormack's *Something Else*, Bill Wright's *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop* and my own *Scythrop*. All the local clubs and groups publish things from time to time. If you would like to contact any of these publishers, write to the Space Age Bookshop, 317 Swanston St, Melbourne. (The Space Age is a kind of four-dimensional fanzine, published daily except Sundays, thinly disguised as a commercial enterprise.)

At the 11th Australian Science Fiction Convention in Sydney last August, I led a discussion on the subject "Why Fanzines?" I was delighted to find no less than sixteen fanzine publishers in my audience, including our American guest of honour, Lesleigh Luttrell, and I asked them in turn why they went to the immense effort and expense of publishing these things. Leigh Edmonds said something about weaving baskets (and promptly went to sleep); Bruce Gillespie, talked profoundly about communication; John Foyster said it kept people off the streets. After badgering them all, and receiving all the expected answers, they turned on me and demanded to know why I publish fanzines. I said: "Because I am lonely." There was a momentary silence, until someone realized there must be more to it than that and asked whether I would stop publishing fanzines if I stopped being lonely. I sidestepped the question, and answered it, simultaneously. Every now and then I want to give up this foolishness, and whenever I feel this way my immediate impulse is to rush to the typewriter and start producing a fanzine explaining why I have stopped publishing fanzines. Make of that what you will.

"It is a proud and lonely thing to be a fan." Robert Bloch said it, years ago, in a story called "A Way of Life", in *Fantastic Universe*. The pride is discernible immediately. I am proud to have published original material by Bob Bloch, Bert Chandler, Ursula Le Guin, George Turner, David Compton, Mungo MacCallum, Jim Blish, John Brunner, John Boyd, Mike Moorecock, the late Ted Carnell—and a host of others, famous, not yet famous and never to be famous. The loneliness is less easily discerned.

The trufan finds in fandom "the mystique of the group"—something he has possibly experienced before, in a church (as I did), at university, in some association or other, and has lost. Or perhaps he has never experienced it before. It doesn't matter. Here in fandom he mixes with an elite group. He meets Bert Chandler or Isaac Asimov at a convention. He gets a letter from Brian Aldiss or Stanislaw Lem. He asks L. Sprague de Camp for an article for his fanzine, and gets it by return mail. He does not know it yet perhaps, but this is his "surrogate of love".

When, if, he finds love—personal, immediate love—he might very well give up fandom and rejoin mundania. Or he might continue his fanactivity, realizing that love is universal and fandom one of its multifarious forms. It depends a lot on what he wants from life.

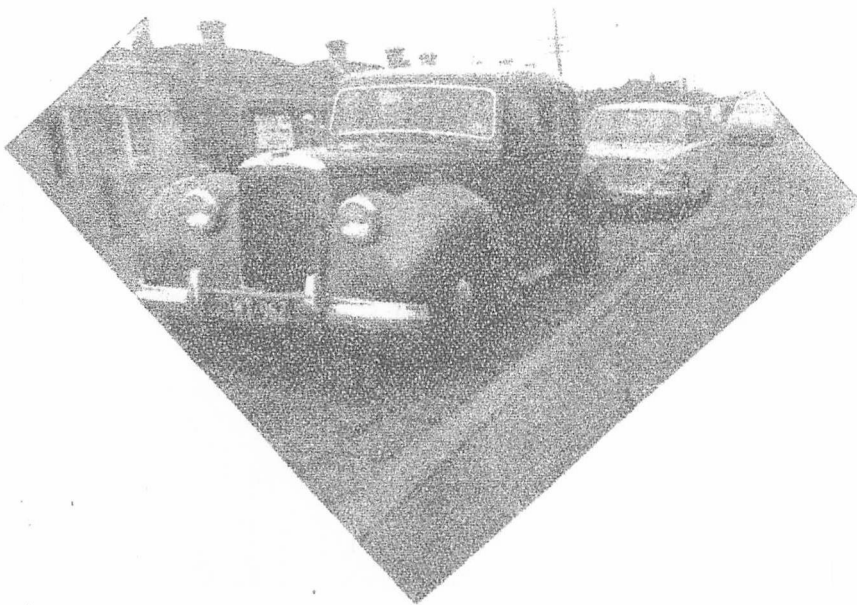
Applying Andre Maurois's words to fandom is, I think, not unseemly or inappropriate. The mystique of the group *can* be the surrogate of love, and for many of my fannish friends is just that. But for some, the group becomes a means of spreading love. I like to think of fandom in that way, and to regard the fanzine as the best way for me to do a bit of that spreading.

And—pardon me, Dr Johnson—who ever wrote, except for love?

© John Bangsund, 1973.

This is a special almost-all-pictorial issue. The interior pages I ran off some time ago as an experiment in reproducing photos on electronic stencils. It didn't work very well, as you can see. Mecanorma has a range of dot screens, called Normatone, and most of them are available in white as well as black. I used five of these white screens to get the results inside. I will probably use them again, but on more suitable originals next time. The photos are of: (1) Bob Smith, Shayne McCormack and Mervyn Binns; (2) Shayne, Lee Harding, Carla Harding, me and Bob; (3) part of the audience at Syncon 72; (4) the Alvis, of sad memory, in Gladstone Avenue, Northcote, about 1965; (5) Diane.





Lord willing and Gough Whitlam permitting, 1973 will be the year when I destroy this myth forever. Maybe. In April the first of my major debts will be paid off, and in October the other three. I have many ideas for wasting the surplus money that will start accumulating during the year, but I am trying to resist them all. Besides, I must remember that I am only a temporary public savant.

We have spent a little over four weeks working at Parliament House, and it has been an interesting experience. (When we resume in January, we'll be back at the Government Printing Office and I can stop wearing my tie again.) The recess between sessions of Parliament - especially this one, when an election has been held - is a very quiet time in Hansard. Our work at the House has not been at all what you would call interesting. For three weeks we checked the index to the last session - 850 pages of the House of Representatives, 600 pages of the Senate, each - reading, checking, cross-checking, analysing speeches where the indexer hasn't bothered, and so on. Nasty stuff, and a somewhat traumatic experience for anyone who still has some illusions about the dignity, intelligence and decision-making functions of Parliament. As one who still retained a few such illusions, the job was pretty sickening at times for me.

Now we have a Labor government, and a lot of my illusions have sprung to life again. In less than two weeks as Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam seems to have done more good things and undone more bad things than the Liberals managed in the last decade. I say "seems", because a lot of things he has announced have still to be ratified by Parliament, and without a majority in the Senate he might have a job putting them into effect. Even so, someone compiled a list of what he did during his first 100 hours as PM, and it makes rather incredible reading. I have the delicious feeling that after twenty-three years of Liberal (translation for overseas readers: Conservative) government we are suddenly about to be dragged screaming from the late 40s into the 70s.

But enough of politics. Four weeks close up and I'm sick of it.

After Syncon 72, I had the honour of escorting Lesleigh Luttrell and a nondescript bunch of Melbourne fans around King's Hall at Parliament House. Lesleigh wasn't awfully impressed, and I was somewhat ashamed to admit that, apart from a short interview with the Hansard chief on my first day here, this was the first time I had been in Parliament House since my father took me there not long after the war. I can now assure Lesleigh that the place is much bigger inside than outside, and I wish I could have shown her some of the places I've now discovered.

One of the extraordinary things about Parliament House is that you keep on seeing or bumping into famous people - and they are ordinary people, just like you and me. It tends to restore one's sense of wonder, somehow. Senator Lionel Murphy, the new Attorney-General, came into the staff lunchroom to buy a packet of fags one day last week. "Christ!" I said to my friend Bob Lehane, "That's Lionel Murphy!" He turned around slowly, said "Yeah", and went on eating. (Bob has Seen It All Before.) Yesterday he said something like "He really looks like one of the world's great human beings", and I said "Who?", and he said "Gough: he's right behind you", but when I turned around the great man had disappeared.

I said to Bob, "Do you know Mungo MacCallum?" He said, "Yes, I thought you did, too." I said I'd never met the man, and Bob said he'd often been looking at the papers in the corridor when we had passed that way. Bob knows all the journos. He knows a lot of things I haven't found out he knows yet.

Another day I remarked the presence a table or two away from us of a very handsome, extremely well-built young lady, and he said "Megan Stoyles". "Who is she?" I asked. "Writes for the Financial Review," he said, "And Bill Hayden's new press secretary." "Uhuh," I said. "She achieved fame some years ago by getting her photo in Time, and on the front page of just about every paper there is, wearing a tee-shirt with 'Make Love, Not War' on it." Too much. When that photo appeared I thought she was one of the handsomest women I had ever seen. Now I have seen her, often, and still think the same.

Today a senior reporter named John Campbell (who thinks I'm writing a book about him) showed me the two houses. At least, he showed me the Senate. We walked into the visitors gallery in the Reps and were promptly ejected by an attendant who said we would have to join a guided party. John has been with Hansard for twelve years, but we were tossed out. A funny place, Parliament House.

22nd January: February seems a lot more believable now - Thursday week, I think it is - and those thirty-eight glorious days are almost finished. Let us all be unhappy together. Let us sing a catch. Let me tell you What I Did On My Holidays.

After typing the last stencil I started thinking again about going to Melbourne, and that meant thinking about the strong possibility that the Volkswagen wouldn't last the distance. I could take a plane, and use my sister Joy's Renault 10 to get about in. But that would mean returning to a broken-winded VW. So, spend the air fare getting the VW repaired. But I didn't know what was wrong with it; it could turn out to need a new clutch and a new engine, as it did about this time last year. So. So? So-so. Then again. Saturday I spent thinking about getting another car. Rather wisely, I feel, I didn't actually do anything about it until the car dealers had closed down for the day. On the way to a party at Dickson I stopped to look at new VWs. I went round to the back of the place, where the VW dealer keeps his used cars, and fell head over heels in love with a white Valiant Pacer. Then I went to the party and asked people to tell me why I shouldn't buy a used white Valiant Pacer. That's a pretty good party game, if you want to get all the men in the place talking, excited and angry. Try it sometime. Anyway the theoretical choice came down to a VW 1600 station wagon or a Renault 16, either new or not too used. (I say theoretical because there was an excellent chance that no car dealer would be interested in the red beast.)

I drove to Fyshwick and looked at Renaults. New Renaults. I took a white 16 TS for a test drive. It felt kind of exhilarating: all the weight at the front of the car instead of the back, all that acceleration in top gear, those luxurious Peugeot seats, that thick green carpet, the crazy column gear change that operates as smoothly and quickly as any floor change I've ever experienced, the unaccustomed speed, solidity, comfort and quietness: oh, I was sold completely before I got back to the showroom. (If only our Gallic friends would concentrate on flooding the Pacific Basin with Renaults instead of radioactive fallout... Then Boney he'd come pouncing down, rollicum rorum, &c. Old Song. Hardy, I think. Pardon me.)

So, after a lot of toing and froing and proing and conning about finance and insurance and all kinds of guff like that, on Tuesday afternoon I picked up the new car and pointed it at Melbourne, and thitherward we wended at a rapid pace, the white beast and me. (Part of that sentence is a quote from John Foyster's "Chunder!", and so are the next eight, just in case you feel you've read this stuff before.) Outside Yass I picked up a hitch-hiker. We chatted about this and that. I told him about what I understand to be the Russian system of hitch-hiking. Since cars are, after all, a valuable resource, drivers are encouraged to pick up hitch-hikers. The hiker is issued with coupons, and when he gets a lift he hands one to the driver. When the driver accumulates enough of these coupons... "He gets a hitch-hiker all his own?" said my passenger. It was a good trip. I never found out that bloke's name, but he was great company. When I saw him by the side of the road, with his long hair, greasy headband, dirty-looking old patched jeans, his slightly crooked grin and his great beak of a nose painted white with sunburn ointment, I knew immediately that here was a nice, decent young feller I could trust not to clobber me and make off with my car and meagre wallet at the first opportunity, and I was not wrong. It's the short-haired, clean-looking types you have to be careful about. (I picked up one of those, too, and he left potato crisps and an empty coke bottle on the back seat.) This fine young man had gone bush somewhere in Queensland to escape the draft, and was now emerging to see his folk in Adelaide. (Gough scrapped conscription in the first few days of his ministry, and a lot of good people like this kid have come back into circulation.) He was gentle, with a whimsical but barbed sense of humour, and of course, he reads science fiction. There was a time, on discovering that, when I would have immediately demanded his name and address and tried to introduce him to fandom. These days I don't do much in the way of recruiting. I feel that these people will find fandom for themselves when they need it. Towards midnight we were utterly lost in Melbourne's north-eastern suburbs, which have been completely revised and edited in the last year, but eventually I found the place in Box Hill he was making for and about ten minutes later was sitting drinking beer with my brother-in-law at Burwood.

I have it on good authority that during the three weeks I spent in Melbourne I was drunk all the time and surly, nasty and generally obnoxious to everyone in sight. This comes as something of a surprise to me. It doesn't sound at all like the sober, congenial, courteous (and what was that adjective Gillespie used about me recently? - oh, yes;) and mellow chap I have come to know and respect, so I am forced to confess that I don't believe it. (Perhaps it was someone else of the same name.) I know I didn't get to see everyone I have ever known in Melbourne, and many I could have easily telephoned, I didn't. Two lady friends who have been very close in the past, I saw only once. There is a reason for this slight reluctance to re-establish (or attempt it) old friendships and acquaintanceships, a reason which might emerge eventually as I write this. But I definitely do not recall being nasty to anyone. I even smiled at Mervyn Binns once, and snarled at my little niece and nephew in strict moderation (since I was a guest in the house). Drunk - or pretty close to it - yes; I will admit that I was just that, once or twice - but, dammit, xmas comes but once a year, and if a man can't get quietly blurred at the edges on a passable red while watching the Pakistanis playing a dashed good game of cricket on the telly at xmas, what's the world coming to?

What did I get for xmas, you ask? (Go on, ask. Ta.) One tin ham, three pairs underpants, one tin shortbreads, one fancy box exploding Japanese matches, one collapsing wine-rack with bottle 1968 Kaiser Stuhl Bin 33 claret, three 1800' tapes, one Bulgakov novel, one xmas cake, one sf paperback (which I'd read), one Renault 16 TS, one Edward Stewart novel, one packet mixed nuts, one magnificent volume of illuminations. And a wombat in a gum-tree. (No, I didn't get that. I've been after one for years, but no-one ever seems to think I might like a wombat in a gum-tree and I know I'll just have to go out and buy one eventually.) Bill Wright gave me one of the Rotsler Australia-in-75 badges from LACon, and let me look at his copy of the programme book. Robin gave me something, too. What was it? One box O'Grady's Whisky Sour Mix ("just add whisky")? No, he left those at my place last May. Ah, a cassette, yes. But mainly what I got for xmas was a lot of hospitality and good talk with friends old and new. You can't ask for better than that.

On Wednesday, 20th December, I drove into town from Burwood (the Renault handles very nicely on the freeway at 90) and walked into the Degraes Tavern, traditional meeting-place of Melbourne fandom for some years. (Formerly Jenny's Cellar. See ASFR 5, p.41.) My arrival suprised everyone except Diane, who knew I would be there, and Henry, the proprietor, who is surprised at nothing. Even as I reached the bottom step (assorted fans recoiling in horror or gasping at their rediscovery of a sense of wonder) Henry was calmly pouring me a complimentary glass of house red, which he presented to me at the bar with the words, "So you're back" - or something polite like that. "Yes, sir," I said. "I've been to Canberra and changed the government, and have returned for further instructions. Sir." "I still think you're a bloody spy," said Henry. "Merry Xmas." "And a merry xmas to you," I said, raising my glass in salute. He refilled it. "Your friends are over there. You have noticed already. Good. Your wife looks very attractive tonight. I do not know what she sees in you, and I am not interested." Ah, it was good talking to Henry again.

Elizabeth Foyster invited me to sit opposite her, which I did. Diane did look very attractive indeed, and it was very thoughtful of Elizabeth to keep me at the other end of the table. John Foyster came back from buying food, or some such unsocial activity, and said, "Ah, Banger. If you want something in the next Chunder. I'll need it next week." It felt good to be back. Harding walked in, bearing an enormous bunch of flowers. He caught sight of me, stopped dead, and simultaneously dropped his jaw and the flowers. A born actor, Lee. He joined us at the Paris End of the table, introduced me to Irene and said, "That's the John Bangsund!" "No!" said Irene, who is very lovely and an actor in her own right, "Not the John Bangsund?" "Not so loud," I said, "I'm supposed to be incognito." "You look more like inebriated," said Foyster. And so the merry night went on.

I wish I could remember everyone who was there. It was like a mini-con - at least

two dozen of the elite of Melbourne fandom (plus Robin Johnson, who is more the pica size). Just about the only great&famous fans not present were Bruce Gillespie, who was home typing up an issue or three of SF Commentary, and Paul Stevens and Mervyn Binns, who had urgent business to discuss privately at a horror movie or something.

On the following Tuesday, Boxing Day, fannish history was made (in an unassuming kind of way) with the commencement of the First Australian Bring-Your-Own Convention. This non-event had been carefully unplanned by Gillespie and Edmonds - to the extent that I was under the mistaken apprehension that the thing was to start on Tuesday afternoon. It started on Tuesday morning. I was supposed to be Non-Guest of Honour or something, and a few people had started wondering whether I'd had too much to eat the previous day (I think they said eat) by the time I arrived. Interstate attendees included Paul Anderson and Alan Sandercock, and there were a couple of people from Zambia (I think it was). I couldn't see Kevin Dillon anywhere.

I had brought a stencil for Bruce to run off - a cover for the BYOCon's Do-It-Yourself Programme & Memory Book. A lot of people typed pages for this immortal volume, which Bruce ran off and distributed on the spot. There was a lot of drinking going on (which fills me with alarm for the future of Australian fandom, of course), Bill Wright was trying to teach people some evil board game he had brought back from the fleshpots of Los Angeles or Hagerstown or somewhere, Paul Anderson was talking about sf, Robin was talking about Zambia, George Turner and I were talking about Dryden or someone, Harding was talking about practically everything (a born raconteur, Lee), and Mervyn was talking in rather uncomplimentary terms about the bloke who had just run into his car and near enough to wrecked it (a born loser, Mervyn, I sometimes think). Relieved that the bastard had run into Merv's Falcon and not my car, which was parked opposite, I had another glass or bottle or three, and next morning I woke up in Harding's living-room.

It didn't take Lee and Irene more than an hour or so to wake me up. I greeted them courteously, asked them for details of my conduct the previous night (for future reference), and suggested we go and pick up Leigh Edmonds and drive to the Foyster Farm. Lee sort of looked at Irene with a funny look, and Irene looked back the same way, and Lee said, "We've been asking you for the last hour or so when do you intend to pick up Edmonds so we can go up to Foyster's Farm." I looked at Irene. "Would you like some coffee?" she said. A wonderful little lady, Irene. "Yes," I said. So I had my breakfast and we went to pick up Leigh. He threw a few cats out of the flat, checked that he had his sausages and his score of the Shostakovich quartets, and we were on our way.

At Woodend (or was it Diggers' Rest?) we stopped for some more breakfast, and I walked over the road afterwards to investigate the public facilities. I emerged from same, and stood for a moment watching Leigh Edmonds walking slowly up and down the main street of Diggers' Rest (or was it Woodend?), his thigh-length hair gently flowing about him, silently conducting a Shostakovich quartet, and I felt quietly proud of him. Pimply little Leigh, who not so many years ago had commenced a letter to me, "Dear Sir", who even more recently had been enmeshed with pop music and drugs and stuff, and I had exposed him to Mahler and Bach, and Harding had exposed him to Haydn and Penderewski (or someone), and here he was: walking up and down the main street of a quiet little Victorian country town, humming Shostakovich to himself from the complete score. He's a lunatic, I thought to myself.

Foyster was trying to get the portable barbecue thing started in the barn, since it was a Total Fire Ban day. He was immaculately dressed, as usual, in orange shirt, purple tie and old-slouch-hat-with-the-side-turned-up - which latter he was using, somewhat ineffectively, to fan the barbecue alight. John Alderson solved the problem by pouring some of his home-bottled Mallee Root Dry Red 1972 onto the reluctant briquettes. In no time at all - scarcely more than two hours or so - we had a roaring barbecue which engulfed tall sausages at a single gulf, and someone handed around salad and stuff and it was a fabulous mess of good eating. Then we went and played cricket.

I have not played cricket since I was in theological college - indeed, there are some who would say I have never played cricket at all. In college I was always last to bat, and never ever bowled. My position was called drawback, if I remember correctly, or deep-way-out-long-stop. Something like that. What it meant was that I stood by the bank of the Gardiner Creek reading poetry, and when the ball came my way everyone yelled at me and I scrambled down into the creek to retrieve the ball. (I played the same position, more or less, in football, too.) In this game, on the Foysters' front lawn, we used a soft ball and everyone was allowed two chances. Someone bowled me out first ball, of course, before I could get my eye in, but under the second rule I was allowed to stay at the crease. (Maybe they made that rule up for me. I wonder about that, come to think of it.) After a while I started playing all kinds of fancy shots, hitting the ball in the process almost every time. I loved that part, but I hated running up and down between the wickets. I decided I'd had enough and started hitting catches. No-one caught them. One went into a pine tree, and it was a beautiful and memorable sight to see the cream of Melbourne fandom gathered in communion under that tree, hands upraised to catch my falling ball. It fell about three feet away from Tony Thomas's back, if I remember correctly. I was wearying. Sport is all very well in its place, on the TV and such, but to be involved intimately, as I was, was taking things a little too far. At last I succeeded in lobbing the ball straight up, someone caught it, and I retired gracefully to sleep off this unwonted exertion for an hour or two in the car.

I have suggested to the Australia in 75 Committee (of which I understand - but apparently no-one else does - I am still a member) that in the event of our being successful we might organize a game of grid-iron on Foyster's front lawn, using the same rules. I feel that our American guests would appreciate this. A soft ball, of course, and two chances at the crease. But of course - I am forgetting - you folk in America use a different kind of bat, don't you. (Memo Robin and Leigh: Check with experts such as Harry Warner Jr on correct bat to use in grid-iron.)

Later in the day, Robin played some tapes of the LACon banquet. We listened to Bob Bloch, Fred Pohl, Juanita and Buck Coulson, Andy Porter and a whole stack of people we all know and love, and it was really great - except that they all, for some reason, seemed to have American accents. This disturbs me. I am sure Robin wasn't putting us on, so this must mean that American fans speak with the same kind of accent that we hear all the time on television. I am finding this difficult to comprehend. All these years I have believed, without thinking about it, that fans the world over speak with the same cultured kind of voices as Robin and Mervyn, Harding and Edmonds, Bill Wright and myself. Perhaps a few might affect a slightly outlandish (but loveable) lilt like Bob Smith's or Jack Wodhams's, but I never thought that some might have the same accent as Glenn Ford or Dick Nixon or Lesleigh Luttrell. Lesleigh Luttrell! Of course! Why didn't I realize it before? That's why Lesleigh didn't sound like a fan! The lady looked like a fan, of course, but sounded like an American. Even what she said seemed eminently fannish and sensible, but it sounded wrong somehow. Good heavens! - now I think about it, Mike Horvat talked like that, too, and Hank Davis and Ed Hamilton and Leigh Brackett and Bruce Townley and Ron Smith and Jack Williamson and Jean Jordan and... and... that tape from Jim Blish! American fans talk American!

Pondering this, I missed the third day of BYOCon - a party at Liz George and Peter House's place.

On the fourth day (my sweetheart said to me: four kangaroosters, three Foster's Lager, two knuckledusters, one whistling bunyip - and a wombat in a gum-tree) there was a party at Lee and Irene's flat. I arrived with a flagon of some muck or other and a boot-full of bricks. Lee had mentioned (often) his desire to build some book-cases out of Besser bricks and boards, and had insinuated (even more often) that the Renault had a large boot and I not a great deal to do in my spare time, so why don't we go to a brick shop and buy some Besser bricks? I was forced to steal some of the bricks I had left behind with my sister, and dutifully transported these to the Harding schloss. He didn't want to know about it. "Later," he said. So I sat down with Don Symons and

Steve Solomon and Irene and John Litchen and Monica Correa, and listened, fascinated, as Don and John and Monica talked about Latin America. Don has travelled a great deal, and loves Latin America. John has probably travelled even more, and always seems to finish up in Mexico or Cuba or one of those places over there. And Monica... Monica is the sister of Chile's foremost sf writer, Hugo Correa. I listened. I wish I'd had a tape recorder there.

That party was fantastic. Everyone was there, and anyone who turned up who didn't seem to be especially anyone became someone before the night was over. There was a delightful bloke talking to us at the table for quite a while (I should mention that I prefer talking at a table, and I didn't wander far from Harding's table all night), and eventually I found out that he was Roman Mazurak - one of my subscribers, bless him, but just a name until that night. I knew for sure that he was a subscriber when he said I'd never sent him anything.

Ah, a great night, and impossible to describe. Little incidents remain in the memory, along with a great big good feeling. Robin Johnson, in striped shirt, shorts, shoes and socks, dribbling an empty McWilliam's flagon, as soccer players are wont to do when they have no ball. Dancing cheek-to-cheek with Irene while everyone else was stupidly square-dancing. (Well, maybe it wasn't square-dancing, but it was awfully athletic and individual looking, and Irene is not a lady to be wasted like that.) After everyone had gone home or to bed there was still a little rough white remaining, and Robin, Roman, George Turner and I were the last to leave. I mentioned the bricks. The other three agreed to help me carry them in, and we did the job quickly and efficiently, given the circumstances. Lee and Irene's flat is upstairs, and we didn't feel like carrying all those heavy bricks up, so we placed them very carefully on the lower stairs in such a manner that we could close the door when we left - and anyone coming down stairs later in the morning would have to climb over them.

Roman said goodnight and walked off. George and Robin, who had possibly drunk more, got in the car. I dropped George off somewhere near where he lives, and drove round the corner to Robin's. He remarked that we hadn't had much of a chance to talk about Australia in 75 matters. I remarked that the night was young yet, and if he had some coffee I would gladly talk with him. So I followed Robin into his flat, and he went off to the kitchen to make coffee, and when he returned I was fast asleep in his chair. I stayed the night.

I could go on indefinitely about the good times I had in Melbourne during those three weeks - getting to know Lee and George all over again, talking with Robin and Bill and John Julian and John Litchen and Paul and Mervyn and Leigh and Valma and many others, meeting Lindsay Cox again and carrying on where we'd left off last time (same joke, even), and possibly best of all, getting to know Irene. I could talk about the chess marathon with my other brother-in-law, Barry, and the good times I had with him and my sister Ruth. I could wax philosophical about how I realized that I am no longer a Melburnian-in-exile, that for better or worse I am a Canberran; how I realized that some friends from the past must remain in the past now, others become closer friends than ever in the future. But it is after midnight, which means that it is now 23rd January - Shayne McCormack's birthday (happy birthday, Shayne) and the day I return to work (happy work, John).

I will mention that I returned to Canberra on the 8th with my mother (spending a happy night with Irene and Noel Kerr, who stayed here for a week or so), had a quiet time playing scrabble and cards with her until the Friday, when I drove her over to Yass to catch the train home; that Shayne came down from Sydney on the Saturday and stayed (by day with me, by night with Helen and Leigh Hyde) for a week - a good week of fun and work; that last Saturday I drove to Sydney, met Mrs McCormack at last, and stayed in the tranquil/stimulating atmosphere of Lyn and Bob Smith's place, dined with the coming Secret Mistress of Australian Fandom, Margaret Oliver, and all in all rounded out my holiday in the most happy and satisfying manner. It has been an excellent start to what I am confident will be a memorable year.

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1. The first of the two main points of the report is that the Commission has found that the Government of the United Kingdom has failed to provide adequate information to the Commission regarding the activities of the British intelligence services in the United States. This failure is particularly serious in the case of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), which has been found to have engaged in a wide range of activities in the United States, including the recruitment and training of agents, the establishment of a network of informants, and the conduct of operations aimed at the sabotage of the American war effort.

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[illegible][illegible]

1. The first of these is the fact that the Government has not yet decided whether it will accept the offer of the United States to purchase the rights in the patent for the atomic bomb. This is a very important question, and it is one which the Government should decide as soon as possible.

THE WISH

Well then! I now do plainly see
 This busy world and I shall ne'er agree.
 The very honey of all earthly joy
 Does of all meats the soonest cloy;
 And they, methinks, deserve my pity
 Who for it can endure the stings,
 The crowd and buzz and murmurings
 Of this great hive, the city.

Ah, yet, ere I descend to th' grave
 May I a small house and large garden have;
 And a few friends, and many books, both true,
 Both wise, and both delightful too!
 And since love ne'er will from me flee,
 A mistress moderately fair,
 And good as guardian angels are,
 Only beloved and loving me.

O fountains! when in you shall I
 Myself eased of unpeaceful thoughts espy?
 O fields! O woods! when, when shall I be made
 The happy tenant of your shade?
 Here's the spring-head of Pleasure's flood:
 Here's wealthy Nature's treasury,
 Where all the riches lie that she
 Has coined and stamped for good.

Pride and Ambition here
 Only in far-fetched metaphors appear;
 Here nought but winds can hurtful murmurs scatter,
 And nought but Echo flatter.
 The gods, when they descended, hither
 From heaven did always choose their way:
 And therefore we may boldly say
 That 'tis the way, too, thither.

How happy here should I
 And one dear She live, and embracing die!
 She who is all the world, and can exclude
 In deserts solitude.
 I should have then this only fear;
 Lest men, when they my pleasure see,
 Should hither throng to live like me,
 And make a city here.

- Abraham Cowley (1618-1667)

Cowley failed in metre as he failed in style through his weakness for too much of everything. What he actually accomplished was to make himself unreadable. (Concise Cambridge History of English Literature) ... he did not lose his interest in the wider world, and was directly responsible for the founding of the Royal Society. Even while I think it necessary to write about him, I can think of no pressing reason why anyone should read him. (Hopkins: English Poetry: a short history) The beauties of his poems are spoilt by false taste and affected wit. (Everyman's Encyclopædia) Who now reads Cowley? (Alexander Pope)

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

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O WHAT A TANGLED WEB WE WEAVE ...
even when we're not aware of practising anything in particular.

Today is 21st February 1973. Tomorrow is Chopin's birthday. He would have been 163 if he'd lived, poor bugger. I could endure the rest of my life without reading another word of Sir Walter Scott's, but I would hate to think of my remaining years being devoid of Chopin's music. It is sheer coincidence, of course, and of no moment at all, that tomorrow is Chopin's birthday; blind chance, you might say - the kind of thing I understand Larry Niven is good at writing about. The point of this little exercise in composing on stencil is to try to grasp, for myself, whether there hasn't been just a little too much coincidence or blind chance in my life during the past decade or so - and especially the past few days.

About a fortnight ago I got my tax refund, and proceeded to spend it rapidly on outstanding debts and such. By the time David Grigg landed here last Thursday I had blown the lot. He will testify that we didn't exactly dine magnificently during his stay, but we did have a lot of fun. On Friday I decided, not without some thought beforehand, that I really should have a stereo outfit and a few records, so I went out and mortgaged a bit more of my salary to the ANZ Banking Group. When I returned I said to David that I just had to get over to Roneo and pick up some paper, but that we might as well have some coffee meantime since there was easily half an hour to go before they closed for the week. So we sat and drank coffee and talked a bit, and a bloke knocked on the back door - a PMG messenger with a telegram for me. Ring solicitor, reverse charges. I don't have a phone, of course. So we drove over to Roneo at Fyshwick, and I made the call from there. The solicitor wanted me to come to Melbourne on Thursday. I said there was no hope of that. He said he would send me an affidavit to sign, which might be just as good though he doubted it. I said okay.

David set off for Melbourne a few minutes after I left for work on Monday morning. I wasn't sure whether I was supposed to be working at Parliament House or the Printing Office, so I went to Kingston PO and rang the Printing Office number. Yes, I was expected there, and everyone was talking about my letter in that morning's paper. So I went to the newsagency and bought the Canberra Times, and there was my letter, in

which I offer the Australian Public a brand-new national anthem. When I got to work I was told that my injudicious reference to the Minister for Health would probably constitute a breach of the Crimes Act, and that I should make the most of what would probably be my last day on the job.

Well, it hasn't turned out like that, so far. On Tuesday we finished our job on the Transport Advisory Council, and a little before mid-day were sent home, with instructions to stand by for emergencies and report for duty again next Monday. I was happy to comply. David and I had managed to stay up talking until about 4 am each morning while he was here, and I had some sleep to catch up. A little after 12 I was sound asleep. When I awoke about 9 there was another telegram under my door from the solicitor. It said I was to ring a local solicitor at 4 about the affidavit. Tough.

I rang him when I woke up today - about 2. He said he couldn't talk because he was running late for a funeral, but I was to be in his office at 3.15. Meantime I had received a further telegram, from Diane - instructing me to ring her (reverse charges). So I rang her after ringing the solicitor, and she said if that affidavit doesn't arrive before the case comes up you've had it chum - or words to that effect.

I saw the local solicitor, who is an awfully nice bloke with greying hair and all that - the kind of bloke you would instinctively trust - and he asked me to swear on the Bible that Diane's petition was correct in every detail, which I did, and then I signed the affidavit to that effect. I didn't feel like arguing that swearing on the Bible is un-Christian and, to non-Christians like myself, idiotic. Time was short.

I drove back to Kingston and went to buy a paper and some grog. In the newsagency I noticed Harry Harrison's BEST SF: 1971 and had a look at it. (I don't buy much sf these days, and I didn't buy this book, but I can't help looking at the stuff.) In his introduction Harry mentions the book JOHN W. CAMPBELL: AN AUSTRALIAN TRIBUTE, which I found quite interesting since I haven't finished printing that book yet, despite anything you might have heard or read to the contrary.

Harry's selection was also interesting in another respect. The first volume - the 1967 selection - included a story by Bert Chandler from ASFR 10. I had just returned from swearing on the Bible that everything Diane said in her petition was true, and in that petition is a statement to the effect that around the time I published Bert's story my efforts in the writing and publishing line were "financially and artistically fruitless". I expect lightning to strike me at any moment.

On the way out of the newsagent's I noticed the latest issue of Cleo - which is a kind of liberated ladies' magazine - and in this issue is a delightful and well thought out article by Anne Woodham (under the pseudonym "Stephanie Smith") about science fiction, in which she mentions Gillespie, Chandler, Binns, myself and other great and famous names in the field. I bought a copy, went into the supermarket for a flagon of rough red, and decided it was time I had another haircut. I mean, someone might want to interview me or something after all this great stuff I've had published lately in The Australian Author, The Canberra Times, Chunder's, Something Else and Girls' Own Fanzine, and after being mentioned in Cleo and the Supreme Court of Victoria and all, and one of my new-year resolutions was to try to look tidy. So I went round the corner to the barber's shop.

The barber, a young bloke of maybe 25 with very long hair, was relaxing in one of the chairs. "How would you like it, Sir?" I said as I walked up to him, and he grinned. Then he asked me how I would like it, and I said, well, I dunno, just pretend it was your hair and do what you think best, but I think it needs about two inches off at the back. He got started and I asked him if he would mind if I read this magazine while he was working on me, and he said not at all, and he asked what it was and I said Cleo, and he said it was a great magazine, and somehow the subject of science fiction came up and he asked me if I had read THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS. I admitted I hadn't, and he started telling me what it was about. I interrupted him and completed his

plot summary, and then I had to explain how come I knew what the book was about without having read it, and one thing led to another... and another... and another.

Some years ago there were reports of odd patches of scorched earth, such as might be made by a flying saucer landing, about sixty miles or so from Canberra. My barber and a few of his mates who are interested in this kind of thing went out to look at them. Since then they have compiled between them a thick dossier of every UFO sighting, every suggestion of paraphenomena and every hint about these unknown things they have found in all the world's literature. They check out the sightings, they contact the people with ESP and so on, they note what they have found in their reading, and they get together every so often to discuss all this. One of his friends, the barber said, was in the Navy, and he had a tape of an incredible transmission he had picked up on a ship's wireless. The ship had established that the transmission did not come from anywhere in the horizontal vicinity - it came from straight up. And it sounded like a number of unearthly beings, all speaking distinguishably the same language. His friend had been transferred to another posting interstate, and his tape was utterly illegal. The implication of this was that the Navy was worried about the whole affair and had dispersed the personnel present at the time.

I am sure you have read umpteen stories like that before, and so have I. I have even heard a couple from what you might call eye-witnesses. But it was rather croggling to come straight from that anti-ASFR petition, that reference in BEST SF '71 and that article in Cleo, into a discussion of that nature. I went home and hoped there would be no more coincidences or anything else out of the ordinary today.

I opened the Canberra Times and the flagon, and commenced reading the former and emptying the latter. On page 13 of today's Times, among the legal notices, is a report that one Robert Picton Greenish, 61, businessman, is involved in a hearing of 42 charges alleging fraud and stealing, to the tune of "about \$168,608". (I love that cautious "about".) Mr Greenish is a former ASFR subscriber. He is also the stockbroker mentioned by Cordwainer Smith in his Prologue to SPACE LORDS.

I didn't read any more of today's paper, just in case. I went to the Lucky Chinese Restaurant (celebrated in these pages on numerous occasions), and after I had been there for a few minutes the boss-man put a record on that I hadn't heard in that place before. I thought I had heard his complete collection, many times over, but I hadn't heard this record. It was Zorba's Dance and other Greek pop favourites, and there's nothing especially odd about that except that my favourite eating-place in Melbourne - the Cha Cha at Prahran - used to play this particular record over and over again. I have listened to it while dining with just about everyone in Melbourne fandom, with Diane, with Carolyn, with the un-named lady of recent Scythrops, with just about everyone I know in Melbourne.

Tonight, I just know it, I will have nightmares about a little green man in a judge's wig pointing at a stack of ASFRs and Scythrops and things and saying, "Did you or did you not publish this artistically and financially fruitless rubbish?" and in the background there will be Zorba's Dance and the sounds of extraterrestrial voices, and I will wake up screaming "Don't smite me, Lord! - I'll gafiate, I promise!"

Had a nice letter from George Turner today, too.

And a bill from Roneo.

Life goes on.

22nd February: Well, I didn't dream about Martians in legal drag after all; in fact, I slept pretty well. But when I got up I was sort of fidgety. I moped around all day, doing nothing of importance. Listened to Chopin's etudes, opus 10 and opus 25, and his concertos, and then some Gilbert & Sullivan and Frescobaldi and Elgar's cello concerto; opened the can of sausages and veg David left behind and indulged in the unaccustomed luxury of breakfast (well, I guess it's breakfast, even if it happens to be 2 pm); re-read the junk I wrote last night, realized I had spelt "affidavit" incorrectly throughout but couldn't be bothered changing it; read some poetry - Abraham Cowley (great stuff: must look out for some more), Dryden (None but the brave/None but the brave/None but the brave deserves the fair! Often wondered where that came from.) and Henry Vaughan (I saw Eternity the other night...); went up to the post office - no mail except a copy of "Teaching SF" from Jack Williamson, and a note from him expressing continued enthusiasm for Australia in 75 and asking if the Campbell book was ever published; bought a copy of the Melbourne Sun to look at the law notices (Divorce: Undefended, 15th Court, Mr Justice Norris, 10.30; Watson (mention); Shelton; Katsiouras; Bangsund; Thompson... and eleven others: lotsa people seem to be getting divorces these days: whatever happened to our once proud Christian nation? Labour gets into office and first thing we know people are watching dirty movies and getting divorced all over the place - just like bloody rabbits! Sad. Henry Vaughan, thou shouldst be living at this hour.); listened to some more music, tried to read a book but couldn't, tried to find the will to do some more work on JWC but couldn't, so sat about and chain-smoked.

The telegram arrived about 4.30:

YOU ARE NOW A NUMBER AND A FREE MAN

D

Even now she puzzles me. If that message was spontaneous, maybe something did rub off on her after all. Maybe she has been composing it for months. I won't insult her by asking, since it was rather neat however achieved. I felt like sending back a telegram asking Yes, but who is Number One? but decided to save a few cents and put them towards the bill when it comes.

In the last FAPA Dick Geis expressed interest in the details of my "ill-fated marriage", and in reply I expressed a lack of interest in supplying them. As some kind of compensation, Dick, there's the story of my divorce.

Now, what will I write about to fill this page and conclude this um issue? Ah yes... Also in the last FAPA was Terry Carr's latest volume of "Fanzines I Have Published" - which looked pretty impressive but hardly worth reading. So I will now do a list of things I have published (not all: just the main things) and it won't look anywhere near as impressive but you don't have to read it and I'll see you all next time round.

Australian Science Fiction Review nos. 1-20 (June 1966 - June 1969)
 Scythrop nos. 21-27 (December 1969 to date: no.28 in preparation)
 The Cosmic Dustbug nos. 1-7 (dates uncertain: I have none on file)
 The New Millennial Harbinger nos. 1-7 (October 1968 - July 1969)
 Crog: or: The Chronohotonthological Review nos. 1-10 (August 1969 - June 1971)
 Lodbrog nos. 1-6 (April 1970 - October 1972)
 Philosophical Gas nos. 1-19 (September 1970 to date)
 Australian Science Fiction Monthly nos. 1-4 (December 1970 - March 1971)
 Bundalohn Quarterly nos. 1-4 (May 1972 - October 1972)
 Convention programme books: 9th Australian, Melbourne Easter 1970; 10th Australian, Melbourne January 1971; Adventon I, Adelaide January 1972; 11th Australian, Sydney August 1972
 Australia in 75: The Facts (September 1971)
 John W. Campbell: an Australian Tribute (dated October 1972 and nearly completed)
 Syncon 72: A Cosmic Melodrama (in preparation)
 Plumbers Of The Cosmos: Essays & Reviews by George Turner (in preparation)
 ...and maybe thirty or forty other odd things - but the next is the one to watch for!

FAPA will be seeing Philosophical Gas nos. 14-19 in one slim volume, and since it seems a waste to use a completely blank sheet at the back (and vaguely unprofessional not to have a blank back cover), I will now speak briefly - possibly even briefly - of my new stereo outfit and record collection and such. As well as fulfilling the purpose mentioned, this will also be a kind of response to something Ted White published last year.

When I moved to Canberra I brought with me the Sony TC252 tape recorder, the Sony CF300 mono cassette recorder, about 35 records, about 40 tapes and a dozen cassettes. To this I have now added a Rotel RA 210 amplifier (small and pretty gutless, but it serves), a pair of Soundwood Apollo speakers (Australian-made, and probably the best speakers you can buy for \$39 each), a locally-built JH turntable (belt-driven, 12-pole hysteresis motor, rumble immeasurably small, wow and flutter 0.03%), Sansui arm, Shure M55 magnetic cartridge with elliptical stylus - and, for a few days, a Sanyo cassette deck. The latter I returned to the retailer. Sure, it was great having a stereo deck with a switch for ordinary and chrome tapes and a quasi-Dolby noise-eliminator, but the bloody thing didn't sound anywhere near as good as the mono cassette recorder I already had. The next step up in cassette decks would have cost about \$200 more, and I don't have that kind of money, so I exchanged the Sanyo for records and tapes. After a little thought this seemed logical anyway, since I need music rather than pretty machines. I now have about 80 records, about 60 tapes and about two dozen cassettes. Nineteen of the tapes are 1800' EMI low-noise, and blank; when I have finished transferring the worth-keeping stuff from the cassettes to tape I will have more than twenty usable cassettes.

I don't think I ever had more than about 500 records. It's not really worth blowing about \$260 on good stereo gear when you only have about 80 records, but there is method in my madness. I have joined the Canberra Recorded Music Society, which has a library of around 2500 records, and the object of my relatively expensive exercise is to provide myself with lots of tape and the best possible (without being stupid about it) means of recording the stuff I borrow - without damaging it. The Sansui/Shure pickup tracks nicely at 1.5 g, which shouldn't hurt any records I borrow, and both of the Sonys, while not spectacular, reproduce what they have recorded in a very satisfactory way indeed.

While I was about it I bought a rechargeable nickel-cadmium battery for the cassette recorder. This is said to last about five years - around 300 cycles from dead to recharged - and even if it's only half as good as that it will be cheaper than using ordinary batteries. I use the cassette recorder quite a lot whenever I go to Sydney or Melbourne, both for playing and recording, and most of this is done on battery. At home I keep it connected to the power-point, and apart from the odd recording, I use it mainly on radio. It's a very versatile machine: even picks up TV stations on the FM radio. (When we get FM in a few years it will be useless for these broadcasts, since we will be using a VHF band not used overseas, but I don't care much about that at present.)

The records are 100% classical (if you include G&S in that category), the tapes about 95% classical. The only popular music I have is about three hours of the Beatles, two hours of Simon & Garfunkel, two albums of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, the soundtrack of Li'l Abner, and some pieces by Sammy Davis, Charlie Parker and (*blush*) Brigitte Bardot. There are a few Goon Shows, far too much stuff recorded at conventions and in private conversation with fans - and that's about it. It would take over three weeks, non-stop, to listen to the lot, so I guess it's not exactly a small collection after all. And in a few months those blank tapes and cassettes will be filled, so there's roughly another four days or so.

The record collection at present consists very largely of Schubert, Chopin and Mahler. I didn't plan it that way. Before I sold the bulk of my collection about this time last year there was more Bach than anything else, and a fair swag of Stravinsky and Shostakovich, with Berlioz and Beethoven not far behind. Taking the tapes into account I probably still have more Bach than anything else, with Beethoven, Mahler and Schubert close behind. I am sadly short of Mozart and Haydn. Ah well: ends page and issue.

The following information was obtained from the records of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health Policy and Statistics, Division of Health Policy and Statistics, Bureau of Health Services Administration, Washington, D.C., dated 10/10/68.

1. The first step in the process of the investigation is the identification of the problem. This is done by the investigator who is responsible for the investigation. The investigator must identify the problem and the scope of the investigation. The investigator must also identify the objectives of the investigation and the methods to be used. The investigator must also identify the resources available for the investigation.

1. The first of the above mentioned points is that the Government of India has not yet decided whether it will accept the offer of the Government of the United Kingdom to purchase the rights of the Government of India in the Indian Air Force. The Government of India has not yet decided whether it will accept the offer of the Government of the United Kingdom to purchase the rights of the Government of India in the Indian Air Force.

[illegible]

1. The first of these is the fact that the United States has a large and growing population of people who are not citizens of the United States. This is a result of the large number of immigrants who come to the United States each year, and the fact that many of these immigrants do not become citizens. This is a problem because these people are not entitled to the same rights as citizens, and they are not subject to the same laws. This is a problem for the United States because it is a country of immigrants, and it is important that all people who live in the United States are treated equally.

1. The first step in the process of identifying a problem is to recognize that a problem exists. This is often done by comparing current performance with a desired state or goal. If there is a discrepancy, a problem is identified.