

IDLE CHATTER in the vaults...

By ERIC C. WILLIAMS

(From Novae Terrae Vol 3, No 4 - December 1938

SCENE: Editors Hanson, Temple, and Clarke examining correspondence over breakfast.

Hanson: (unfolding a gigantic sheet of printed paper) "Look at this - another form from the British Museum."

Clarke: "What do they want this time? The BIS Bulletin?"

Hanson: "No, Novae Terrae. Didn't you send it off with your blinking BIS Journal?"

Temple: "Pass the butter and shut up you squigs."

Clarke: "Of course I did. I just caught the post - you remember. That makes about four of those blithering things they've sent. God knows where they must put all the stuff they collect, and God knows what they want it for!"

Temple: "Are you squigs going to pass that butter...?"

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SCENE: The dim lit vaults of the British Museum. Two young men stand amidst towering stacks of papers and printed matter of all kinds. One is writing in a book, the other kneels on the floor in the dust and examines a small pile of magazines. Now and again he sneezes.

"Artishoooo! Lot 575,216."

"Slowly rotting atoms! This job is enough to send you rockets. Some more of this duplicated stuff."

"Name of production - let me see - N-O-V-A-E 'Terrae."

"Novae Terrae. What on earth does that mean?"

"New Earths, from the Latin. Duplicated production."

"Yes, I've got that down. What year?"

"1938, believe it or not."

"1938! Lord! how this duplicated stuff smells when it reaches its hundredth birthday!"

"No need to tell me. Nature of contents - um, this is a bit difficult to place; largely speculative, I should say."

"Well, that makes a bit of a change."

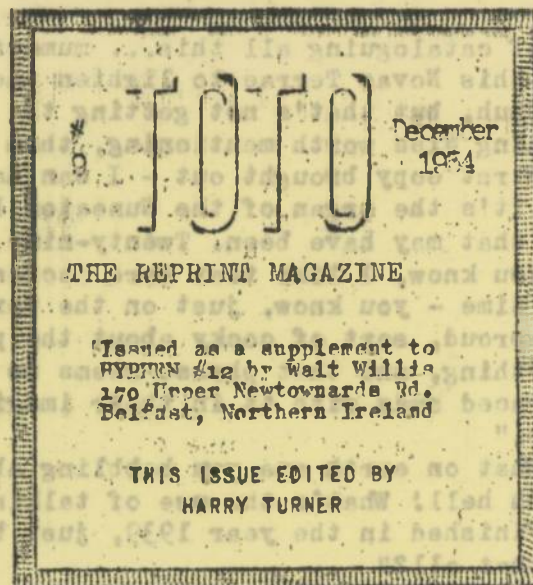
"Yes, seems to be concerned largely with speculative fiction published in other books and magazines."

"I suppose that brings it under the heading of a fan production?"

"Artishooo! I guess so. You know, Jol, when you consider that all these stacks and stacks of duplicated stuff stored away here for lord knows how long were all turned out on cranky old machines that dripped ink and tore the paper to shreds every so many turns, it makes you marvel at the patience and devotion these people must have had to go on churning it out month after month."

"And it makes you marvel that the British Museum troubled to collect it all and store it away in these vaults."

"Yes, that's true. Poor luck for us they did. And just our luck to cop this



job of cataloguing all this... mummified stuff. Thank God there were productions like this Novae Terrae to lighten the task now and again!"

"Uhuh, but that's not getting the job done. Give me the number of copies and anything else worth mentioning, then we'll get on to that stack of Church gossip."

"First copy brought out - I can hardly read it, terrible duplicating... '36. Says it's the organ of the Nuneaton Branch of the Science Fiction League, whatever that may have been. Twenty-nine issues."

"You know, I like that word 'science-fiction', it so describes the minds of that time - you know, just on the verge of scientific discovery, half-thrilled, half-proud, sort of cocky about the possibility of their ultimate conquest over everything, and that phrase seems to illustrate how they grabbed this science and raced away with it in their imaginations as if they had known it all their lives."

"What on earth are you babbling about?"

"Oh hell! What's the use of talking to you? Anything more to add?"

"Finished in the year 1939, just before the war."

"That all?"

"Changed editorship five times - that's significant. Gets rather snooty towards the last about politicians."

"Everything you read about that time does. Things must have been pretty bad in those days. Remember that fellow Wells, either he had indigestion or there was something in what he was saying."

"He was a diabetic living on insulin - might have had something to do with it."

"Most of those birds turn out brighter than the rest in the long run."

"You're a diabetic yourself aren't you?"

"How'd you guess?"

"By the polish on your boots. Now shut up and put this down, Novae Terrae - a privately produced magazine that preceded the era of freed imagination by about two generations - useful to students of the Metamorphosis Period. And now those Church gossips. Artishoooooooooooo! Lot 575,217."

The Prospect Before Us

or Pity The Poor Writer! By MARION F. EADIE

(From Zenith Vol 1 No 3 - December 1941)

"Perhaps you would care to see over one of our factories?" suggested the Man of the Future.

"No" I said. "No, I don't think so. We had a lot of factories in the century I come from. Couldn't I see - say, one of your great libraries?"

He looked puzzled for a moment, and then his face cleared.

"Ah, the Palace of Literature!" he said. "Certainly, by all means. You must see the Palace of Literature."

He led me thru the broad streets of Damopolis to a vast white building of stately design. Noble building, fit Palace of Literature! It seemed unfortunate that the facade bore such a striking resemblance to that of the boot factory across the way.

"We of the 21st century treat our writers much more humanely than you did in the barbarous times, if I may use the word, of a hundred years ago," said the Man of the Future.

I bowed my head and blushed as we entered the lofty building. During my visit

to the 21st century I had so often heard the words 'barbarous', 'dirty', and 'savage' applied to my own times that I could now see scarcely anything of value in the 20th century.

"This is where the writers of the State wander to meditate on the genius of the past," said my guide. We stood in a mighty hall covering several acres of ground, around whose walls were crowded the busts of famous writers of the past. I gazed in awe at the silent assembly.

"No longer must the writer struggle to earn his living by menial labour, or else live a parasite on society," said the Man of the Future. "Our State supports him, assures his future, and grants him a pension when he retires. Writers now have nothing to do but write, and they are counted valuable members of the State. If you follow me you will see some of our great men of letters at work."

We crossed the vast hall and passed thru a doorway into an extraordinary room. Rows and rows of desks filled it, and at each desk sat a man or woman writing busily. At either side of the desks was what looked like a letter-box, while the desks themselves were piled with reams of virgin paper.

"This is the Novel Room," explained the Futurian. "We prefer writers to use pen and ink - inspiration flows more freely. The box at the left is for spoiled sheets; the writers push in the sheets and they are instantly sucked away to be re-pulped. The box at the right communicates by pneumatic tube with the typing room, and writers push their finished chapters into those."



"It all seems very efficient," I ventured.

"We waste nothing," replied the Futurian. "The next rooms are the Short Story rooms. Come this way."

I walked with bated breath thru this room where at least five hundred novels were simultaneously being written, and we entered a smaller room, similarly ranked with desks. The walls here were painted dark red and decorated with crude irritating, jagged white lines. The atmosphere was curiously stuffy and smelled of incense.

"This is the room where weird and horror stories are written," explained the Man of the Future. "We have other rooms for love stories, detective stories, war stories, and so on. The atmosphere and decorations are specially arranged by our psychologists to stimulate the inspiration of the writers."

"And do you find that it helps?" I asked, a trifle breathlessly.

"Undoubtedly," he replied. "The State ensures ideal working conditions for every operator, however humble."

We passed thru the Short Story room and emerged into a corridor.

"None of our writers works more than six hours a day," said the Futurian. "For two hours before and after starting work they enjoy happy, healthy, noisy games, essential for relaxing the mind and ensuring physical fitness. The sports grounds are just outside."

Some draught must have caught me at that moment - yet how was it possible in a perfectly-designed building? - for I felt myself shuddering.

"The essayists and diarists are along the corridor to the left," proceeded the Futurian. "Then, of course, there are the historians, but they are in another wing. I think we should go up to the Poetry rooms - step into the lift, please."

We shot up and arrived in an airy corridor.

"These are the highest rooms," said my guide. "We find that elevation helps the poetic inspiration." As he spoke he opened a door and we passed into a long room littered with sofas and divans, which in their turn were littered with men

and women in various languid attitudes.

"Poets are different from other writers; they must have more stimulus," explained the Futurian. "In the mornings we usually have visual stimulus and in the afternoons aural stimulus, but today, as it happens, we are trying out a combination. Please take a seat."

I sat down uncomfortably on a sofa of the type which engulfs one completely and makes rising a somewhat embarrassing business. Immediately the whole of one wall seemed to fade, and on it appeared a convincing picture of a moonlit glade while somewhere a brass band began to bray out the first movement of the "Moonlight Sonata". Then a violin was wailing a gypsy song, and the scene had changed to a picture of a dancing girl. Five minutes later, to the swing of a rousing march, the wall was brilliant with old-fashioned military uniforms. From time to time a poet would rise and rush into an adjoining room. I felt tempted to follow them.

"Inspiration strikes them all of a sudden," whispered the Futurian. "Then they dash off and write whatever has come to them. The next room is sound-proof and there they can sit peacefully composing."

"Wonderful!" I said feebly.

We left the poets at work and descended to the next floor.

"I hope you are broad-minded?" asked my guide. "Considering the century you are from... But you must understand that the writer needs a fuller life than the ordinary citizen; he must even be allowed to indulge in what would be forbidden to others. It is all part of his trade. History shows us that the great geniuses of the past were all great lovers, and we have provided for that."

We entered another room. It was very hot and scented, and crammed with flowers. In rows of chairs sprawled women of all types, looking excessively bored.

"They also work only six hours a day," said my guide proudly.

We passed on.

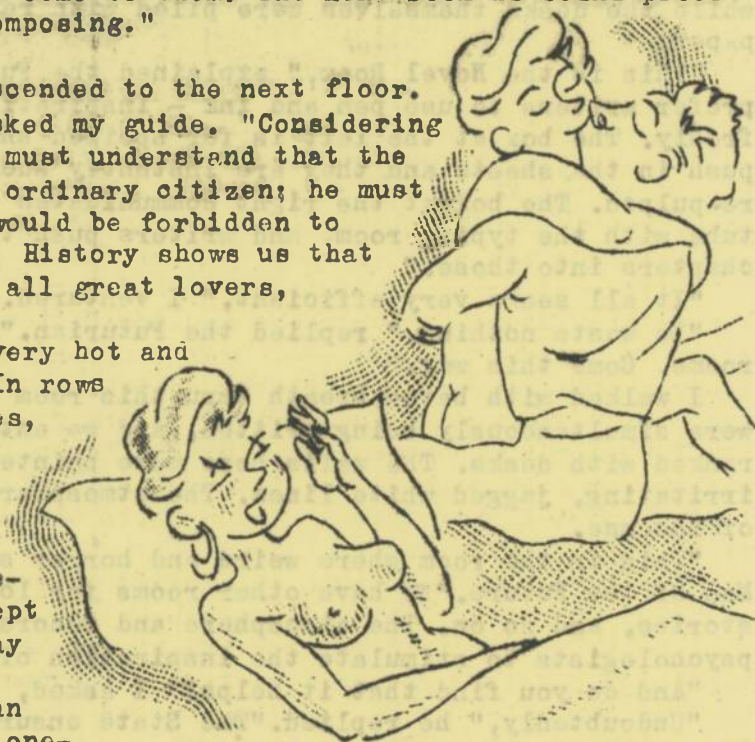
"Most of our writers are on piece-work," continued the Futurian, "except the poets. They have a months holiday per year, but in the case of the novelists, who often take longer than a year to complete a work, we allow one-twelfth of the period taken over the work. Thus a writer who works six years on a novel is allowed six months holiday at the end. But I'm glad to say that since our new competitive system was introduced there are very few of that sort in the Palace."

"He opened another door and an appalling reek gushed out. The place seemed to be a sort of public bar. Writers were drinking, sprawling on the floor, smoking, sitting at tables, and registering every sort of bohemianism.

"All this is necessary for their inspiration," said the Futurian. "When they have finished their work we counteract the effect with happy, healthy, noisy games. We haven't time to look in at the typing room, but I might explain that the mss, straight from the author's desk, are scanned by a photoelectric machine which turns out typed copies at the rate of 5000 words per second. These copies then go to the readers' room, which you are about to see."

"Then you do your own publishing?" I asked.

"The State is the sole publisher," he said. "We have eliminated wasteful



competition. Here we are."

The readers, rows on rows of them, sat at desks exactly as did the authors. Beyond the room we stood in we could see another precisely the same.

"Every ms passes thru the hands of three readers," said the Futurian. "The first corrects for grammar and spelling, the second for accuracy - and some of the poets turn out the most extraordinarily unscientific statements - and the third for morality and ideology. The book is then ready for printing. But first of all the ms as passed by the three readers goes back to the copy room, where six copies are made. I'll take you down to the basement where the printing presses are - just this way."

We left the readers feverishly blue-pencilling mss and went down in the lift.

"Two of the copies come down here," continued my guide. "One goes to the monotype room, where the machine automatically scans it and sets up the type. The other goes to the art room where the book jackets are drawn. A third copy goes across to the illustrators in a separate building, just behind the sports pavilion you may have seen as we came in, where every book is provided with six full-page illustrations in black-and-white and a coloured frontispiece. The other three copies go to the critics, who write their reviews and submit them to the press. There's nothing like having different opinions, is there?"

"No, it's a great thing," I muttered.

"The three reviews are then combined, cut down by sixty per cent, and published in the State newspaper," said the Futurian. "This is the typesetting room, but it won't interest you very much. The book-jackets are done next door."

Next door was another room full of desks, each stacked with coloured paper.

"Different wrappers distinguish different types of books," explained the Man of the Future. "Red covers are for National Books - State Book Club choices. Every worker must read these. Orange covers are recommended and may be read if desired. Our workers have plenty of leisure for reading; none of them works more than six hours a day. These green covers you see are for books on philosophy, and the pale blue ones are children's books. The artists superimpose a suitable design for each book - very interesting work."

We walked slowly down the room while the workers raised their heads to look at us in bored fashion.

"State Book Club choices are issued to every worker as they are published, and periodic exams are held to ensure that the books are read and understood. As soon as they have read their books the workers return them to the library to be repulped, and thus we avoid waste and accumulation of litter." The Futurian held open a door as he spoke, and we emerged into a long narrow lobby lined with time-clocks.

As we passed down it a door at the top opened and a stream of authors emerged. It was exactly eighteen hours, and each punched his time as he passed out. The last of them was disappearing as the first of a new lot appeared to check in for the next shift.

"They work in four six-hour shifts," said the guide. "Some authors prefer to work in the morning; others thru the night, and still others in the evening. We suit all tastes. But none of them has to work more than six hours a day."

The door by which the new shift had entered led us back to the hall of the busts. As I was about to step out I noticed a crowd of workmen suspending an enormous red and white banner across the hall. Curious, I stepped forward, and at the same moment the Futurian plucked me back.

"Perhaps we'd better go out by one of the side doors," he suggested. "It won't be so crowded."

"I'd like to go this way again," I persisted, more because I saw how very much he didn't wish me to, than because of any real desire. We walked down the hall

until I could see what was written on the side of the banner facing the outer door. In large white letters on a red ground appeared the words:

Y A H ! Y O U B I G S T I F F S !

Last week the Palace of Literature at Yopolis turned out

56,780,000,000,001 words.

The Palace of Literature at Damopolis turned out

only 55,345,000,000,000 words !

GET A MOVE ON, COMRADES !

A glance at my Futurian showed that his head was bowed in shame and his cheeks were scarlet even as mine had been on entering this noble building. Full circle! I was content.

Condensed from **Approach to Life** by R O N H O L M E S
(Gemini No. 7 - May 1945)

... in (fandom) we have our chance to express ourselves, to create, write, print, edit, criticise and generally expand our ego. We take this opportunity too, expressing ourselves first in that emotional manner common to young fans - dogmatic, intolerant, but expressive.

Later this stage is passed, and we settle down, to follow that trend which interests us most. We begin to edit, illustrate, review, and generally be creative. With new-found conceptions and knowledge we turn our energies into constructive channels and, with fewer inhibitions to hold us back, concentrate upon expressing ourselves in a way which produces real happiness.

I well remember my first writings, the result of a desire to show I existed, a desire to be acknowledged. Later I changed: fandom's importance was still social, but instead of the urge for self-display I wanted to swap ideas and meet people... the emotional element had gone. If I wrote something, I did it to benefit myself, not to be printed.

So we can divide our fanning into three periods, the first of adjustment, then the creative period, and finally a stage where science-fiction comes very little into the picture, and one's ties are very largely social. It is at this stage that, phoenix-like, something arises from the ashes of fandom, in the form of a rooted interest in sociology, mythology, art, psychology, book-collecting, etc. In this new stage we really cease to be fans, but still retain our old social contacts - our friends and friendly-enemies. We are a good crowd because we have no emotional connections with each other and can give and accept criticism in a fairly impartial way.

I think, then, that we must accept fanning as a stage in our lives: the release of pent-up energy into channels which make us happy. We are a community of hobbyists; only, unlike most communities of this type, our hobby embraces such a wide field that we are less dependent than most upon the outside world.

... Fanning cannot be advanced or even set upon certain paths - to call on fans to 'pull together' is folly... Fanning is liberty of expression... Our desire to change it is basically a desire to have other people enjoy themselves in the way we do. This desire is either selfishness or an inability to see the true principles behind it all. So let us no longer ask fans to 'organise' - let us get on with expressing ourselves while we can, lest this desire to chain down other people's mode of expression loses us our own.
