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Lynette Russell (Editor), *A Trip to the Dominions: The Scientific Event that Changed Australia*

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Lynette Russell (Editor), *A Trip to the Dominions: The Scientific Event that Changed Australia* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2021), 153pp. A$29.95. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-9224-6400-2.

Indigenous peoples in Australia are often said to be the most researched peoples in the world. While hard to measure, this statement points clearly to discontent with the often extractive and exploitative research practices Indigenous people face, and marks a determination to refuse such practices in future encounters. The relationship between scientific research and Indigenous peoples remains, then, a tense and important subject.

This collection of essays dealing with the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) and centring on their 1914 annual conference, held around Australia, provides a series of insights into this relationship. As Lynette Russell notes in her introduction, Aboriginal people were central, and sometimes sensational, objects of discussion at the various BAAS meetings, as well as attractions on many of the excursions organised for the research and interest of delegates. But they were also 'out of sight and out of mind' (p. 22), absent as active and knowledgeable participants in the scientific discussions.

The experience of Henry Balfour, in 1914 a member of the BAAS anthropology section, is exemplary. In his careful and sophisticated engagement with Balfour's diary, Christopher Morton describes Balfour's first encounter with Aboriginal people. En route to a mission near Guildford in Western Australia, Balfour succeeded only in bogging the car in the mud. His touring party—himself, the Dean of Perth, and a policeman—was forced to walk to the mission to request help from a group of Aboriginal men, and 'much merriment resulted' when these men were flung into the mud themselves (p. 76). This was one of several such encounters: in Morton's telling, Balfour was awkward and often baffled when facing his ostensible research subjects in an unstructured situation. Three days later, Balfour confidently delivered an address on one of his specialties: 'primitive' fire-making. Setting these two experiences in relation illuminates a form of imperial self-fashioning that depended ironically and ambivalently on the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of Aboriginal people.

A Trip to the Dominions takes us to several such moments of encounter, shedding light on relationships between metropolitan concerns, settler colonialism, scientific imperatives, and Indigenous situations. Approaching the BAAS conference from multiple perspectives, the various chapters trace the ambivalence that structured these relationships. They take, in turn, a reunion, a diary, a literary memoir, and a survey as their subjects, each leading the reader to a different sense of what the BAAS conference was and how it produced knowledge in relation.

Ian McNiven describes Alfred Haddon's post-BAAS visit with his 'old friend' Maino, in Iama in the Torres Strait (p. 43). Alfred's daughter Kathleen Haddon's account of their meeting conveys some of its tenderness, describing Maino's delight at seeing Alfred, their hugging and personal conversation. This sits uneasily alongside Haddon's colder description of the loss of Aboriginal knowledge some two weeks earlier when Haddon had written of the 'death' of 'native tribes' whose value lay not in their humanity in and for themselves but in the fact that they 'represent stages in the evolution of our ancestors' (p. 42).

Maino took Haddon to a site he had found, of which he knew little but commented that it may belong to two culture heroes. Haddon read the site as one of stone-grinding and lamented Maino's apparent ignorance, placing Maino in a liminal

position as both knowledge-holder and signifier of the absence of knowledge: he could show Haddon the site, but not its meaning. For Haddon—inaccurately, as McNiven shows us—this signified a loss caused by colonisation, a rupture with past knowledge that marks present people, like Maino, as no longer knowledgeable about their own practices and those of their relatively recent forebears. It was already 'too late' for the effective practice of salvage ethnography.

Salvage and the problem of lateness was also a theme in Elsie Masson's *Untamed Territory*, which Jane Lydon reads compellingly as popularising scientific knowledge, writing on northern Aboriginal people for a public for whom the BAAS meetings were inaccessible. For Lydon, Masson's often contradictory and unstable text—sharing these characteristics with reports and other texts authored by Baldwin Spencer—provides a lament for the passing of Aboriginal ways of living and knowing, alongside an awareness of and concern for coherent Aboriginal communities. As Leigh Boucher goes on to show, salvage ethnography had long been set out as anthropological method in the *Notes and Queries* sent to collectors of knowledge about Indigenous peoples around the empire. The *Notes and Queries* had emerged in a context of imperial fantasies of exclusive settler possession of Indigenous Country, and concern for the effects of that possession on those Indigenous people. It then provided a basis for gathering the knowledge that would provide a warrant for further such practices, albeit in new forms.

A Trip to the Dominions is methodologically generative, engaging with and contextualising a range of texts, framing them as assemblage, tracing their diffusion and re-articulation, and pluralising genres of scientific knowledge. In exploring historical relationships between scientific research and Indigenous peoples by focusing on a single, yet important, moment in time—a moment that brings together imperial, settler colonial, and Indigenous situations—it elucidates themes of ongoing concern.

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