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Redd Boggs'  
**SPIROCHETE**

IN THE HOLE

I have been down in the Hole. If I am blinking like a bear newly wakened from winter's sleep it is because I have been immured so long. I have been in the cellar of the Bancroft library. With good reason they call it the Dungeon.

The Bancroft, which is housed in an annex of the main University of California library, is an extensive collection of western Americana and Californiana source materials based on the library of Hubert Howe Bancroft (1832-1918), San Francisco bookseller and historian. (Amusingly enough, a nearby thoroughfare, Bancroft way, which borders the southern edge of the UC Berkeley campus, is named for the other historian named Bancroft: George Bancroft, 1800-1891.) The Bancroft's stacks contain treasures aplenty, and lots of rubbish as well, I suppose. Its cellar is as darksome a place as the locale of an Edgar Allan Poe story, only I don't think Mr Poe would quite comprehend my activity down there, or approve of it, either. I wasn't ghoulishly digging in a grave, but only twirling a little crank. I wasn't goggling at a ghost, but only staring intently at a flickering, uncertain picture. In a word (or three or four) I was studying microfilms.

I don't approve of this activity any more than Poe might. I know that microfilms are useful in libraries to conserve space and to preserve crumbling brown old newspapers which are falling to tatters under the onslaught of time and rough handling. But I hate microfilms, and look forward to a long session of peering at them much as I might look forward to a case of scurvy or to reading the authorized biography of Forrest J Ackerman.

What I was examining down there in the cellar -- or maybe a sub-cellar: there were so many stairs leading down and down into the darkness that I may have lost track -- were microfilms of old newspapers. Although I don't often read today's newspapers, I was eagerly scanning the news, down in the Dungeon, of one hundred and more years ago. Some of the newspapers from the era of 1865-75 I perused in the microfilm viewer were the Daily Alta California, the Evening Bulletin, the Pacific Appeal ("for people of color"), the Dramatic Chronicle, and others.

Northern California's leading newspaper, the San Francisco Chronicle, began its existence in 1865 as the Dramatic Chronicle. At the start it was an advertising sheet for a local theater, Worrell's Olympic. It published some other news, but page one of each issue was devoted mainly to an ad for the current program of the theater.

Looking back from 1983, I think the most fascinating attraction at Worrell's Olympic in those days must have been a farce called "Trips to

the Moon from San Francisco in 1965," which ran for six days in March 1865. The cast included four "Lunarians" (all female) and the star was an actress named Fanny Brown. Whoever wrote this bit of lightweight science fiction wasn't too bad a prophet, after all, for the first trip to the moon took place in 104 years, if not exactly in 100.

The Dramatic Chronicle of Saturday, 15 April 1865, published the first report, received by transcontinental telegraph, of Lincoln's assassination. (The headline first misspelled it "assination.") But aside from such items of intrinsic interest and various pieces by Mark Twain, including his letters from the Holy Land, later rewritten and reprinted as The Innocents Abroad, the most interesting item I found in these microfilmed old newspapers was an ad for the Thunderbolt saloon. It was a well known bistro of the day, mentioned by Mark Twain in one or two of his newspaper sketches. A fixture of the Barbary Coast, at 938 Kearny street, it must have disappeared even before the earthquake and fire of 1906.

The "cheap" end of Kearny, where the porn theaters and girlie shows elbow the Chinese restaurants, is still a suitable neighborhood for the Thunderbolt. Across the street are the Mandarin Delight, Kong's, the Yee Yeun, and the Yenching restaurants, the Club Paradise ("dancing nightly"), an upstairs hotel, the St Paul, and the Silkway Travel and Trading company. But now in 1983, on the "even" side of the street, where the Thunderbolt once stood, there is only one structure, an old-fashioned seven-storey building at 916. Wim's Hamburgers occupies the ground floor. But 938 Kearny would be about a dozen feet from the curb out into the Kearny-Columbus avenue intersection.

My dictionary defines "saloon" as "a room or establishment in which alcoholic beverages are sold and consumed," but in the 1860s obviously they followed a much broader definition of the term. There is an ad in the Dramatic Chronicle for a place called Taylor's Restaurant and Ice Cream Saloon, and from its own ad it is clear that the Thunderbolt did not consider "alcoholic beverages" its only attraction.

The Thunderbolt's ad was unusual even for the free and easy days of the frontier. It consisted of a verse reprinted from day to day. We can only wonder who the anonymous bard was who wrote such doggerel for a living (or the price of a few drinks) in San Francisco when under different circumstances he might have been writing imperishable poetry for the Brahmins of Boston and the academicians of the future.

Since it amuses me to reprint some of the verses from that Thunderbolt ad, perhaps the man was writing for posterity after all, even in San Francisco. Here are his lines, back in print after 118 years:

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Haste away, boys, do not tarry,  
Go and see bold Dick and Harry,  
Take a drink and hear a tune  
At the Thunderbolt saloon.

Tall Rosa, Little Rosa,  
Captivates each man who knows her,  
Pauline, Emma, Mary Anne,  
Turn the brain of every man.

Wine and women here please all,  
Give the Thunderbolt a call,  
Each night all the "gay boys" meet  
At 9-3-8 on Kearny street.

I'm not sure whether "bold Dick and Harry" has symbolic overtones or not, but obviously "gay" has undergone a slight change in definition since 1865. But it's back in print at last -- the Thunderbolt ad written by an unknown hack more than a century ago, reprinted for the modern world and a world audience as if it were rediscovered poetry by Shakespeare or Colley Cibber.

#### HERE IN THE TWILIGHT

Yesterday morning when I went out to the car to drive to the post office I saw the man from next door whirling up and down the street, describing long and erratic figure 8s on his son's small size bicycle. I think he was test-driving the contraption after repairing it of some minor malfunction. His wife was standing on the front porch, watching him carefully, perhaps worried that he would fall and break his neck.

After exchanging greetings with her, I stood alongside the porch for a moment contemplating the oversize rider on the undersize bike. "You know," I said to her suddenly, surprising myself, "I never learned how to ride a bike. When I was a kid my dad thought that bikes were too dangerous to ride on the street and he wouldn't buy me one. I never did learn to ride one."

She expressed mild amaze, but her attention was still centered on her husband's antic gyrations along the street, and I bade her goodby and drove away. "Now WHY in the world did I confess such a thing?" I asked myself as I motored toward the post office.

There was no ready answer. The shameful secret had been perfectly safe in my bosom. Nobody had forced me to reveal it, nobody asked me, nobody cared. The reason I volunteered the information must be that I have reached the age at last when I can quite casually reveal things about myself without a blush even when they might seem to tarnish my Image. The time for saving face, for preserving a false modesty, is long past. One discovers, here in the twilight, the vanity of a defensive posture against the world. One even conceives a lust to lay bare the brave foolishnesses of the human heart. Who cares what the world thinks? Kick away the ladder you have climbed up on, and be damned to it. You are not going to descend that way. One will be posthumous soon enough. Write and speak, if you wish, as though you are communicating privily from the grave. Let it all hang out!

So ran the tenor of my thoughts. It must be time now, I decided, to reveal other dreadful secrets. Maybe it's time to tell an International Audience, in FAPA, that.... Well, what could I tell them that would send a shock wave, a wind shear of wild surprise, sweeping over the world? One's secrets, after all, are small and grimy. As I found out from the reaction of the woman next door, nobody is really much interested. Well, I muttered with a feeling of sudden pleasure, I could tell everybody the truth at last about Finnegans Wake and me!

I will tell everybody that the book has been on my shelves for more than 20 years, yet I have never read it. That's the honest truth. I've paged through it to extract a few quotations now and then, but I know that I will never be able to force myself to read it. I would sooner read Religio Medici or The Anatomy of Melancholy, two other books on my shelves unread. About all I can read of Finnegans Wake are the closing and the opening passages: "A way a lone a last a loved a long the" and "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs." There's crazy stuff in the book, but I find crazier things on the tape of my Record-a-Call from time to time, and the latter also has messages. I don't think Finnegans Wake has a message.

Of course nobody else ever read the book cover to cover, either, except possibly Campbell and Robinson. Not even A Shorter Finnegans Wake, edited by Anthony Burgess. James Joyce isn't taken as seriously any more as he was in the days of B. W. Huebsch, but who else ever admitted to owning the book but never managing to read it?

I am sure that this revelation about myself will be so startling that it will be the talk of FAPA for the next five years. It can hardly fail to be. This is a real triumph to pull off in an organization where your ambitious little fapazine spins away in a long parabola through empty space, unremarked by everyone, claiming less attention than my bicycle revelation from the woman next door.

With this happy prospect before me, I couldn't wait to speed back home and write this little article.

DO I WAKE OR DREAM?

I went into the Berkeley public library to check on the authors of A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake and the editor of A Shorter Finnegans Wake, whose names I couldn't remember when I started to write the above article. As I walked into the lobby I saw an attractive young woman consulting the card catalog. I could not help noticing the front of her neatly fitted T-shirt across which in large script was written, "Finnegan's Wake." What a remarkable coincidence, I thought, pausing in mid-stride. Balanced on one foot, I studied the matter a long while, scanning carefully the message spread across two mounds and a valley till finally I realized that it did not provide the information I was seeking. "Finnegan's Wake," the one with an apostrophe, turns out to be a cocktail lounge at 4054 24th street, San Francisco.

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The passive voice is never used by me.  
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