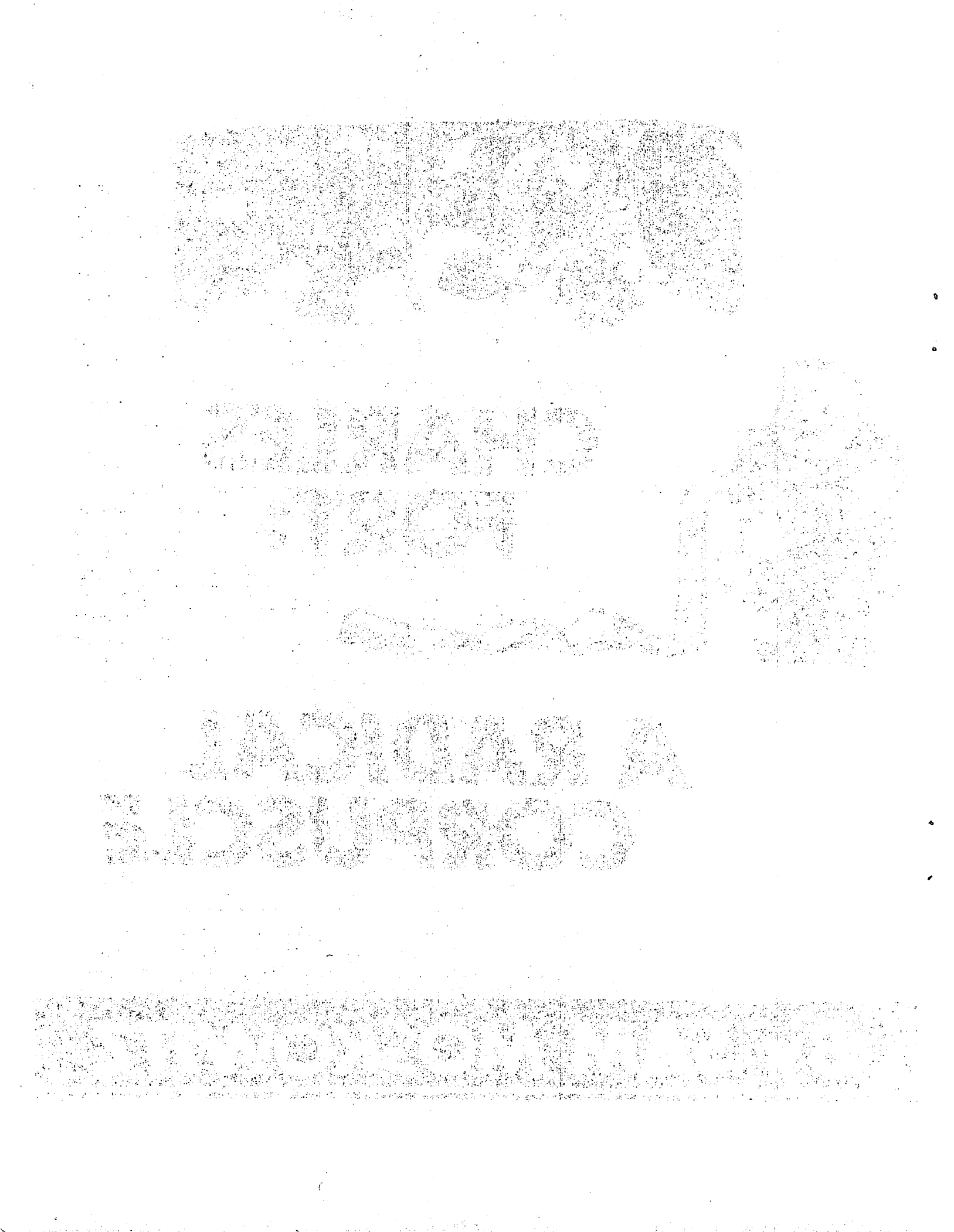
CHARLES FORT:

A RADICAL CORPUSCLE

By SAM MOSKOWITZ



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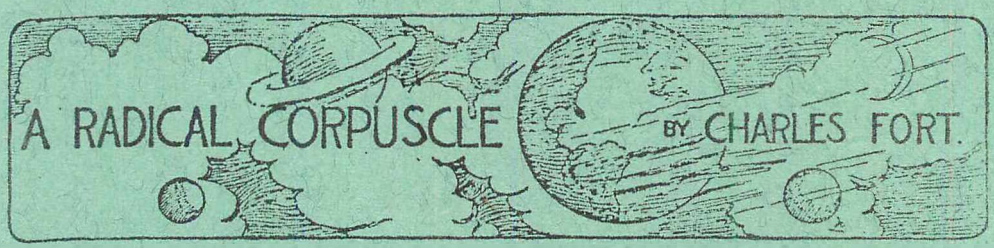

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INTRODUCTION

My book, Strange Horizons: The Spectrum of Science Fiction (Scribners, 1976), contains my most advanced work to date on Charles Fort, in a chapter titled, Lo! The Poor Forteans. Initially, an article by me bearing that title appeared in AMAZING STORIES for June, 1965. Since that time Damon Knight has produced a book titled Charles Fort, Prophet of the Unexplained (Doubleday, 1970) in which, through access to an old diary and some papers of Fort, he provides valuable information and sheds new light on the subject. Moving into areas that he did not cover, I researched a considerable quantity of additional material which helped to put Fort into perspective, particularly as to how he related to the science fiction world, and this material I put into a long expansion of my original AMAZING STORIES article. When it came time to collect essays for a book, it was found desirable to trim the manuscript, and one of the segments that could be deleted in a unified chunk was nearly 5,000 words of description and analysis of the short stories of Charles Fort. Only a few of these had ever been described at any time.

Of all the short stories, only one could be accepted as a bonafide fantasy or science fiction work, and that one is A Radical Corpuscle, whose only appearance was in WATSON'S MAGAZINE for March, 1906. That one is included in this publication along with my essay. Three of Fort's short stories in SMITH'S MAGAZINE, Glencliff's Mysterious Burglar (March, 1906), Fryhuysen's Colony (May, 1906) and In a Newspaper Office (July, 1906), carried three illustrations each by a cartoonist who would become internationally famous as the creator of that classic comic strip, Krazy Kat. That cartoonist was George Herriman. The style of those drawings is so identifiable, so typical, as to instantly relate to their creator. They are included here as a bonus.

Sam Moskowitz

August, 1976

THE SHORT STORIES

OF CHARLES FORT

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

The influence of the books of Charles Fort on the plot ideas of science fiction has been so pervasive that his works have remained in print and his importance in this regard is generally recognized. It can honestly be said that Fort has been far more successful as an inspiration for fiction than in uncovering any flaws in known science.

While his one published "novel," The Outcast Manufacturers, has been covered by myself and others, literally nothing has been done on his published short stories. After all, it should never be forgotten that while Fort started out as a newspaper man, it was his intention to attempt to create a reputation for his writing. His fame as a collector of "inexplicable" events came about almost as an inadvertancy, and gradually grew out of his library research for filler material to sell to newspapers and magazines.

Writing sales were early made by him, but they were of the most humble type. Jokes and anecdotes were sold to the comic supplement of The New York Sunday Journal, tongue-in-cheek fillers to The New York Herald, an occasional quip to Judge; all of these bringing in from one to ten dollars apiece and usually published anonymously.

There were periods when his wife, as well as he himself, were seriously ill, and when everything that could be pawned and sold went to put food on the table. Fort's greatest ambition was to sell fiction, but no one seemed to be buying any.

Fort made few friends in his lifetime, but those he did make proved to be influential. The most important was Theodore Dreiser, whom he was reputed to have first met as a newspaperman in the nineties. Dreiser had written Sister Carrie, which was a shockingly outspoken novel for its day, with daring sexual implications. In method he had departed from some of the Victorian affectations then prevalent in popular fiction. The initial unenthusiastic response to the first edition issued by Doubleday had deeply embittered him.

The melancholy and complex man who had authored Sister Carrie had been a contributor to AINSLEE'S since 1898, a magazine that was Street & Smith's first attempt to leave the dime novel field and compete with popular general magazines like COSMOPOLITAN, MUNSEY'S and McCLURE'S. He had made a friend of

Richard Duffy, the magazine's editor, who helped him secure a position at Street & Smith editing dime novels.

One of the most influential men at Street & Smith was Charles Agnew MacLean, editor of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, which was then challenging THE ARGOSY for circulation leadership in the all-fiction adventure pulp magazine field. MacLean was much impressed by Dreiser, even using some of his poetry in THE POPULAR MAGAZINE. MacLean bought back the plates for Sister Carrie from Doubleday, paying $500, and planned to publish the book with Dreiser. When Street & Smith decided to publish an all-fiction pulp magazine aimed at women, to be titled SMITH'S, MacLean recommended Dreiser as editor.

It was at SMITH'S that Charles Fort approached Dreiser with his short stories, probably because he had known him from his former newspaper days.

Dreiser, who would popularize the vogue of naturalism in fiction, became excited when he found Charles Fort's techniques far ahead of his time in composing slice-of-life vignettes, faithfully realistic interpretations of life in New York, all presented in an avant garde stylistic method. Afraid to initially use him in SMITH'S, which still had to establish itself as a woman's magazine, he introduced him to Charles Agnew MacLean with such an enthusiastic build-up that four of Fort's offbeat stories were accepted for use in THE POPULAR MAGAZINE.

He did not stop there. Theodore Dreiser's brother, Paul, had changed his last name to Dresser and was building a reputation as an actor and a song writer. (He is best remembered for My Gal Sal and On the Banks of the Wabash.) Dresser had collaborated with Robert H. Davis, the fiction editor of the Munsey magazines, including THE ARGOSY, on a play titled Boomerang. Dreiser sent Fort over to Davis, who also bought several of his stories.

When Richard Duffy left Street & Smith's in 1905, because they wouldn't give him an interest in AINSLEE'S, he took a job as managing editor of TOM WATSON'S MAGAZINE, "The Magazine With a Purpose Back of It," a monthly, printed on book paper, featuring serious articles on international and national affairs, political cartoons, as well as fiction. Dreiser did such a good selling job on Duffy that seven issues in 1906 ran a short story by Fort, and most of them were his works of stark realism and avant garde writing. Arthur Sullivan Hoffman, later to become the editor of ADVENTURE, was then assistant editor of TOM WATSON'S MAGAZINE.

For SMITH'S magazine, Dreiser got Fort to write the more sentimental type of tale that would appeal to women readership. Dreiser's editorship on SMITH'S had been a real success, with circulation up to 125,000 after only two years. Among the publishers who noted this was Benjamin B. Hampton, who had come into control of BROADWAY MAGAZINE, which had sunk to a low of 12,000 circulation with its cheap, tawdry, "sexy" appeal. Offered $40 a week to revive the publication, Dreiser jumped at the chance, and Charles Fort began appearing in BROADWAY MAGAZINE as well as the others.

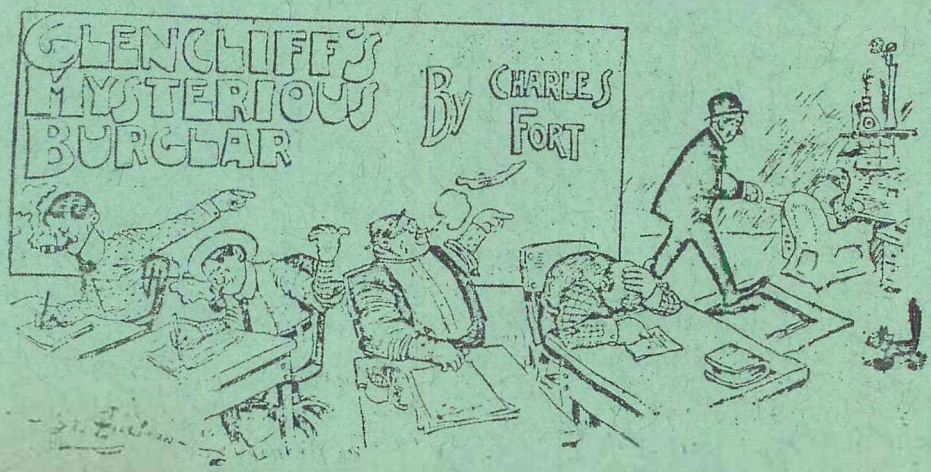
Only about two dozen Charles Fort short stories with place of publication have been so far established; 22 of them appeared in an 18-month period in magazines

dated June, 1905, to February, 1907. The majority of those stories have never previously been examined for elements that might have provided the genesis of the later non-fiction works that were to create his reputation, or for a basic appraisal of his early writing skills.

His first appearance in THE POPULAR MAGAZINE was With the Assistance of Fryhuysen (June, 1905). It was 2,800 words long, and in the introductory blurb Charles Agnew MacLean stated: "The author, Mr. Charles Fort, is a recent addition to 'The Popular Magazine's' staff of humorous writers." The story was drawn from Fort's experience on The Brooklyn World, and offers an insight into the operating attitudes of the lower echelon of reporters on a city newspaper. These included their coverage of amateur plays; listing the names of people as "also present" at important social functions, even though they were never there, to enhance their status; the technique of 'faking' a story of events without anyone ever being present; fluffing off assignments in favor of the nearest pub, and the pretense of knowing everything to the point where an old-timer would never admit that he was unfamiliar with a fictitious celebrity. The story is a slice of life; there is no plot, nothing happens, and while the fictional procedure was far ahead of its time, the literary handling was second rate.

The Marooned Campers, a short of about 3,000 words, appeared in the August, 1905 number, and relates the adventures of a group of young men from the city who locate an island on a lake in upper New York State and begin their vacation by camping out on it. They are having a glorious time until they attempt to leave, and then they find that farmers with shotguns will not let them row ashore. Finally, when a party makes it to the bank at night and overpowers one of the farmers, they find that the island had recently been used as an isolation camp for smallpox cases, accounting for the lack of willingness of the 'natives" to consort with them. There is humor, there is an insight into vacation psychology, but there is very little good writing or willing-suspension-of-disbelief present.

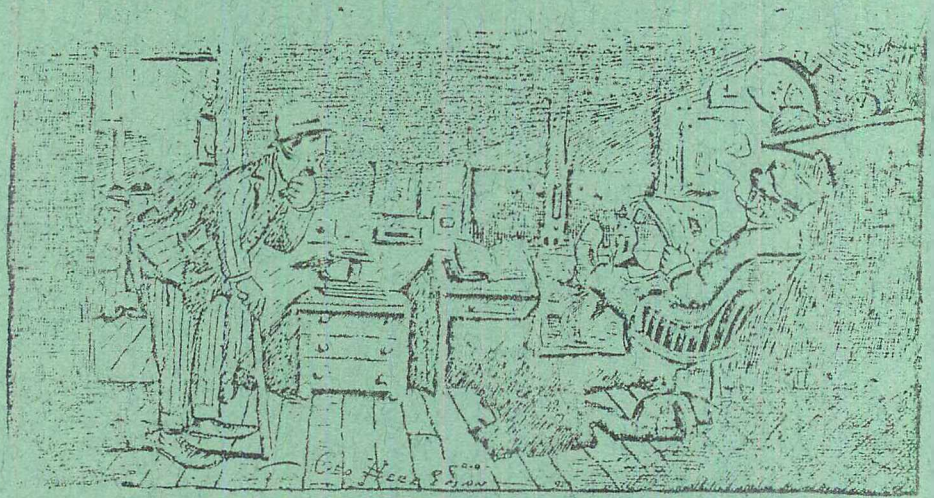
Vacationing was again the theme of Fort's next story, Twenty Campers, in the September, 1905, issue, in which a physical culturist, failing to attract any interest



for his outdoor spot called Camp Mulligan, 20 miles from the city, changes the name to Lake Longuelia, "nestling in the Adirondacks," asserts it is 200 miles away, and intrigues 20 middle-aged and older businessmen from the city to accept his personal transportation to the location. While there, the men gradually regain some of the sense-of-wonder of their youth, and a few find old physical skills have remained with them. The surroundings change them, and one man who was going to force another to remove a building that sagged one inch onto his property decides in the new atmosphere to forget the matter. The intent to probe into the psyche of the city dwellers was commendable, but the execution was poor.

Fort's final story for THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, in the December, 1905, issue, I Meddled, returned for a brief 1,600 words to his Brooklyn newspaper. While reviewing amateur plays, a young reporter is enamored of the actress daughter of a businessman. The excellent reviews he gives her do not require the two- and three-cent cigars that are offered him for bribes. Finally the girl disappears from home, and the father pledges the reporter not to report a word of it in the newspaper. To accomplish this, the reporter has the story called into every newspaper and attributed to the borough's most unreliable informant. None of them print it. When the girl returns, she is furious at her young reporter, because she was counting on the publicity of her disappearance to enhance her acting "career." Inept is the best description possible for the story.

Charles Fort's introduction to the readers of THE ARGOSY, the nation's leading all-fiction magazine at that time, was a 1,000-word short titled Jed's Big Scheme, published in the May, 1905, issue. When the town's ne'er-do-well, Jed Doublebee,



"Hello!" said the station agent. "You didn't sit in a draught, did you?"

begins turning up at local stores with $500 bills, the whole town takes notice. A pig running through town with an iron mask on its face arouses considerable excitement, and people remember agonized squealings at the Doublebee Farm. The culmination of the events is the report that a pig with a human face had been seen pursued by dogs. Upon investigation it is found that Jed Doublebee has been putting iron masks on the snouts of young pigs, and as they grow their features parody a human face. He then sells them as freaks to the circus. The handling was more like a "true feature" filler in a local newspaper and totally unconvincing.

The one fiction sale that Fort made in 1905 without the influence of Theodore Dreiser would appear to be How Uncle Sam Lost Sixty-Four Dollars, which appeared in THE BLACK CAT for September, 1905. THE BLACK CAT greatly encouraged amateurs, holding periodic contests which paid as much as $1,500 for a prize-winning short story, and honorable mentions received $100. In order to be eligible to submit a story to the contest, one had to be a subscriber to THE BLACK CAT, but since the magazine sold for 12 issues for 50 cents, this was scarcely an insuperable barrier. The strange part about all this was that THE BLACK CAT was the straight goods. It printed most of the stories that won its contest and paid as promised, and because the stress was on cleverness rather than literary writing, most of the winners were legitimate amateurs (though professionals were not barred from the contests). The magazine was entertaining and deservedly popular.

There are possible allusions to Fort's early travels in his contribution to this magazine, since he expounds the philosophy that people are more interested in being able to say that they were in a far-off city than actually seing the city. A young man who wants to be able to name-drop famous cities he has traveled to puts a two-cent stamp on his forehead and forces the postal department to send him postage-due to various localities, where even though the people know him, the "letter" will be refused. He winds up in the dead-letter office in Washington, D.C., and then is returned home by the postal department. The entire affair costs the postal department $64, which accounts for the story's title. THE BLACK CAT never claimed the story as one of its literary triumphs, and Fort did not retire on the $25 he received for it.

If judged by his 1905 appearances, Charles Fort would have to be rated as a rather mediocre prospect. Stopping at the end of 1905, one could have considerable qualifications as to Theodore Dreiser's judgment as stated in his posthumously published memoir: "And among ourselves—Richard Duffy of TOM WATSON'S, Charles Agnew MacLean of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and others, we loved to talk of him and his future—a new and rare literary star."

Though it was in TOM WATSON'S MAGAZINE that he began to show conceptual and stylistic ability beyond that of a distinctly third-rate writer, it was certainly not in the insipid first of his stories for them, How Sentiment Was Discouraged in Sim, in the January, 1906, issue. Mercifully, it took only 1,500 words to unfold its "plot" concerning Sim Rakes, who supervises the unloading of vessels at the New York docks, and projects himself into a state of mental euphoria by ruminating philosophically about the barrels of apples coming in from the country: "I do like to see them going into so many homes instead of beer and whiskey. I like to think of an honest laboring man working hard and his wife having a nice apple pie for him in the evening, instead of squandering his wages." Disillusionment sets in when he knocks the head off a barrel and, digging down, finds a jug of whiskey under the apples.

TOM WATSON'S MAGAZINE changed its title to WATSON'S MAGAZINE with the February, 1906, issue, and it was in the following, March, 1906, number that the most important of the seven stories they were to run by Fort in terms of giving some clue as to how early he entertained the ideas introduced in his four major books, from Book of the Damned to Wild Talents, appeared.

He had submitted a 2,500 word story titled Is This Earth Alive? which was published in the March, 1906, issue as A Radical Corpuscle. The story is a brief satire which might be considered science fiction. The leucocytes, red corpuscles and white corpuscles have a civilization going for them in the human bloodstream, which culture numbers philosophy as one of its sciences. There are debates as to whether the host they inhabit is actually a living thing, and Fort draws parallels to the Earth.

"Pursue your analogy!" cries a rival philosopher. "If we populate a living creature, then the creature inhabited by Man itself must be a corpuscle floating in the system of something inconceivably vaster. We are leucocytes to Men; Men are to the Earth; then hordes of Earths are to a Universe? You speak of many Men. Are there hordes of Earths?

"How can these many independent bodies be part of a solid?" it is asked.

"Only comparatively are they far apart," is the reply, "as to a creature microscopic enough, the molecules of a bit of bone would seem far apart and not forming a solid, at all. To the molecules nearest to him he would give names, such as Neptune or Mars; like Men, he would call them planets; remoter molecules would be stars."

Attempting to puncture that logic another corpuscle responds: "You have it that a myriad worlds like your fancied Earth are molecules to an ultimate creature? But there can, then, be no ultimate creature; he, in turn, is but a microscopic part of--- Beware of him and don't listen to him, my friends!"

An angry mob finally shouts: "And he says that we, with our great warriors and leaders, our marvellous enterprises, our wondrous inventions, are only insignificant scavengers of this Man we inhabit? Down with him! Or, if we're too civilized to tear him apart, put him away where he belongs!"

As the philosopher barely escapes with his life into a tiny vein he hears the parting shot: "He says we were made for the Man!" jeered the few leucocytes who gave the distasteful doctrine another thought. "But we know, and have every reason to know, that this Man was made for us!"

This satirical story is the earliest example so far uncovered of a line of thinking that would gradually lead Fort to the concepts expressed in Book of the Damned. It was also in WATSON'S MAGAZINE that stories appeared which indicated that there might be some hope for Fort as a stylist and interpreter of human affairs.

Those That Are Joined Together in the April, 1906, issue forefronts elements of realism:

> "You are standing on an Eighth Avenue corner, looking down a side street toward the ugly black streak made by the Ninth Avenue elevated railroad. You see peddlers, right hands curving at the sides of their mouths, left hands holding pails of potatoes; a woman with a basket of wash, which is tucked under a sheet; many fire escapes that look like a jumbling of giant gridirons, when seen from the corner... The tailor

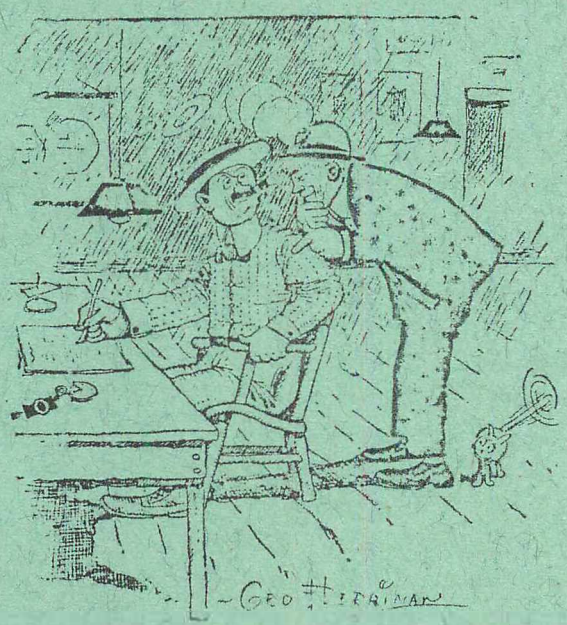
shop occupies the first floor of a three-story frame house — a grimy-looking house; its grimy clapboards are stained by streaks of rain dripping from the rusty fire escape."

His method in writing has become more staccato, more graphic, such as in the description of Mr. and Mrs. McGibney in their kitchen:

"Evening! Both of them in the cheerful kitchen. Very cheerful kitchen. Three conch-shells, like big pink ears, up on the mantelpiece, and four palm leaves, painted green, stuck in a flower pot, just like a bit of Florida. The dishpan, on the stove murmuring; a subdued rattle and good-natured growling of bubbles forming on the bottom of the pan, and dishes fluttering on them."

The dialogue begins to ring true to the people, place and time, and his perceptions into the human condition strike home. The situation is understandable to everyone. First Clara, "a stocky person, with a broad, flat, amiable face," wet laundry in hand, comes to tell the McGibneys that she is leaving her man Tommy for good. "Everything about her seemed to suggest that she was made to work hard and suffer, usually not complain, but, quite without reasoning, flash into short-lived rebellion against hardships now and then."

She talks herself out and goes back to her husband, but a few days later he arrives at the McGibneys', telling them he is leaving Clara forever. Fort characterizes him as "an uneasy, squirming, twisting, little man; bald-headed; Hebraic nose like a number six inclining at forty-five degrees; chin with a dimple looking like a bit gouged out of it; very neat; fussy. And a very polite little man, scraping, bowing, grinning."



"You always put your name on the corner?" he asked.

He also talks himself out and returns to his wife, but the two split again and with extreme expression and sensitivity Fort reports their coming together again:

"But why didn't you come to find me, Tommy, when I was hiding away?" Clara asks. "I told the Finnigans and everybody, so you must of known where I was hiding away!"

Tommy, who has been miserable, reveals that he would not return until he had accumulated and given to her the money to the buy the brass lamp she had been saving for, and which he had taken and spent. There is more than a touch of O. Henry in the ending.

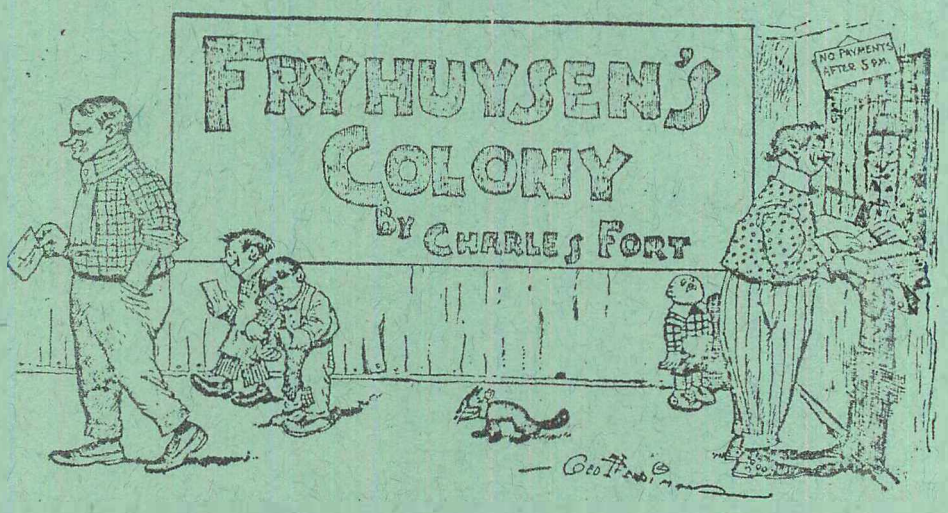
The quality of the writing was maintained in Ructions in the May, 1906, issue, a 9,000-word story about the aged and proud Mrs. Bonticue, who arranges with her

neighbors to make a mess of the tenement house she resides in when she finds an eviction notice on her door. She cleans up the place and pays for the damages when she learns that the notice was pinned on her door by another tenant who hoped to get a few additional days towards scraping together the rent before the error was discovered. The story sparkles with validity in the manners, language and life of the New York Irish of the slums at the turn of the century.

It spawned a sequel titled Mrs. Bonticue and Another Landlord in the next, June, 1906, number. Moving to a cheaper tenement to save money in order to bring kin over from Europe, Mrs. Bonticue finds her windows darkened by a fence in the back yard. She exhorts the men of the tenement to tear it down, and they do. Now she must face the landlord, knowing that either she must pay up and not have money to send abroad, or be evicted. When he arrives, he is delighted to see the fence torn down, because he has bought the adjoining apartment. However, he was going to hire two of the Bonticue boys to rip it down, and they now have lost two days' pay each!

The Fat Lady Who Climbed Fences in the July, 1906, issue, was one of the best of Fort's sketches, probably because he did not overextend the situation and because it is something more than a preoccupation with character delineation. The setting is the slums of Manhattan at the turn of the century, the characters Irish and the focus of the story is Mrs. Pillquit: "A cherry on a plum on an apple! All three impaled on a skewer to hold them together. That should give you some idea of Mrs. Pillquit's figure," Fort begins. Mrs. Pillquit never leaves her rooms on the upper floors of the tenement, for fear she is so fat she will not be able to climb back up. Her husband is forced to tend to every chore, including washing the steps, carrying down the ashes, cleaning the hall sinks, in addition to earning a livelihood.

Mr. Pillquit takes to evening walks. One evening when he leaves for his walk, the immobile Mrs. Pillquit slaps on her bonnet, takes down the steps after him, follows



him through a yard full of carts, climbing on the roof of a shanty, tracking him over or rather through a 10-foot fence, finally losing him and climbing the stairs back to the apartment.

The inspiration for all this accomplishment? A mysterious letter which reads: "Dear Madame, Take a friend's advice and find out where your husband goes every

night." It was sent to her by her husband, who tells her: "I have scrubbed down my last stairs. Now, just you go on your little errands, and don't stop to play leapfrog on the way."

A letter is also involved in his November, 1906, story for WATSON'S MAGAZINE, A Great Human Principle. An Irish boarder, forced to share his room with a newcomer, and finding he is losing his dominance in the apartment, hits upon the idea of sending an anonymous letter to the Mrs. Cassidy who keeps them, suggesting that she ask her boarder "What he's done," on the basis that "every man has something in his past that he'd fear to find out."

The next day he is confronted by Mrs. Cassidy, who exclaims, "Merciful Father, but I've been hearing strange tales of you!"

Before he can think, he blurts out in consternation: "What did she say? Was the child with her? How did she find out my address?"

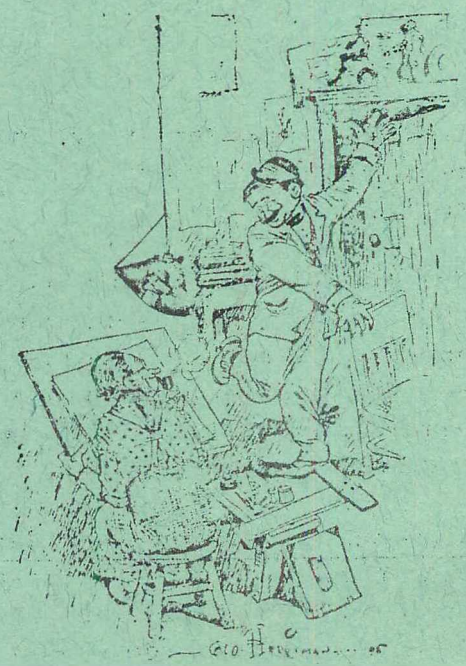
He is undone by his own device, because in his letter he had neglected to specify which boarder Mrs. Cassidy should be suspicious of!

The dynamic realism, the naturalism leavened with humor, the excellent writing of Fort's WATSON'S MAGAZINE contributions was in vivid contrast with A Floral Hold-Up which appeared in the May, 1906, THE ARGOSY. A contrived, difficult-to-believe and barely competently written story, it told of a young man who got his employer, a florist, to take him in as a partner because of his "uncanny" ability to predict runs on certain varieties of flowers. When the agreement is signed, it is discovered that those runs are motivated by advertisements he has placed in the papers, reading:

> At 8 p.m., corner Fifth Avenue and Thirtieth Street; wealthy young widow, considered beautiful, would like to make acquaintance of gentleman matrimonially inclined; age and means no consideration; will recognize by bunch of zinnia in right hand.

Theodore Dreiser's letters indicate that he offered Charles Fort literary advice while he was editor of SMITH'S and may even have helped revise some of his stories. Unlike the impressively different material appearing in WATSON'S MAGAZINE, Dreiser id not permit Fort to express such graphic realism in the pages of SMITH'S.

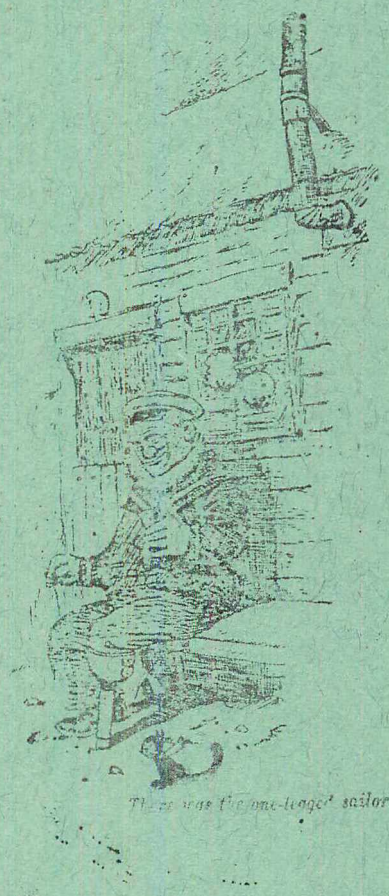
The closest to it was the first story, Not Like Mother's in February, 1906, where boarder Alonzo Grudgger maintains a constant stream of complaints about the cook he has



Frye posed as the one-legged sailor

never seen, comparing her efforts most unfavorably with that of his mother. When finally the unfairness of his gripes is leaked to the cook, she dashes out for a showdown and Alonzo gasps with surprise, "Mother!"

The second story Glencliff's Mysterious Burglar, in March, 1906, is set against the background of a newspaper office, where a young man, Jeremiah Boggs, despite his best efforts, can't seem to get the hang of finding news in a big city. Finally he retreats to the suburb of Glencliff and a stream of excellent local stories of a burglary, an attempt to dynamite the railroad tracks, a shot fired at a prominent citizen from ambush, pours forth, climaxed by a fine story of the robbery of the local post office. When detectives finally track down the source of the crime wave, it turns out to be Jeremiah Boggs who has been doing it himself to manufacture news!



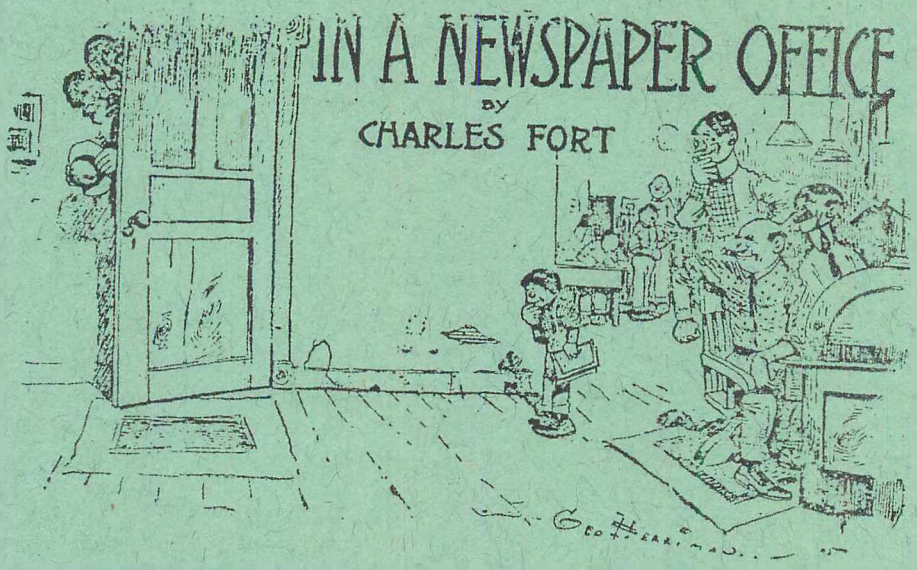
Better handled than the story were the three illustrations by George Herriman, later to become famous as the creator of the comic strip Krazy Kat. Herriman was a staff artist for SMITH'S, and would also illustrate the next two stories by Charles Fort, including Fryhuysen's Colony in May, 1906, which in a sense was a sequel to With The Assistance of Fryhuysen which had run in THE POPULAR MAGAZINE the year before. Fryhuysen tells the incident of making up a story about a squatters' colony down by the bay, with a peglegged sailor living in a house made of old junk, surrounded by goats. The artist illustrates the story, but the managing editor grows suspicious and asks to be taken there. When they arrive, by outright coincidence the scene is just as described in the story.

This was followed by still another newspaper story which takes place in the same office, but without Fryhuysen, titled In A Newspaper Office and published in the July, 1906, number. A hayseed newspaperman from Vermont elicits the sympathy of a regular on the daily in applying for a position. The help he gets on a human interest feature starts him on the road to becoming one of the paper's chiefs, while the actual writer remains "still doing three men's work at eighteen a week."

And Now the Old Scow May Slant As It Pleases in October, 1906, changed the locale to the New York docks. A middle-aged barge man lives with his young maountain wife aboard that drayage vessel, and her attempts to maintain a neat kitchen are foiled every time the scow dips as cargo weight is removed from it. The problem is solved when a mountain range is painted on the kitchen wall, and the more the barge slants, the higher the mountains rise, reminding the young wife of home and keeping her cheerful.

Christmas Waifs, in the January, 1907, issue, again supplied a newspaper office background, but with a sardonic touch. It is Christmas night and office girls from across the way convince the young newspapermen that they must look for homeless waifs to feed at such a season. The newspapermen wander about the city, but on Christmas Eve starving, freezing men, women or waifs are at a premium. Finally they decide that they are the only homeless waifs around, and arrange an immense feed and celebration for themselves.

Fort's final story to appear in SMITH'S was Mickey and the Collegemen in the February, 1907, number. Mickey, who yearns for culture, having been raised by drinking, brawling parents, associates with pool room boys who are going to college. Their hobby is stealing signs. One has once stolen a cigar-store Indian and they now convince Mickey it would be the height of refinement if he would help them steal a cigar-store cop. At night, from a roof top, they drop a loop upon the blue-coated



figure, but half way up Mickey discovers he has a 250-pound unhappy live policeman and not a wooden carving on the end of his rope.

When Theodore Dreiser shifted over to BROADWAY MAGAZINE, Fort went with him, and the story topics stayed pretty much the same. A brick scow served as the setting for The Discomfiture of Uncle McFuddy in the June, 1906, number of what was now named THE NEW BROADWAY MAGAZINE in adjustment to the changes Theodore Dreiser was making in it. The scow owner is holding a boy with blistered hands who has "escaped" from an old uncle who hires him out cracking rocks. The wife is sympathetic to the boy, but can do little to help until a group of fishermen cause so much havoc aboard the scow that when the uncle arrives he is mistaken for just another troublemaker, denied permission to board the boat which is towed up the Hudson.

Quite clever and effective was The Rival Janitors in the August, 1906, number, where a shiftless janitor implies to the tenants that the owners of the apartment may shortly be looking for his replacement. Two tenants compete frantically to show

their abilities, and in the process accomplish a tremendous cleanup and repair job for the janitor who has duped them.

The October issue of THE NEW BROADWAY MAGAZINE announced a Charles Fort story for November titled His Thanksgiving Dinner for Everybody. The story was actually set in type, but at the last moment Dreiser changed his mind about running it. Though two stories by Charles Fort appeared in SMITH'S in 1907, they were actually purchased by Dreiser before he left that magazine.

This commendable outpouring of saleable short stories was to end with the appearance of Mickey and the Collegemen in the February, 1907, issue of SMITH'S. With Dreiser's departure for a top-drawer job at BROADWAY MAGAZINE, sales were over at SMITH'S. As a result of a falling out over publication of Sister Carrie with Dreiser, Charles Agnew MacLean also terminated sales at THE POPULAR MAGAZINE for Charles Fort.

WATSON'S MAGAZINE, doing poorly, was sold to an Atlanta, Georgia, firm with its January, 1907, issue, and the name changed to WATSON'S JEFFERSONIAN MAGAZINE. Richard Duffy departed, to eventually find a post on LITERARY DIGEST. Not only did Fort lose the market at WATSON'S MAGAZINE, but they never paid him $155 they owed him, which conceivably could have been the total amount for all seven stories!

Theodore Dreiser had invested in the B. W. Dodge & Company, book publishers, and had gotten them to reissue his book, Sister Carrie. It was a critical success. He was hailed as a literary doyen, called a "genius," interviewed by THE NEW YORK TIMES. On the crest of this acclaim, he was offered a job as editor of DELINEATOR, a women's magazine devoted to fashions, homemaking, cooking, patterns and society, with some fiction and articles. He shifted from THE NEW BROADWAY MAGAZINE to DELINEATOR with its July, 1907, issue, and the former market closed to Charles Fort and there was no place for him in the latter. Dreiser took Arthur Sullivant Hoffman from WATSON'S MAGAZINE to serve as his managing editor.

"I believe I told you I had nothing at present."

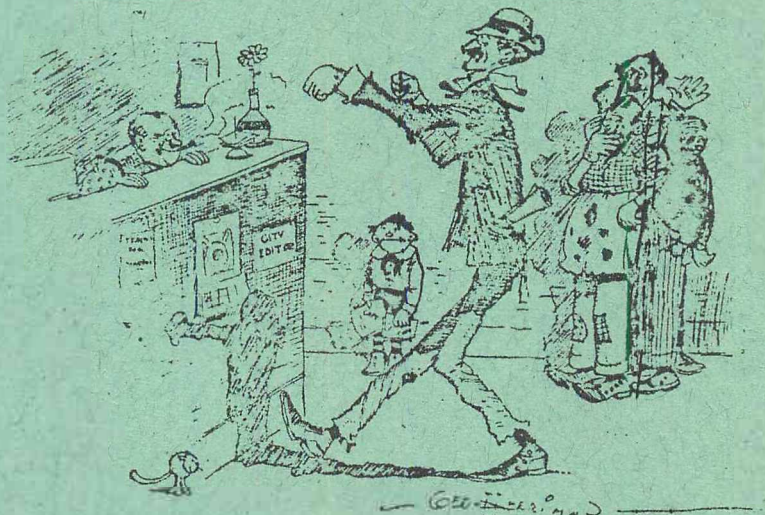
Fort's succeeding years were ones of grinding poverty and personal tribulation. Whether Fort was invited to contribute anything to the four issues of the magazine THE BOHEMIAN, which Dreiser secretly owned and published September to December, 1909, has not been established. Nothing under his name appeared. He is believed to have had a short story in the difficult-to-locate and short-lived magazine 1910, titled Mad to Go Somewhere, since galley proofs of the story are said to exist.

It was Theodore Dreiser who would publish Charles Fort's novel The Outcast

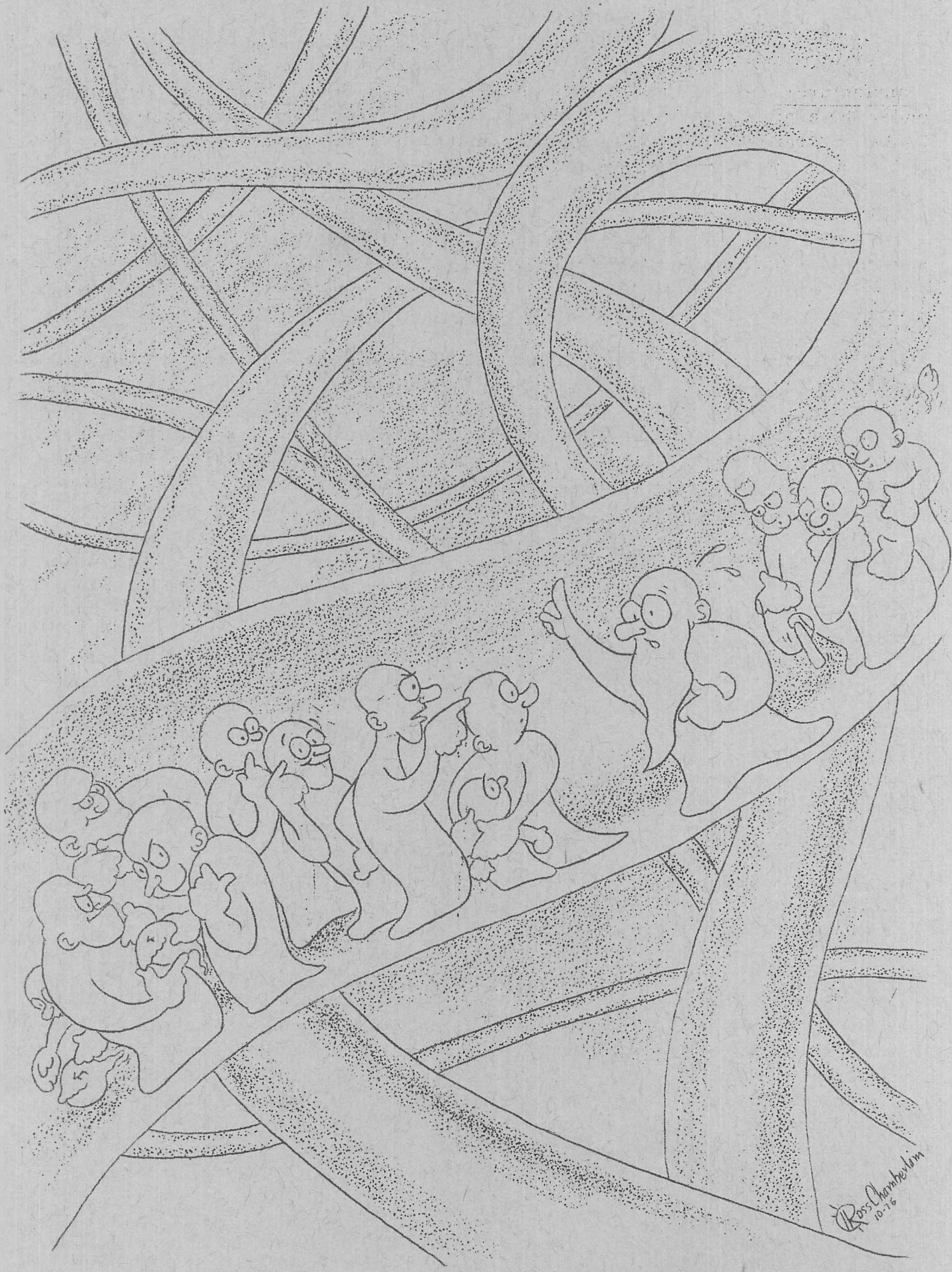
Manufacturers (described in some detail in my book Strange Horizons, Scribners, 1976) under the aegis of Dodge in 1909. Dreiser would prove Fort's benefactor in getting his books on strange phenomena published, and would assist him with money as well as testimonials right on up to the time of Fort's death.

The record shows that Fort hoped early to be a short story writer, then a novelist and finally, when heir to a small bequest, he moved into the type of books for which he became famous. Ironically, they may have developed out of his constant search through the libraries to find items for fillers for magazines and newspapers: his main source of income for many of his writing years.

The best of his short stories show that he was a superior stylist, distinctly ahead of his contemporaries. A comprehensive reading of his short stories reveals one of the reasons Dreiser was so taken with him. He wrote about life as he saw it, graphically, realistically and sometimes extremely well. His big weakness, and it was fatal, was his inability to plot, fundamentally a failing at story telling. He was a newspaper reporter, a journalist, and he never successfully made the transition to fiction.



"At any rate, give me back my stuff."


Ross Chamberlain
10-76

A RADICAL CORPUSCLE

By CHARLES FORT

A WHITE CORPUSCLE, of venerable and intellectual appearance, dug a claw into the lining of an artery and paused.

Past him surged millions of his fellows, all intent upon doing what they believed they had been sent into the Man to do, which was to earn a living; tired mother-leucocytes, starting out upon the day's work dragging small leucocytes after them; young leucocytes, with not a care in the world and never a thought for tomorrow; serious-looking leucocytes, weighed down with responsibilities.

Here and there were some whose individuality would attract attention—that old fellow with the prominent proboscis, forced along in the rush, as others were, but at the head of an association formed by him, so benevolent to himself that he got all the white meat, while the workers divided pickings, of every disease germ captured. There had been battles with an invasion of diphtheria germs, skirmishes with germs of typhoid, small-pox, and scarlet fever. The leucocytes had overcome every enemy, and they were a triumphant, arrogant race.

The venerable corpuscle might have clung where he was, all day, without interfering with traffic, were it not for a peculiarity of the corpuscles. A very hungry white corpuscle, coursing ravenously, noticed the venerable old gentleman, and paused. Stronger than even hunger was his feeling that he should have to learn why the old gentleman was standing on a corner, instead of pouncing, grabbing, and struggling. Small leucocytes, with messages to deliver, paused and gaped; and because they paused and gaped, such a crowd gathered that a burly corpuscle, with a stout club, came along and growled:

"G'wan, now! don't be blocking up this artery."

But the wise old corpuscle had provided himself with a permit.

He began: "Fellow leucocytes——"

"Hooray!" from irresponsible, small leucocytes.

"Fellow leucocytes, I look around and see among you some who may remember me. These may recall that a long time ago I withdrew from the activity and excitement of our affairs, and may wonder where I have been. I have been secluded in the land of gray soil at the upper end of our world. In a remote convolution of this grey matter I have lived and have absorbed something of a strange spirit permeating it—the spirit of intelligence—and I have learned much from it. I feel that I have a mission among you. Let me start it abruptly with a question. Fellow leucocytes, do you know why we are placed here in this Man?"

"To get allwwe can out of it!" answered a sleek, shiny corpuscle.

The others laughed good-naturedly, agreeing that this was their sole reason for being.

"Out of *it!*" cried the wise old corpuscle. "Why not out of *him?* You don't believe

that the Man we inhabit is a living creature? You think that because his life is not like our life, he has no life? And you think that, when you can feel the element of him that we inhabit, pulsate?"

"Oh, that's only the tide!"

"You have never heard his voice?"

"Nothing but thunder!"

"You think he never moves?"

"Nothing but a manquake, now and then."

"You doubt that he is kept alive by internal heat, just as we are? For, without heat, there could not be life."

A studious white corpuscle had become so interested that he permitted a fine plump pneumonia germ to pass him without pouncing upon it. He stepped forward and said, learnedly:

"Yes, there is internal heat in the world we inhabit, but we are taught that the Man was once a ball of fire and is now gradually coolong off. It is ridiculous to say it is alive like us. Look how fine and delicate is our flesh; see the Man made of coarse, rough substance forming banks along every river we navigate. Think of how tremendous its heat is, when it is great enough to keep these teeming millions of us from perishing! Could any living creature produce such heat? You say we can feel it move? It must move very infrequently, then, for these manquakes are far apart. And you regard as a pulsating, the coming and going of the tide? Why, our heart s beat thousands of times in the span of one ebb and flow of the tide we are familiar with!"

Said the wise old corpuscle: "I say that not only is this Man alive, but that he, and millions like him, inhabit a world as vast to him as he is to us."

"Oh, let the old fellow rave!" laughed good-natured leucocytes.

But the financier-corpuscle, with the prominent proboscis, coming along with a germ under each arm, rolling half a dozen others in front of him, sputtered savagely:

"Another of those cursed agitators!"

"This wide Man of ours," pursued the cursed agitator, "is between five and six feet in length, according to his own measuring. The world that he lives on is twenty-five thousand miles in circumference. Telepathy has told me so; I have been able to interpret throbs of his intellect to mine. He calls his world the Earth. I say that he is a white corpuscle to the Earth, as we are to him. He will not accept this belief. He argues as do you. Flesh that he lives upon is so gross that he calls it rock and soil; as rivers and brooks he looks upon arteries and veins. He knows of a tide and sees it pulsate. During one ebb and flow, his own heart beats thousands of times. He says the Moon causes the tide. Perhaps; then the Moon is the Earth's heart. He feels agitations similar to those we know as manquakes. They are very infrequent. He knows that there is heat in the Earth, but can not conceive that it is a source of life, because of its extreme degree. He has no sense of proportion. He can not conceive that a tremendous creature with an existence of ages must move, breathe, and throb in proportion to bulk and longevity, and be sustained by heat that would consume him."

"Too deep for me!" cried a group of young leucocytes. "Oh, he's some kind of a fake! Start in advertising something, in a minute!" Each jumped on a red corpuscle and went sliding down hill.

But the studious white corpuscle again stepped forward.

"Friends," he said, "let us not deride this old person. Let us, rather, point out his astonishing errors to him. Be tolerant, I say! Be tolerant, by all means, even when we are opposed. Sir, we'll admit that there are many Men instead of only this one, and that all inhabit some vast creature that they call the Earth. But what for? We are here

for pleasure, profit, and to store up germs."

"Are we? For a long time it has been my theory that we are here solely for the welfare of the Man we inhabit; that our food and our enemies are elements inimical to him; we remove them in his behalf."

"Vile agitator!" The fanancier-corpuscle, coursing round again, was so agitated that he nearly dropped a germ.

"Let him speak!" urged the studious corpuscle. "His views differ from mine, but I will be tolerant! I have arguments that will silence him soon. Now, then, my friend, if our reason for being is such as you describe, and you liken men to us, these many men you speak of must occupy a relation to their Earth similar to ours to this Man. Do they pounce upon and destroy every organism malignant to their creature?"

"I have no doubt of it!" cried the old corpuscle. "I believe that, existing with those that are workers, are others, similar to them but idle or weak, or, at any rate, of no value to the Earth. I do not say that these worthless ones are pounced upon and eaten, but I do believe that in some way those of no value are forced out of existence; perhaps, besides weak and idle individuals, there are whole tribes who are being extirminated, unable to survive in the struggle with the fit."

"What industrious, unselfish beings these Men must be to do so much for their Earth!" sneered a doubter.

"Now, let him speak!" urged the tolerant philosopher. "I have arguments that will destroy his views, in a moment. Let there be freedom of speech, by all means!"

"Industrious and unselfish?" repeated the old corpuscle. "Are we? Industrious, yes; but unselfish, no! For our own existence we are working in this Man's behalf. We are not philanthropists. For the necessities of life we perform our appointed functions, most of us never dreaming that we are laboring in the interests of the Man we inhabit. So it is, I believe, with them! I can't quite imagine what their benificent tasks are, but perhaps they till the soil, as we till the soil of this Man, keeping the Earth's system in good order, doing everything in the belief that they are working only for themselves."

"Pursue your analogy!" cried the rival philosopher. "If we populate a living creature, then the creature inhabited by Man must itself be a corpuscle floating in the system of something inconceivably vaster. We are leucocytes to Men; Men are to the Earth; then hordes of Earths are to a Universe? You speak of many Men. Are there hordes of Earths?"

"You have expressed a thought of my own! I believe that there are other creatures like the Earth. Perhaps they are faintly visible to the Earth. Perhaps they revolve and have orbits and course through a system just as we do."

"There," cried the old corpuscle's opponent, "I've got you! Be tolerant to him my friends; I'll silence him in a moment. My friend, then these vast revolving creatures like the Earth are remote from one another? They float in nothingness, then? But you have called them corpuscles, or tiny parts of a whole. How can they be parts of a solid, when they are widely separated bodies floating in nothingness?"

"Take an object of any kind," was the answer. "Of what is it composed? You call it a solid, but I have lingered long enough in this Man's brain to catch glimmers of what he calls the atomic theory. This doctrine is, that all matter is composed of ultra-microscopic particles known as molecules. These molecules are not stationary; they revolve; they have orbits; in everything you think solid and dead, tiny specks of itself are floating and are never still. A myriad worlds like the Earth

are only molecules floating in ether, forming a solid, just as the molecules of any substance you are familiar with form a solid. Only comparatively are they far apart, as to a creature microscopic enough, the molecules of a bit of bone would seem far apart and not forming a solid, at all. To the molecules nearest to him he would give names, such as Neptune or Mars; like Men, he would call them planets; remoter molecules would be stars."

"Wretched nonsense!" cried the other philosopher-corpuscle. For he had no argument left. "Subversive of all modern thought! You ought to be locked up for promulgating your wild views! I'll be the first to hang you, if someone will bring a rope! You have it that all existence is a solid, then? That a myriad worlds like your fancied Earth are molecules to an ultimate creature? But there can, then, be no ultimate creature; he, in turn, is but a microscopic part of— Beware of him and don't listen to him, my friends!"

Suddenly a number of rough-looking corpuscles began to circulate through the crowd, paid in typhoid germs by the wrathful financier-corpuscle, who, standing farther down the artery, could not control his excitement, as he cried:

"Vile agitator! Already there is too much murmuring against my invested rights!"

"You tell us," shouted a rough-looking corpuscle, "that we, the conquering inhabitants of this Man, fresh from a war in which we were gloriously victorious, are placed in this man only for his welfare?"

The crowd muttered indignantly.

"Fellow leucocytes," said the old philosopher, earnestly, "I do tell you that! Through our own selfish motives we do our best to benefit him, but each one of us for himself only, haphazard and without system. Then never mind what Man's relation to his Earth may be, and never mind what his Earth's relation to its Universe may be; let us think only of our relation to this Man. Let us have done with our grabbing and monopolizing, and study and find out just what is best for us to do in our appointed task of taking care of this Man. With that view, let us all work together and overcome that egotism that makes the thought of our own true humble sphere so repellent—"

But, excited by the defeated philosopher-corpuscle and the emissaries of the financier-corpuscle, the crowd had become a mob. Angrily it shouted:

"And he says that we, with our great warriors and leaders, our marvellous enterprises, our wondrous inventions, are only insignificant scavengers of this Man we inhabit? Down with him! Or, if we're too civilized to tear him apart, put him away where he belongs!"

And the fate of the wise old corpuscle would have been the fate common enough in the tragedies of philosophy, were it not that a few disciples hurried him away, seeking refuge in a tiny vein far from battle, struggle and selfishness.

"He says we were made for the Man!" jeered the few leucocytes who gave the distasteful doctrine another thought. "But we know, and have every reason to know, that this Man was made for us!"

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March, 1906