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This is volume one number one of Fantasy Commentator, bearing the date of December, 1943. The editor and publisher is A. Langley Searles, whose address is 19 East 235th Street, New York 66, N. Y. All material herein, unless otherwise credited, may be blamed on him. Although it is distributed free of charge to all F.A.P.A. members, this magazine may also be obtained by anyone else interested for fifteen cents per copy. The next issue, God and local board #101 willing, will probably appear in time for inclusion in the second 1944 mailing.....

This-'n'-That

This magazine being of the volume-one-number-one variety, perhaps some little explaining should be undertaken before I proceed to a more detailed discussion of the items included in this particular issue. First of all, policy: to begin with, I have always been under the impression that the Fantasy Amateur Press Association was intended to be devoted in the main to fantasy items; and, although a perusal of the last mailing shows conclusive evidence that many of its present members have somehow failed to arrive at such a conclusion, I still see no reason to undergo a change of mind.

The Fantasy Commentator, therefore, will probably continue with its present conservative policy of 100% fantasy material until the reformation of its editor and publisher is more advanced than at present. Conservatism, too, will be the watchword as far as diction is concerned. If you are looking for a magazine with phonetic spelling, Esperanto, or simply out-and-out misspelling (a la Ackerman) this is not the one for you; try another. I believe it is possible to obey the simple rules of grammar, and yet to maintain a conversational style of writing if the latter is desired. Stuffiness of context is not necessarily a corollary to obedience to forms of established correctness.

As to the regularity of appearance, I can promise nothing definite---as long as my spare time and 2A draft status hold out I shall continue with both this magazine and the bibliography. But since my work this Winter is certain to prevent the rapid issuance of either, I hope that those who have been kindly appreciative will bear with me patiently.

More specifically as regards subject matter, I hope to be able to continue the policy as is shown by the contents of this issue: mainly books. While interests in the field of fantasy in Britain have centered largely on books (because books are easily and cheaply available there, and magazines aren't) trends in America appear to have kept the magazine in the forefront as exemplifying the field. Books have not been given the attention in this country that they richly deserve, and it is my hope to aid the efforts of Messrs. Koenig and Liebscher in this respect. Considerable good fortune has attended the collecting efforts of your editor in book-accumulation during the past few years, which has enabled me to enlarge my collection to well over seven hundred volumes. With this fund to draw from, and with the information at hand gained in various quarters by bibliographical research, it is hoped that each future issue will be of approximately the same length as this, and contain at least one long article concerning an interesting phase of fantasy books.

The scope of this issue's long article on certain writings of Edward Frederick Benson is narrow, and purposely so. I felt that to attempt an adequate treatment of both his short stories and novels would result in either a piece of work that was far too long to be interest-sustaining or else one which, by reason of its attempt to cover too much ground, would leave an impression of careless organization of the author's material. Therefore Benson's novels have been put aside for a possible later discussion, should comments received on this article indicate a favorable reception.

Although many---in fact, most---American readers of fantasy seem to be unaware of the fact, they may get copies of current British-published books without depending on slow and not-always sure trans-Atlantic mails. This is accomplished by patronizing Canadian distributers, who have available many books of a fantastic nature at the present time. To check on the availability of a given title, simply consult the latest supplementary editions to the U. S. Catalog of Printed Books at your local library. Wherever a Canadian distributer handles a particular book his name is given, and by consulting the appendix one can easily determine his address. For example, I obtained a copy of Stapledon's latest novel Darkness and the Light soon after its British appearance through S. J. Regin-

(continued on page 14)

Although his four volumes of material devoted to the subject contain over fifty stories, the late E. F. Benson is comparitively unknown in this country as a modern exponent of the short weird tale, and has seemingly fared little better in his native Britain. In fact, collectors of the weird as a rule remember merely "The Man Who Went Too Far" which through repeated anthological representation has become, of late, almost too familiar. And the anthologists themselves, sad to say, appear to know little more about him than do their readers.

The first of E. F. Benson's collections appeared in 1912 under the intriguing title The Room in the Tower. The edition was a very small one, and its present day scarcity has raised the price considerably, despite the fact that it was once reprinted in 1929. The comparatively few copies of this book that are in circulation, coupled with the fact that it has never been published in America, make it both a scarce and an expensive addition to the average fantasy fan's collection; book dealers consistently ask from four dollars to six-fifty for a copy, depending on the edition, and even at this figure it is a but infrequently encountered item.

It is in this volume that "The Man Who Went Too Far" was first given the permanence of hard covers. Little need be said of the story, it being well-known, other than to quote H. P. Lovecraft's "Supernatural Horror in Literature" which notes its breathing "whisperingly of a house at the edge of a dark wood, and of Pan's hoof-mark on the breast of a dead man." Benson later refashioned the germ of the story into a novel, The Angel of Pain, somewhat in the habitual way of Le Fanu and Vernon Lee. The story has been reprinted countless times in its original short form; suffice it to mention two of the collections including it: Arthur Reeve's Best Ghost Stories, and the Mystic-Humorous Stories of Joseph L. French's editorship.

Of equally high quality in The Room in the Tower are "The House with the Brick-Kiln" and "How Fear Departed from the Long Gallery". The former tells of the hauntings of an isolated Sussex manor, once inhabited by a jealous-crazed artist who murdered his wife and then attempted to incinerate her remains in the brick-kiln near by. Summer vacationists living at the manor frequently see the ghost of the former tenant about the grounds; smoke, smelling of charred human flesh, emanates from the cold kiln; the servants' bell is frequently rung from a disused bedroom. The climax is reached one evening when the crime itself is re-enacted:

> "The doorway into the room beyond was open, and just inside it we saw the man bending over some dark huddled object. Though the room was dark we could see him perfectly, for a light stale and impure seemed to come from him. He had again a long knife in his hand, and as we entered he was wiping on the mass that lay at his feet..."

Benson's unerring choice of detail and admirable restraint make this tale one of the best in the collection. In the second story mentioned the author reverts to a more quiet apparition of ghostly twin-babies; they are always seen in the long gallery of the house, and then only between sunset and sunrise. Anyone luckless enough to see them meets a violent death soon afterward. Of these latter was one Mrs. Canning, a great beauty of her day; her fate was to be inflicted with a nameless dread disease---gray-green patches appeared on her skin, each burgeoning into lichenaceous tendrils which, finally spreading to her respiratory organs, caused her death. A guest visits the house, and, falling asleep one afternoon in the fatal gallery, wakes from a distorted dream of Mrs. Canning's fate to discover it is past sunset. Before she can escape from the room---being unfamiliar with its geography in the near-darkness---the twin-babies appear, but

instead of fear the expressions on their faces evoke her maternal compassion for them. Henceforth the sight of the apparition no longer brings disaster upon the watcher. While there are touches of sentimentality in this tale they do not by any means render it inferior.

"The Thing in the Hall", here included, may also be found in The Best Ghost Stories (1924) edited by Bohun Lynch (published in England as A Muster of Ghosts); here is unfolded a description of an elemental that haunted the room of a Cambridge student. Benson is at his best in many descriptive passages of this story and his careful delineation, not of the elemental itself, but of its shadow---"it was like...some enormous slug, legless and fat, some two feet high and about four feet long...one end of it was a head shaped like the head of a seal, with open mouth and panting tongue"---and his later recounting the elemental's attack on a medium there are done with a consummate artistry that is truly enviable.

The variety of the sixteen tales if The Room in the Tower is indeed great enough to satisfy the most discriminating reader. Modernists will probably be pleased to note that Benson does not rely on the Victorian ghost throughout, but even goes so far as to include the apparition of a motor-car in one of the stories ("The Dust Cloud"). "The Confession of Charles Linkworth" involves the return for absolution of an executed murderer who died unconfessed; "Gavon's Eve" describes the fate of two lovers near a pool on a night when evil powers are reputed to return to a near by pagan altar; and "At Abdul Ali's Grave" takes the reader within the shadows of Egypt's pyramids to tell of black magic and thought transference. What Anthony Boucher has called the therianthropy themeis enlarged upon with deft realistic touches in "The Shootings of Achnalneish", wherein the provincial superstition of a human transformation into a black hare is artistically recounted.

Whether Benson held any actual belief in spiritualism, or merely found its close contact open-mindedly interesting cannot be determined accurately, but the extent to which characters in his stories discuss it, together with the consistency with which the pro-'s win out argumentatively over the con-'s---if only by inference---breeds more than a suspicion that the author's inclinations tended toward the former. Mention has already been made above of cases where the spiritualistic rituals entered the scenes portrayed, and fully one-half of "Outside the Door" is devoted to animated discussions of the subject. However, it must be made clear that never does Benson depend upon the stock devices of either spiritualism or occultism to furnish material for the physical response which his climaxes so often impart even to a veteran reader. "Outside the Door" (which connoisseurs will be interested to compare with William Hope Hodgson' s "Whistling Room", from Carnacki, the Ghost-Finder) is a case in point. The high point of the story is reached not in the explanation of supernatural happenings, but rather in their actual telling. The same holds true for other instances of the use of spiritualism, both in The Room in the Tower and the author's remaining collections.

Abnormal psychology forms the prime basis for "The Cat", but ardent devotees of the old-fashioned ghost story will find that in "The Other Bed" they have not been forgotten. Premonition, pure and simple, provides a few uneasy moments in "The Bus Conductor", and "Between the Lights" is an hallucinatory variation of the same theme. These latter four are not equal in quality to those tales less briefly described herein, but they are by no means poor; indeed, to label any of the author's short stories as such would, to say the least, be inviting argument.

Finally should be mentioned two of the finest stories in this, E. F. Benson's first collection: the title story and "Caterpillars". The Reverend Sum[illegible], in the preface to his Supernatural Omnibus (1932) characterizes the author

as 'a supremely accomplished artist", and the former story, whose theme is vampirism, substantiates this opinion to the fullest extent. "The Room in the Tower" is undoubtedly one of the most skilfully constructed novelettes on its theme yet to appear. Unfortunately, it has never been anthologized elsewhere, and so it is doubtful if it will ever attain to a popularity equalling that of stories more widely known. "Caterpillars", however, was chosen for inclusion in Colin de la Mare's excellent collection They Walk Again (1931), and is clearly representative of the master at his best. A visitor at the Italian villa of friends is troubled, on his first night in the building, with strange dreams, unlike any hitherto experienced. The second night finds him restless and unable to sleep; he arises in search of a book left in another room, the better to while away the night hours. Returning to his chamber, he passes a disused bedroom, and glancing within, notices an eerie gray light coming from the bed. The latter

> "was covered with great caterpillars, a foot or more in length, which crawled over it...they were faintly luminous, and...instead of the sucker-like feet of ordinary caterpillars they had rows of pincers like crabs...in colour these dreadful insects were yellowish-grey, and they were covered with irregular lumps and swellings. There must have been hundreds of them for they formed a sort of writhing, crawling pyramid on the bed. Occasionally one fell off on to the floor, with a soft, fleshy thud..."

Paralyzed with horror, the visitor at first can do nothing except stare, but finally flees in terror. With morning come doubts as to his adventure---perhaps it was merely a dream. But he encounters an artist, also staying at the villa, who shows him a caterpillar, a miniature of those seen the previous night; he is overcome by the same feeling of horror, whereupon the artist crushes it beneath his heel. Once more unable to sleep, that night he leaves his room, and once more sees the caterpillars, this time swarming from the disused chamber toward the artist's room in a hideous gray tide of flesh. They crawl through the keyhole and hinge-cracks of the door unimpeded... With the next day he leaves the house, never to return, and never learns until months later that the disused bedroom had been occupied the year before by a fatal case of cancer, nor that, shortly after his own visit, the artist had likewise succumbed to that disease. The lurking horror throughout the story is depicted with nothing less than a genius worthy of Lovecraft at his best; had he written no other story, Mr. Benson's reputation would rest as securely on the besis of this one as does that of Charlotte Perkins upon her isolated effort in the field.

The author's second volume devoted to the weird did not appear until eleven years had elapsed. In 1923 there was published in this country Visible and Invisible, to date the only Benson collection to be printed in America. Not a few of the twelve stories included first saw print in the now-defunct Munsey magazines, though precise information on the dates of publication is lacking at present. Visible and Invisible, while not a common book, is nevertheless not a difficult one to obtain; bookdealers' prices range from a dollar to two-fifty, and many collectors have been fortunate enough to obtain it for less. In quality, it rates as excellent, being at least equal to its predecessor in this respect.

"And the Dead Spake--" begins the volume with a ghastly description of a scientist's experiment---tapping a recently-dead woman's brain with a "needle" to reveal its "recorded" information about her husband's murder; while "Mrs. Amworth" reveals the discovery of a vampire in a quiet Sussex village. The latter story was anthologized by Dorothy Sayers in her first Omnibus of Crime (1929).

A shuddery tale indeed is "The Outcast", wherein is related the events occurring in a small town when a reincarnated demon, in human form, dies and will be received neither by the sea nor the earth. And "In the Tube" is a capable vignette of the spectre of one long dead.

But of the most powerful tales in the volume we must deal in more detail. "The Horror Horn" certainly takes its place in this class; a more ghastly example of the weird in fiction would be difficult to discover. A chance Alpine tourist discovers that his guide habitually avoids a certain peak in the region where they have been climbing, Ungeheuerhorn. Close questioning elicits the information that local legends credit the area with being inhabited by remnants of some wild primeval race, dwarf-like but of tremendous strength, who inhabited higher reaches of the mountain, but occasionally were seen at lower altitudes, whence they descended to forage for food or to capture stray wanderers from the near by village. Little daunted by what he regards as a provincial superstition, the traveller one day skis about the region, encountering nothing. Sunset finds him well off the beaten trails; and, on breaking into a small clearing, he sees before him one of the dread denisons of the peak: it is a female of the horrible species:

> "She was enveloped in a thick growth of hair grey and tufted and from her head it streamed down over her shoulders and bosom...never had nightmare fashioned so terrible a countenance; the beauty of the...beasts of the field and the kindly race of men could not atone for so hellish an incarnation of the spirit of life. A fathomless bestiality modelled the slavering mouth and the narrow eyes..."

Benson's description of this creature's attack upon a chamois and her subsequent discovery and chase of the helpless traveller through the silent snows of the forest in the last rays of the red and dying sun is done with a consummate artistic touch, and the picture of loathesome doom conjured before the mind's eye is unforgettable.

Equally effective is the tale "Negotium Perambulans.."; here the reader is introduced to Polearn, an isolated hamlet on the Cornish coast. On a panel of the pulpit in its church was once a strange carving of a priest facing a terrible creature "like a gigantic slug" upreared before him, with the accompanying legend "Negotium perambulans in tenebris"---which, feebly rendered, is "the pestilence that walketh in darkness"---a pestilence more deadly to the soul thanto the body, "the Thing, the Creature...that trafficked in the outer Darkness, a minister of God's wrath on the unrighteous" and against which there is no protection save a firm faith and a pure heart. But the owner of the land had pulled the church down, keeping the pulpit-carvings, and dining and playing dice upon the former altar. But as age overtook him he kept the lights on all during the night; yet once a gale conspired to extinguish them, and servants answered his yells of fear to find him dead, a huge black shadow crawling from a bloody throat. A like horrible fate overtakes the present tenant of the house, a debauched artist; once dusk falls unexpectedly soon---he cannot light the lamp in time---

> "the thing had entered and was now swiftly sliding across the floor toward him, like a gigantic caterpillar. A stale phosphorescent light came from it, and an odour of corruption and decay, as from slime that has lain long under water. It seemed to have no head, but on the front of it was an orifice of puckered skin which opened and shut and slavered at the edges. It was hairless and slug-like in shape and texture. As it advanced its forepart reared itself from the ground, like a snake about to strike, and fastened on to him..."

And the thing on the floor is no more than "a rind of skin in loose folds over projecting bones". It was this vivid description of horror that doubtless led August Derleth, in the introduction to his Someone in the Dark (1941), to state that E. F. Benson had written but one story like "Negotium Perambulans...", and it is true that the latter but seldom has treated more objectively of a horror that is completely contrary to the moral constitution of his world. This tale is undoubtedly one of the finest---if not the finest---that Benson ever produced.

Spiritualism is the main theme of four of the stories in Visible and Invisible: "Machaon", "Inscrutable Decrees", "The Gardener" and "Mr. Tilly's Seance", in all of which Benson's capabilities are favorably exhibited. "At the Farmhouse" strays from the supernatural to a theme of sheer horror, but suffers not at all in the author's hands because of it. A strange story is told in the penultimate selection, "In the Tube", concerning the occult and a warp in the fabric of time, while the final offering of the collection, "Roderick's Story", introduces Benson himself as a character, to whom one Roderick Cardew relates his own ghostly experiences.

It is well at this point, perhaps, to examine more closely the general characteristics of the author's writings. One is struck, first of all, by the isolation of Benson's locales and situations from the unrest and complexities so characteristic of post-war conditions. Throughout the entire series of his four collections---stories spanning well over two decades in period of composition---his world remains in its immovable state of Victorian solidity, scarcely touched by the passing din of brash modernism. New mechanical inventions are overlooked consistently, save the automobile, which, however, Benson keeps in the status of an unwilling intruder upon the quiet fastness of an English countryside, a vehicle whose tires can never be trusted not to puncture, and altogether a contrivance which should never be regarded as superceding the bicycle where reliability is concerned. A circle is drawn about a quiet tree-shaded Old-English manor, with its huge fireplaces, its undisturbed atmosphere, and its somber retinue of efficient servants. External distractions---be they the quiet bustle of near by London or even the sanguinary uproar of a world war---somehow spend their force upon an intangible barrier, and filter through only as dim echoes of unimportant events. The drawing-room is still, as always, the most important chamber of the house, and the conversation it engenders is no less animated than it is sincere.

Nor apparently has Benson lost faith in human nature, if only inferentially so. The reader gleans the distinct impression that if a temporary dislocation of the social structure has occurred---and the author never admits frankly that it has---the continued staid conservatism of the English majority will inevitably triumph. The characters in these stories are precisely what their environment would be expected to produce: quiet, responsible, and capable of emotional moods that vary within narrow limits. Open-mindedness is seldom a characteristic for the simple reason that the mode of existence seldom demands or needs its exercise.

It might seem to some that the latter feature would operate against a weird tale, unless the medium of a naturalistic explanation were entailed to unravel the supernatural. Yet such is not the case. The undercurrent of spiritualism that is present throughout Benson's writings is the redeeming factor here: if it is not directly brought in, in a particular story, the influence of environment of its believers is usually apparent. And it is a spiritualism that has either not been mentally accepted by the characters, and hence is still an issue of debatable interest, or else its acceptance is of a recent nature, and an aura of romanticism still lends to it a mystic, mysterious air.

This is one category into which the tales of these four collections may fall. There is also another. In this latter, contrary to the first in which phenomena of the occult fail to possess any---or at the most a mild---moral is-

sue of right or wrong, there enters either a stark, primal manifestation of the Unknown that inextricably involves a reaction of sheer terrified horror by its witnesses or else a theme that conjures up borderland nightmares kept under control by established religion. It is obvious even to the casual reader that the explanation of such phenomena is entirely beyond the powers of the author----in fact painfully so. Stories in this second dual category seem a source of worry to Benson, and almost appear to have been written for the purpose of unburdening a mind of a plot whose genesis and rearing have been far less pleasant than parentally dutiful. It is in stories of this type, as exemplified by "Negotium Perambulans..." and "The Sanctuary", that Benson reaches the high-water mark of his power as a master of the macabre. And it is scarcely necessary to remark it so because of the subject, because of the skill with which he forces the reader to feel that what-cannot-happen has become what-should-not-happen.

This English author's style is so unobtrusive that it is often difficult for the reader to describe it without considerable reflection. Such a characteristic speaks highly for it as a suitable vehicle for the telling of a weird tale. Quiet naturalness is its most distinguishing trait; unlike those of Poe and Lovecraft, it is free from all traces of precicsity, and possesses all the well-tooled, subject-subservient efficiency that a good writer's should.

Two small volumes, of pamphlet-thickness and not actually included in the listing of major collections of the author were published in this country soon after the appearance of Visible and Invisible: Spinach and Reconciliation (1924) and A Tale of an Empty House and Bagnell Terrace (1925). Each contained two tales, as given by the titles. "Spinach" tells of a murderer's spirit communicating by a ouija board with the occupants of a summer house, and "Reconciliation" relates the haunting of an old English home by a former resident who had been cheated of ownership by gambling. "A Tale of an Empty House" is a powerful account of the haunting of a disused coastguard tower in an isolated corner of Norfolk; "Bagnell Terrace" touches upon the dark powers of an ancient Egyptian cult, and although it falls a trifle short of the author's earlier classics, it is nevertheless similar to them in both subject-matter and treatment.

These four tales were included in the author's next standard-size collection, Spook Stories (1928); this volume (unpublished in this country), despite having run through no less than four English editions, is rather difficult to obtain, and is now out of print. Copies vary in price from two-fifty to five dollars, depending on the edition quoted. Besides the four just mentioned, one other of its twelve stories has appeared elsewhere: "Expiation", which tells of a suicide reenacting his own hanging, was included in A Century of Ghost Stories (1934).

Of the stories in E. F. Benson's third anthology, two undoubtedlyare outstanding: "And No Bird Sings" and "The Face". The latter story is characterized by Lovecraft as "lethally potent, in its relentless aura of doom". This is by no means an overstatement, for it attains to a level of horror rarely touched. Hester Ward, the main character, suffers anew from a set of recurring dreams which had tortured her during childhood. In these, she finds herself walking along the edge of a sandy cliff; it is dusk, and at length she approaches a copse of trees, through which is visible her destination, a lonely church fronted by a disused graveyard, where some unknown thing awaits her. Here the preferatory dream stops; but on the next night, after a day of uneasy malaise that the dream causes, she dreams again. Standing by the tower of the ruined church, she sees a pale oval light form in the uneasy dusk before her; it resolves itself into a composite face: one half is "soft-curved and beautiful"; the other is horrible, thick and gathered together as by some physical deformity, sneering and lusting. It is a very incarnation of evil, and as it draws nearer, she is unable to move. Then she screams and wakes in distraught terror. At an art exhibit she

sees in a painting the very face of her dream; this increases her nervous tension to such an extent that she is forced to take a rest-cure at a lonely seaside village. Here, to her dread, she comes upon the very terrain of her dream; and that evening, at her stopping-place, she is accosted at the door by one who turns out to be the horrible creature of her dream. He leads her up the cliff through a tremendous storm which has arisen; and the next day, amid the washed-out graveyard, is discovered the body of this creature, "untouched by corruption or decay, though two hundred years had elapsed since it was interred there". But Hester Ward is never seen again.

Second only to "The Face" is "And No Bird Sings", which treats of the hunting down of an enormous phosphorescent slug amid the dark aisles of a silent wood completely devoid of animal life. In his descriptions of this huge primeval entity Benson is at his vivid best. Not far behind this tale is "The Temple" which ends the volume; this recounts the weird occurrences in a house built upon the site of an ancient temple whose stone of sacrifice is still intact.

The reenacting of a murder accounts for the theme of "Home Sweet Home" and "Naboth's Vineyard" is similar in subject to "Reconciliation". The remaining two tales in the book, "The Corner House" and "Corstophine", tell of cases of murder and pre-vision, respectively.

Of More Spook Stories (1934), E. F. Benson's last volume, less need be said. Booksellers' prices for the book range between the limits of two dollars and three-fifty; it is now out of print. Several of the stories are familiar to American readers by reason of inclusion in Weird Tales magazine; two others of the total of thirteen appeared in English anthologies: "Pirates" in A Century of Ghost Stories (1934), and "The Hanging of Alfred Wadham" in A Century of Creepy Stories (1934). As a whole, the quality of Benson's final effort in the field falls somewhat short of his previous works. The bases of the stories are of a slighter nature, and the plots show little change from those of earlier collections. Some, indeed, degenerate into little more than drawing-room discussions and others leave entirely too much to the imagination. Benson experiments in one case with the "surprise ending", and, it must be admitted, fails to entice more than a yawn from the reader for all his pains.

However, this volume does possess its redeeming features. The subject of invisibility is used to good effect in "The Dance", and that of spiritualism once more comes to the forefront, being especially well employed in "The Psychical Mallards". And despite the decrease in the number of shudders per page Benson's style retains its usual literary solidity, so that while the reader's expectations may at times be disappointed, he is not, as a rule, bored.

"The Sanctuary", moreover, will certainly disappoint no reader who admires the author's former masterpieces. Here is an example of the practice of the Black Mass that demonstrates the author's accustomed power and sure dramatic insight into the potentialities of horror. In its own way, "The Sanctuary" compares well with "Negotium Perambulans...".

It is indeed unfortunate that the late E. F. Benson was not prevailed upon to write introductions to his collections, thus enabling his readers to attain to a more accurate insight of his purposes and beliefs in the field. As it is, much must now be left to guesswork. Luckily, we have something, which, however short, nevertheless does aid the reader who finds himself still curious after the last story has been read; this something is the half-page preface to The Room in the Tower, from which the following is quoted:

> "These stories have been written in the hopes of giving some pleasant qualms to their reader, so that, if by chance, anyone may be occupying in their perusal a leisure half-hour before he goes to bed, when the night and the house are

still, he may perhaps cast an occasional glance into the corners and dark places of the room where he sits, to make sure that nothing unusual lurks in the shadow. For this is the avowed purpose of ghost-stories and such tales as deal with the dim, unseen forces which occasionally and perturbingly make themselves manifest. The author therefore fervently wishes his readers a few uncomfortable moments."

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For the benefit of those bibliographically inclined a listing of the books mentioned in this article is appended below, which the casual reader may well save himself the trouble of glancing over. At this writing (October 1943) all of the editions mentioned are quite out of print, and it is to be doubted, considering the wartime paper shortages existent at present both here and in Britain, that a reappearance of any particular title is at all likely. Collectors desirous of obtaining copies are therefore advised to keep a sharp watch out for the few now in circulation. Bibliophiles in the field will please note that the Knopf edition of The Room in the Tower bears a London, not a New York imprint; contrary to opinions held by several collectors of fantasy fiction, this volume was never published in America. This is also true of all books listed below except in the cases where the publisher is listed as "Doran".

The Room in the Tower and other Stories:
viii-338pp, 1912, Mills & Boon; 7¾ x 5; 8vo; 6/-.
320pp, 1929, Knopf; 7¾ x 5; cr 8vo; 5/-.

Visible and Invisible:
288pp, 1923, Hutchinson; 7½ x 5; cr 8vo; 7/6.
298pp, 1924, Doran; 7¾ x 5½; 8vo; $1½.
288pp, 1925, Hutchinson; 7½ x 5; cr 8vo; 2/6.

Spinach and Reconciliation:
45pp, 1924, Doran; 7½ x 5; price not known.

A Tale of an Empty House and Bagnall Terrace:
36pp, 1925, Doran; 7½ x 5; price not known.

Spook Stories:
286pp, no date (1928) Hutchinson; 9 x 5½; cr 8vo; 7/6.
286pp, 1929, Hutchinson; 8¾ x 5½; cr 8vo; 3/6.
288pp, 1933, Hutchinson; 7¼ x 4¾; cr 8vo; 2/-. (#14 of "The Booklover's Library)
288pp, 1934, Hutchinson; 6¾ x 4¼; fcp 8vo lthr; 3/6. (#14 of the leather-bound edition of "The Booklover's Library")

More Spook Stories:
288pp, 1934, Hutchinson; 8¾ x 5½; cr 8vo; 7/6.
288pp, 1935, Hutchinson; 9 x 5¾; cr 8vo; 2/6.

Rendevous with Triplets

In each of the past three years has appeared in the realm of books an outstanding collection of short fantasies which would warm the cockles of the most jaded dilletante's heart. These volumes combine so naturally into a neat, compact trio that to review one without mentioning the others seems actually inappropriate. Therefore I give brief discussions of all three below, in the hopes that other readers will be interested enough to obtain copies in order to learn for themselves just how good the brand of fantasy produced by Mssrs. Collier, Knight and company can be.

PRESENTING MOONSHINE: Stories, by John Collier. 327pp. New York: The Viking Press, 1941. $2.50.

You've probably heard of this book, since a good reputation isn't easy to keep under cover; perhaps you've even toyed with the notion of buying it. But if you've not actually obtained a copy as yet, you automatically rate (à la Will Cuppy) as a goop of the first order.

Collected here from The New Yorker, Harper's Bazaar, Esquire, The Atlantic Monthly and Harper's Magazine are "twenty-four astonishing and memorable accounts of the ways in which the normal individual may run afoul of the bizarre the occult, and the openly fiendish". Save for those lucky individuals who have perused the above periodicals and those who have been fortunate enough to read three of the stories which were privately printed and distributed --- "Variation on a Theme" (1935), "Green Thoughts" (1932), "Witch's Money" (1940)--- the contents of this volume are new. And anyway, if you've once made Mr. Collier's acquaintance it is not likely that you will forgo the opportunity to renew it.

Among other tales is "Rope Enough", where the reader learns what lies above the Indian fakir's rope; "Thus I Refute Beelzy", which shows that although a child's imagined playfellows may be invisible, they may also be rather dangerous; and "Half-Way to Hell", wherein an attempted suicide demonstrates the possibility of riding the devil's tail into paradise. Why should a djinn never be trusted? Read "Bottle Party" to learn the answer. And for those who like their fantasy delicately blended with the weird there are "Bird of Prey", which tells about the doings of a grotesque black chick that was hatched from a parrot's egg and "Green Thoughts", where we learn of an orchid-grower's metamorphosis into--- but it wouldn't be fair to spoil the story by saying more. The latter yarn, as you probably remember, was included in Dashiell Hammett's excellent anthology of the weird, Creeps by Night (1931), as well as in The Haunted Omnibus (1937), edited by Alexander Laing.

We meet Beelzebub himself---impeccably attired in evening dress, and sporting a red carnation, a monocle and an imperial---in "The Right Side", while a more prolonged stay with that gentleman is provided by "The Devil, George, and Rosie". In the latter story the wit and ironic insight of Collier reach a peak, producing a tale that will cause you to chuckle for days after you have returned Presenting Moonshine to the place of honor on your bookshelf. To whet your appetite, just imagine yourself in the place of George (a would-be misogynist) in full charge of a Hell designed for the eternal damnation of all sinning females! With a cap of invisibility, absolute authority, and a spark of inventive genius, what could you accomplish? For that matter, what couldn't you? Matters were a bit complicated, though, when there arrived in Hell one Rosie, who was not only very pretty, but not yet dead...

Another yarn gives the reactions of a suddenly-aroused Sleeping Beauty, and "The Possession of Angela Bradshaw" deals with the exorcism of a rather genial fiend. The volume ends with "The Invisible Dove-Dancer of Strathpheen Island" and "The Chaser", which latter is a brief but clever insight into the use of love potions.

But Collier is not to be commended merely for his ideas and the novel manner in which he treats them; his style is easily his forte. Completely free from Gothic trappings and the usual banal cliches that characterize the field of fantasy, it is modern, sharp and incisive; moreover, it has that delightf u l habit of ironically exploiting human inconsistencies and ridiculing gaily the emptiness of modern manners.

Small wonder, therefore, that Collier's work is so highly successful , and that his writings have been characterized as "fairy tales that would cause the brothers Grimm to glance fearfully over their shoulders and Wilkie Collins to toss in his sleep". Your reviewer was fortunate enough to have obtained an advance copy of the book before publication, and after a joyous evening therewith promptly decided that John Collier was undoubtedly the outstanding exponent in the decade of the short fantasy story. With the appearance of Eric Knight's anthology a year later this opinion was nearly equalled---the only time it has been even nearly approached; and now, nearly three years after that initial introduction to Collier, my mind is the same: gentlemen, that judgement stands.

SAM SMALL FLIES AGAIN: the Amazing Adventures of the Flying Yorkshireman by Eric Knight. ix-285pp. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942. $2.50.

In its own more robust way, this volume is to its year what the preceeding one was to 1941. If you're not familiar with Sam Small---and that's something you should be ashamed to admit---here's the chance to get acquainted. And if you already know Yorkshire's outstanding inhabitant, you mustn't miss the opportunity of hearing more about him.

Fantasy followers first met Mr. Small in Eric Knight's "Flying Yorkshireman" about four years ago; that novelette is included here, so you can refresh your memory by rereading how it is possible for a man to just up and fly--all you need is complete Faith. (Maybe that California climate helped, but you must decide for yourself, for the author doesn't commit himself on the matter.) In that adventure Sam Small put not only all California into an uproar because of his antics, but New York City as well. In fact the results were so disastrous that he ended by flying back across the Atlantic to his home town of Polkingthorpe Brig.

"Tyke" is Yorkshire for "dog", and it is in "Sam Small's Tyke" that his adventures with one on which a gypsy had cast a spell are hilariously recounted. It seemed that the tyke, Flurry, could talk; moreover, she could---and, in various embarrassing situations, did!---turn into a human being. Maybe it was lucky that Mully, Sam's wife, was away while most of this was transpiring; but the way events turned out, it was rather unlucky, too---especially when she finally returned---

Sam Small flies again in "The Truth about Rudolph Hess"; here is narrated how he was able to ferry Rudolph to Scotland and foil Germany's attempted invasion of Britain at the same time, which was no small task, even for Sammy-well Small. And "Sam Small's Better Half" tells how Sam personally demonstrated the condition of schizophrenia (the word becomes "schizoperennial" in Yorkshire) by actually splitting into two physically distinct individuals. Which raised merry Cain,for each one insisted that he, not the other, was the real Mr. Small. This latter tale, incidentally, appeared in Philip van Doren Stern's recent anthology The Moonlight Traveller (1943).

The rollicking mirth of Mr. Knight's fancy reaches a climax in "Never Come Monday", a story introducing old Capper Wambly, Polkingthorpe Brig's knocker-up. It is the task of the knocker-up to make the rounds of the village early in the morning, tapping bedroom windows with his pole to awaken people in time

for work. But on the particular morning of this story Capper was sure something was wrong, for it felt like Sunday. This seemed rather odd, to be sure, for yesterday had been Sunday also. So he sat himself down upon the curb to think matters out, and finally hit upon the solution in the form of a very logical syllogism: he waked people up on weekday mornings, but not on Sundays; today he was not waking people up; therefore today must be Sunday. Wherefore the day became Sunday, as did the next day, and the next, and soon the news had spread throughout all Yorkshire that in Polkingthorpe Brig the days of the week had somehow got stuck. No one in the town appeared to mind except Mr. Bloggs, the mill-owner, who was furious at losing time because of his employees' extended holiday. Eventually the sixth consecutive Sunday arrived, and with it the official news from Greenwich Observatory that the day was Saturday, which caused some confusion, for how could the day be Saturday unless the week ran backwards? But Sam Small reminded them that since Mr. Bloggs always gave them their week's wages on Saturday, being paid today would be a sure sign that Saturday it was. And Mr. Bloggs, purple with rage but seeing no other way to start the days of the week rolling in proper order once more, paid. But if that day were Saturday,the next must surely be Sunday---so Capper Wambly reflected---whereupon he sagely remarked that if it were Sunday then one and all could lie abed late and get "a bit o' extra sleep for a change".

The charm of the fantasy is in the telling, and each of the ten stories in the book is told uproariously in its own unique way. Mr. Knight's prose is bright, yet not showy, and his subjects show a pleasant variety that never cloys. As an added ettraction the collection is decorated with drawings by Donald McKay, which happily do full justice to its roguish spirit. Fantasy readers are advised not to search for substitutes for Sam Small: there simply aren't any.

TWO BOTTLES OF RELISH: a Book of Strange and Unusual Stories edited by Whit Burnett. xi-395pp. New York: The Dial Press, 1943. $3.00.

Outstanding anthologies of fantasy are indeed few and far between, so that a reviewer's enthusiasm over the advent of one should not merely be condoned by his readers, but shared. This volume is one of those select few; more, it lives up to its advance notices and jacket-blurbs---and praise cannot reach a higher level.

In a previous review (Unknown Worlds, April 1943) I lamented that habit, so frequently indulged in by anthologists, of collecting and recollecting stories with which everyone has been long familiar. Happily, such criticism cannot be levelled against Two Bottles of Relish. Granted, we encounter a few well-known authors on the title-page; but Anton Chekhov's "A Carp's Love" has been but newly-translated from the Russian, while "Two Bottles of Relish", the tale that gives the book its name, is a recent and little-known work of Lord Dunsany, and shows that master of crystalline fantasy in a far more macabre light than any in which lovers of the outré have hitherto viewed him. And although Stuart Cloete's novels are doubtless familiar to many, his bizarre psychological study "Congo", here included, probably is not. It is true that Robert Ayre's charming novella "Mr. Sycamore" has been anthologized previously in one of the O'Brien Best Short Stories volumes, as well as twice dramatised by the Columbia Workshop radio players; but is also true that this tale of a meek little postman's miraculous transformation into a tree has lost no whit of its delightful and sparkling appeal since its recent appearance in 1938.

But enough of apologia, for Mr. Burnett is certainly in no need of it. You'd best begin at the beginning with "The Camel", in which Lord Berners tells

of that Sahara animal's decision to visit a respectable English vicarage in the dead of winter, and wend your way merrily along to Robert Cochran's "Foot of the Giant", wherein a fingernail the size of a tortoiseshell proves the existence of one of homo sapiens' oversized relatives. Then "No Dawn" relates certain happenings on one morning when the sun didn't rise, while "The Night Before" is of the fantasy-horror slant, and good, too.

Toward the middle of the volume we encounter "John Duffy's Brother", a fellow who imagines himself a railway train---complete with cars! Following this the adventures of the amphibious Luke Hawkins are told in "The Man-Fish of North Creek". The editor himself is represented by "The Night of the Gran Baile Mascara", whose dream-like pathology will give many readers a perceptible shudder. And if you'd care for another one of the latter, try the penultimate selection, "The Arbutus Collar".

Amid the refreshing variety offered in this collection each reader will doubtless find one or more personal favorites; I have picked Michael Fessier's "That's What Happened to Me" for mine; its wistful sincerity is certain, if only momentarily, to bring back those schoolday daydreams of your own that were somehow more real than many realities. In short, each of the seventeen selections offered is a memorable one. The authors' styles are at wide variance, yet never dull, and within the imaginative world of each tale you will find ample recompence for a "willing suspension of disbelief". And the anthology's otherworldly qualities are deftly pointed by the appropriate drawings of Carlotta Petrina.

Two Bottles of Relish is more than merely a good book for your library: it is an ideal prescription to counteract that hungry-for-more feeling you had when the last copy of Unknown Worlds, read from cover to cover, was sadly and reluctantly filed away. A better anthology of fantasy may appear in 1944, but unless John Collier has been exceedingly busy at his short story loom your reviewer will lay heavy odds against it.

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This-'n'-That -- (continued from page two)

ald Saunders, 84-86 Wellington St., W., Toronto, Ontario, this company being the American outlet for Methuen of England. This title, incidentally, may still be available; Stapledon addicts are therefore urged to apply to their favorite local bookstore and request the latter to order it. Price is $2.50, and well worth every penny; it will probably be the rarest of all Stapledon titles in the future, as I hear it has never been reprinted because of paper shortages. When ordering books from Canada, it is usually better to leave the entire matter in the hands of your local book dealer, who usually absorbs postage, duty, etc., which you would have to pay yourself if you attempted to obtain the book direct. Saunders also had copies of a cheap edition of Last and First Men on hand at $1.25 a year ago, but I believe that this edition is now exhausted.

In commenting on Liebscher's contribution on page fifteen of this number I mentioned the radio program "Suspense"; since this writing the scheduled time of presentation has been changed, so, by way of erratum: beginning December second, "Suspense" will take the air Thursday evenings at eight---there is not a change in the network or station, however. Don't miss it!

While I intend to leave most news of new books to the able reporting of Liebscher, there is just room here to tell of a new anthology of weird tales to be published this coming Spring by Random House. It will contain approximately fifty stories, and will run to over a thousand pages. Its co-editors claim that twenty of its stories have never before been anthologized---but I would advise readers to take that statement with more than the usual few grains of salt.

"Devil Take the Hindmost---"
being comments on the September mailing

YHOS #8: The new size is darned handy. Contents are consistently interesting, including "Journey"---methinks Widner has the edge on the ability to describe fans' trips. I liked the Futurian coat-of-arms. And while the matter still is fresh in my mind I'd like to pat Art on the back for his game of Interplanetary, which (being a Monopoly fan) I enjoyed reading about immensely. Doubt if you'll ever get the Parker brothers interested, though, at least until the method becomes more simplified... Anent that remark concerning Southerners' inability to withstand 60° cold spells, I recall personal experiences: wintering in St. Petersburg, Florida in 1934-35, my own resistance to native New Hampshire weather enabled me to be out-of-doors regularly in shirt sleeves, and to gaze in comfortable condescension at the native crackers, shivering beneath several layers of sweaters, jackets, coats, etc...

Fandomania: It seems a pity that in these days of wartime shortages good paper, stencils and ink should be wasted upon material of this type.

Rahuun Ta-Ka, etc.: The foregoing comment becomes a masterpiece of understatement when applied to drivel such as this.

Dreams of Yith: I'd've liked this item much better if the artist hadn't insisted on spoiling what little atmosphere the artificialities of Rimel's poetry evoked by including the modernistic trylons and perispheres of Grover Whalen notoriety in his drawings. Maybe I'm still World's-Fair-conscious, though.

Inspiration: Yes, I think it certainly does need some. But since the publisher is in the armed forces perhaps criticism shouldn't be strict.

Golden Atom: A good issue---and I don't particularly care for poetry, either.

Walt's Wramblings, section one: Good as usual, though I hope that Liebscher has enough consideration for the readers' eyesight to double-space any more material in that small print. More radio stuff: discriminating fantasy fans will be exceedingly pleased to learn that they no longer need fear tuning in on "Lights Out" during this Fall-Spring season; Arch Obler's plays were fortunately discontinued in September. It is a pity that the series never amounted to much; but, with its policy of hackneyed plots, its axe-grinding, juvenile propaganda themes continually obtruding upon the story, and its general lack of adult finish, the program never had any chance to rise to a decent level. "Suspense", heard during the Summer months, has switched both network and time; it may now be heard over the CBS network Tuesday evenings at 10:00 (E.W.T.). Many of its past programs have been strictly on the fantasy side, and they have always been capably handled. Notable among these was the classic presentation of James Thurber's "A Friend to Alexander"---and I mean classic in every sense of the word! (Hope you heard it, Walt.) And on October 19th "Lazarus Walks" was dramatized. This too was fantasy, and far above average... New York City fans may hear weekly dramatizations of many weird classics by tuning in Sunday afternoons at six to radio station WNEW (1130 kilocycles); considering that the station is a comparitively small one, the staff has been doing a commendable job...

Walt's Wramblings, section two: Just spoils the good impression created by section one. Candidly, it was neither humorous nor interesting.

Fan-Tods: Excellent, especially "Yesterday's 10,000 Years".

Horizons: I'll probably read the thing as soon as Harry puts out a legible copy of it; in its present condition, however, I value my time and eyesight too much to tackle it. The indecipherability of this latest number should amply demonstrate to its publisher the advisability of using decent stencils and discarding those now being employed, which appear, from their mimeographed results, to have been fashioned from something like carrot-skins, or perhaps old neckties. Two of readable variety of magazines would be more appreciated than four-a-year of the Horizons type, as exemplified by this issue.

Satyric: The paper's a bit too thick for Kleenex, but I'm blessed if I can figure out any other use for it.

Fan-Notes: Fair stuff, I thought. We Just Had to Do It: Why?

En Garde: Well, the cover was good, anyway.

Wudgy Tales: I don't consider this magazine even remotely funny, and would point out specific instances to support this statement were I not of the opinion that to do so would be equivalent, in curative effect, to the swatting of one fly on a manure pile.

The Nucleus: After perusing Trudy's symposiums on the subjects of religion and race prejudice, I find that the only comment which can adequately cover her efforts is neatly ensconced in the first line on page five: "My mind is not really equipped to handle it." You said a mouthful that time, Trudy.

Sardonyx: A beautiful, neat job. Fan-Dango: Same comment.

Cosmic Circle Commentator: I almost changed the name of my magazine lest it b e in any way identified with this one. The Comic Circle certainly is in the number one position on any fan's daydream parade.

The Science Fiction Savant: Washington's "Raymutterings" is certainly a darned sight better than his Comic Circle stuff. But then what isn't?

Have at Thee, Knaves: I liked it. Sustaining Program: Always interesting.

Browsing should show F. A. P. A. members in this country what can be done under truly trying wartime conditions. Mike's stuff is consistently entertaining. Anent the "Anybody know of any more?" query as regards Cutcliffe Hyne books, I'll make a slim addition: The Recipe for Diamonds; my copy is published in New York by Appleton & Co., is dated 1893, and has viii-241pp. As the title would imply, the novel's theme is that of artificial diamond-making.

Guteto: That Esperanto died a quiet death a few decades after its 1887 inception appears to be freely admitted by everyone except a small clique which persist s in its vain efforts to reanimate a brittle skeleton. Charitable critics might class such attempts as humor, but they definitely do not come under the heading of either fantasy or futurism---unless Morojo has revised Webster to suit h e r purposes---and therefore are questionable topics on which to base material to be included in these mailings. Nor can the definition of basic English be so twisted as to render it basically suitable for the F. A. P. A. Therefore, won't you cut down the amount of Esperanto propaganda in Guteto in the future, and substitute in its place a little fantasy material? After all, F. A. P. A. publications should, I think, have some fantasy in them.