FANTASY COMMENTATOR

...covering the field of imaginative literature...

A. Langley Searles
editor and publisher

contributing editors:
William H. Evans, Thyril L. Ladd, Sam Moskowitz,
Matthew H. Onderdonk, Richard Witter

Vol. II, No. 3 ---oOo--- Summer 1947

C O N T E N T S

This is the fifteenth number of Fantasy Commentator, an amateur, non-profit periodical of limited circulation appearing at quarterly intervals. Subscription rates: 25¢ per copy, five issues for $1. This magazine does not accept advertising, nor does it exchange subscriptions with other amateur publications except by specific editorial arrangement. All opinions expressed herein are the individual writers' own, and do not necessarily reflect those of staff members. Although Fantasy Commentator publishes no fiction, descriptive and critical manuscripts dealing with any phase of imaginative literature are welcomed from all readers. Address communications to the editor at 19 E. 235th St., N.Y. City 66.

This-'n'-That

Before becoming engrossed in the seemingly never-ending task of listing all fantasy books which have appeared since the last number, I'd like to recommend to all readers who enjoy this magazine that they subscribe at once to Fantasy Review. This is a printed magazine of news and reviews put out by Walter Gillings, who was responsible for the fine Scientifiction mentioned in "The Immortal Storm." Thus far, two issues of Fantasy Review have appeared; if you subscribe without delay you will be able to get a complete file. Send 75¢ (for one year) or ¢1½ (for two) via international money order, obtainable at any post office, to Mr. Gillings at 15 Shere Road, Ilford, Essex, England. You'll never regret it.

Recommended: Fantasy Review

The first of the books in this category to come to our attention is Strange to Tell: Stories of the Marvellous and Mysterious (Messner, $3½), edited by Marjorie Fischer and Rolfe Humphries; this contains 68 items, largely European in origin, and frequently newly translated. For these reasons, little of this anthology has appeared in this country before; recommended. Jeanne de Lavigne's Ghost Stories of Old New Orleans (Rinehart, $3½) is well illustrated by Charles Richards and contains no less than forty multi-hued, raffish, Creole wraiths in a wealth of gory detail; plenty of variety, plenty good---get it. Jonathon Draws the Long Bow by Richard M. Dorson (Harvard University Press, $4½) includes tall tales from New England, many of them fantasy. Well off the beaten track is Witch in the Mill by Alfreda Marion Peel (Dietz, $2½), an anthology of folk tales concerning witches. Jack Snow's Dark Music and Other Spectral Tales (Herald, $2½) contains eighteen supernatural stories, only four of which have previously been published; the jacket of the volume is the work of Ronald Clyne. Also a collection of supernatural short stories is G. F. Marson's Ghosts, Ghouls, and Gallows (Rider, 9/6). If you can read Spanish you'll be interested in this fine anthology of fantasy published in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Antologia de la Literatura Fantastica is the title; it is edited by Silvinia Ocampo, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Jorge Luis Borges, and contains stories by Beerbohm, Dunsany, Wells, Kafka, Stapledon and others. The Last Circle by Stephen Vincent Benet (Farrar, Straus, ¢3) contains fifteen tales and a dozen poems---none of which has appeared in any of the author's previous collections---and includes about half a dozen fantasies, such as "The Gold Dress," "The Land Where There Is No Death" and that amusing account of P. T. Barnum's attempt to sign up an angel for his show. This Mortal Coil (Arkham House, $3) is Cynthia Asquith's first collection of supernatural fiction; it is rather mild in flavor. The World of Dreams, edited and with an introduction by Ralph L. Woods (Random House, $5) bills itself as "an anthology of the literature of dreams from the Pharaohs to Freud." One of the most unhackneyed collections that has crossed our path in a long time is The Fireside Book of Ghost Stories, edited and with an introduction by Dr. Edmund Wagenknecht (Bobbs-Merrill, $3¾); moreover, it stands out in beautiful contrast to the bulk of today's books, which are published on cheap paper and bound sleazily. This is unquestionably an item to buy and preserve. Shocking Tales, edited by Robert K. Brunner (Wyn, $2.95) is a rather heterogeneous melange of stories sardonic, bloody and cruel rather than outrightly fantastic, and relies too heavily on the already familiar efforts of Poe, de Maupassant and Saki besides; don't buy it. The Winged Serpent: an Anthology of American Indian Prose and Poetry, edited and with an introduction by Margot Astrov (Day, $3½) is a very good item. From England comes The Tailor's Cake by Noël Devaulx (Wingate, 7/6), a collection of fantastic short stories; the book is a translation of L'Auberge Parpillon by Betty Askwith, and contains a postscript by Jean Paulhan. Pu Sang-Ling's Chinese Ghost and Love Stories (Pantheon Books, $3¾), translated by Rose Quong, with an introduction by Martin Buber, and well illustrated, contains some forty of the 400 trasitional tales that comprise the author's classic Liao Chai Chih Yi, which was

Anthologies and Collections of Short Stories

(continued on page 103)

Weinbaum's Unpublished Novel, The Mad Brain

by
Sam Moskowitz

Stanley G. Weinbaum is a magic name to thousands of readers. To them it is a symbol of fine writing, ingenious characterization, excellent entertainment. More than eleven years after his death, Weinbaum's stories still win nation-wide fan polls as the best science-fiction of all time. Though Weinbaum's style is light---at times almost frothy---it somehow bears also the stamp of permanence.

Like those of other famous authors, his unpublished manuscripts have been a source of immense fascination to Weinbaum enthusiasts. When one of these, The New Adam, was published a few years ago, Raymond A. Palmer, by the use of big names and high-sounding praise attempted to foist it on the public as Weinbaum's "greatest" story. Unfortunately the often crude style, sketchy characterization and fumbling psychology of the novel (one of the author's earlier works) could not hurdle the precedent set by "The Martian Odyssey," "The Lotus Eaters," "Dawn of Flame" and other top successes. As a result, this misleading type of advertising did a great deal to lower the previous high regard in which Weinbaum had been held, and disillusioned many who had not previously read his fiction.

Actually The New Adam provided a gold-mine of information about the manner in which Weinbaum thought, and of his fumbling (but fascinating) attempts to formulate a philosophy of life that man might live by. Naturally, then, the devotee found the novel richly rewarding; but just as inevitably the newcomer found it lacking in the literary and story value on which the author's reputation had been founded.

Upon learning of the existence of still another unpublished manuscript I felt that as an admirer of Stanley G. Weinbaum it would be wise to borrow and read the work, and then prepare for publication an honest appraisal of its intrinsic worth before the literary scene was darkened by selfishly-motivated commercialism. Mrs. E. M. Kay (formerly the wife of Weinbaum) was contacted and informed of the idea; and, approving, she entrusted the manuscript to me. Of my findings, I am giving first a synopsis of the novel.

Chief characters:

Nicholas Devine: Handsome, sensitive, charming intellectual, the son of a deceased doctor (who was notorious for his unorthodox theories concerning insanity), suffering from a split-personality. He is living on inherited annuities.

Patricia Lane: the beautiful, shapely daughter of a financially well-to-do widow. She is in love with Nicholas.

Mrs. Lane: the widowed mother of Patricia, who has maintained her good looks despite the passage of years. She occupies herself almost exclusively with rounds of bridge, flightily permitting her daughter to grow up as she may.

Carl Horker: a big, heavy ex-surgeon, now one of the Middle West's most competent psychiatrists. He has for years been virtually a second father to Patricia. He loves Mrs. Lane, but is frustrated in his attempts to win her hand by his inability to play a good game of bridge.

Mueller: the private detective hired by Dr. Horker to keep track of the movements of Patricia and Nicholas.

Chapter-by-chapter reviews:

1. "Pure Horror": While driving along the shore of Lake Michigan near Chicago, on a date with Patricia, Nicholas explains to her his concept of pure horror as something divorced from all comprehensible human associations. The discussion is terminated by their confessions of love for one another, and Nicholas hints at some strange fear that has prevented him from speaking earlier.

"Psychiatrics of Love": Patricia tells Dr. Horker of her love for Nicholas, and mentions the abrupt changes in personality that he occasionally undergoes---sometimes being stern, cold and authoritative in contrast to his habitually good-natured self. She is intrigued by these changes; but Dr. Horker feels that they may portray the man's true character.

3. "Psychiatrics of Genius": Patricia introduces Nicholas to Dr. Horker, who, upon questioning him, learns that he is the son of an erratic scientist of his acquaintance, a devotee of the decadent in literature, and a budding poet who has had some work published.

4. "The Transfiguration": Pat and Nick leave for a date. While driving they exchange cheerful banter and Nick recites some of his rhymes. Suddenly an oncoming car's headlights careen directly toward them out of the darkness. It is only narrowly that a collision is averted. Abruptly Nicholas undergoes one of his personality changes, and, red-eyed, begins to make overt gestures toward Pat.

5. "Perplexity": Her screams jolt him back to normality, and he stammers profuse, semi-incoherent apologies. Pat partially forgives him.

6. "A Question of Science": While questioning Dr. Horker about the effects of dual personality Pat inadvertently reveals to him her experience with Nick. He warns her that such spells are recurrent, but Pat flippantly makes light of his advice.

7. "The Red Eyes Return": When on his next date with Pat, Nick impulsively speeds the car past a traffic signal just as it turns red, saying "to lose your guardian angel." And after routeing his way for a while through a slum area, he draws the car to a stop.

8. "Gateway to Evil": Despite her protestations, Nick forces her to accompany him into a private room of a run-down, shabby, tavern-dance-hall. There he orders a bottle of liquor and demands that she drink as a prelude to his "experiment in evil."

9. "Descent into Avernus": Enraged, Pat continues to defy Nick after drinking several glasses of the liquor. Nick finally tears the drink from her, and strikes her across the lips, bringing forth blood. Then he savagely alternates blows with kisses, until finally from drunken stupor and pain Pat can no longer resist his advances. She is saved only by the entrance of the bartender, who forces the two out of the tavern.

10. "Orpheus Horker": As Nick drags the half-dressed Pat from a side alley into the street the two are sighted by Dr. Horker, who, worried for Pat's safety, had followed them. He repulses Nick with a blow and takes Pat home.

11. "Wreckage": Upon awakening the next morning, he exacts from her a promise to see no more of Nick. He also voices the opinion that Nick is a manic depressive.

12. "The Letter": Upon reconsidering, Pat begins to feel sorry for Nick, and regret her promise not to see him again. And then she receives a letter in the mail from him.

13. "Hesitancy": In the letter Nick begs forgiveness and asks her to meet him in the park on one of the next two evenings so that he may explain everything. She considers the proposal seriously.

14. "The Meeting": On the next night she slips out. In the park she finds that Nick is as of old---gentle, kind, timid, apologetic. Pat treats him coldly, however, and awaits his explanation.

15. "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde": Nick reveals that he suffers from a split personality. He is virtually two distinct persons, and when the "other self" takes over he is conscious of all he says and does, but yet is powerless to intervene. He tells Pat that he must leave her forever. As the two kiss in farewell they are interrupted by detective Muller.

16. "Possessed": Muller escorts Pat back to Dr. Horker. She tells him of Nick's explanation for his actions, but, annoyed by his lack of ready sympathy for Nick, finally declares, "...devil and all...I love him!"

17. "Witch-Doctor": Softening, Dr. Horker finally listens carefully to Pat's story, and promises that he will help Nicholas.

18. "Disappointment": But Nick has already fled, and is nowhere to be found. In despair, Pat dispatches a letter to his old address in the hopes that it will be forwarded.

19. "The Reply": "Thursday evening at our place in the park," is the curt, unsigned reply she receives. Later in the same day, however, Nick phones her and tells her to disregard this note, as it was written when his other self was in control. Pat nevertheless convinces him that they should meet as planned.

20. "The Assignation": Nick, as his evil self, meets her and unsuccessfully attempts to persuade her to fly with him, using the argument that if she calls the police to resist force, she will be harming the man she loves. But Pat manages to slip away safely.

21. "A Question of Synapses": When she confides her meeting with Nick to Dr. Horker, he suggests that she persuade Nick to submit to psychoanalysis. While they are talking, Nick, his normal self, drives up in his car.

22. "Doctor and Devil": Nick has come to tell Pat he is leaving her permanently for their mutual benefit, but is persuaded to stay and answer Dr. Horker's questions. He reveals that he has known of his split personality since childhood, but that up until lately he has always been able to triumph over its inclinations. Dr. Horker asks him to return later for further psychoanalysis.

23. "Hope": Pat is now all but convinced that Nick is supernaturally possessed. The next day she receives a poem from Nick beautifully expressing his grief over their forced separation.

24. "Psychoanalysis": Nicholas again reports to Dr. Horker, and reveals many more facts concerning his background. Later that day, as she mounts the steps to her door, Pat is startled by the sound of footsteps behind her. She wheels about---and there is Nick, again "possessed."

25. "The Demon Lover": Nick knocks her unconscious and kidnaps her, taking her to his home.

26. "The Depths": Here he makes malevolent, passionate love to her, and succeeds finally in undressing her despite her vigorous struggles.

27. "Two in Hell": As Pat lies exhausted, awaiting the inevitable, she sees Nick struggling with himself. Abruptly the evil self loses control, and for the time being Pat is safe. She realizes, however, that as she really loves him she cannot leave him to solitary mental torture. She pledges her love, offering to marry him despite everything, and help him overcome his madness.

28. "The Moon": Nick philosophizes upon the "heaven and hell" relationship of the earth and its satellite. He sees poison as the only answer to their dilemma, and proposes a suicide pact. Pat agrees. Nick prepares the poison and Pat raises her portion to her lips. There is a knock at the door.

29. "Hairbreadth Horker": At the door is Dr. Horker, who has managed to trace Nick down. Pat refuses to leave, however, insisting that he attempt to solve Nick's problem then and there. To make Nick more susceptible to questioning Dr. Horker injects him with scopolamine. This results in releasing the evil side of Nick's personality for the first time in Dr. Horker's presence.

30. "The Demon Free": Nick's alter-ego is determined to continue his near-successful advances on Patricia. And when Dr. Horker tries to stop him he finds that Nick possesses hypnotic powers which render him powerless. Under Nick's gaze he helplessly drops his drawn gun on the floor. Dr. Horker is then tied by Pat at Nick's orders to a nearby chair. However, he still attempts to cause distraction by shouting, and so Nick therefore turns to throw a blanket over his head. But as he does so Pat snatches up the fallen gun, and, aiming for his head, squeezes the trigger just as he comes toward her. Then she faints as she sees Nick fall and lie motionless in a pool of blood.

31. "The Demon Slain": Nick is taken to a hospital, where it is dis-

covered that the bullet is lodged in the base of his skull, near the cerebellum. Dr. Horker, who is still an able surgeon, decides to operate.

32. (misnumbered "33" in the manuscript) "The Nature of Devils": The operation reveals the secret. In the skull is found a tiny second brain, as big as a man's fist, highly convoluted and with well developed motor nerves, joined also to Nick's spinal cord. Thus his dual personality is explained. Dr. Horker successfully removes this second brain, which was pierced by the bullet, and Nick is soon on the road to good health and mental normalcy. The story ends on a happy note as he and Patricia decide to marry, and there seems little doubt that Dr. Horker and Patricia's mother will follow their example.

In The Mad Brain Stanley G. Weinbaum was anticipating the popularity of today's psychological thrillers in book, screen and radio; but at the time of its writing he either was not a competent enough writer to put his theme across or else, totally lacking an opportunity for making ludicrous, alien creatures and situations seem serious, entertaining and real, he was entirely out of his element and never had a chance for proper presentation or expression. The smooth opening, so typical of the author's work, and the flashes of fine writing that were encountered at first conspired to conceal a very obvious fact which became more an more pronounced as the story proceeded---and that fact was amateurishness. It was impossible to escape the conclusion that The Mad Brain was one of Weinbaum's earliest attempts to write in the fantasy field. Its vernacular dated it as of the late twenties or early thirties. (Later, Julius Schwartz, Weinbaum's literary agent, corroborated this impression, informing me that the story was the first science-fiction Weinbaum had written.)

The initial transfiguration of Nicholas Devine is vividly told, and one momentarily loses himself in the story, with the style relegated to its proper place as a vehicle---but this is almost the last time, for thenceforward Weinbaum plods on laboriously, weighed down by 60,000 words to convey a plot capable of sustaining effectively no more than 10,000.

Characterization, usually one of the author's strongest points, is very poor throughout. The big, heavy, human Dr. Horker is The Mad Brain's most convincing character, the only one that can be visualized without effort. The others are merely puppets in what was intended to be a fantastic tale of powerful emotional conflict. Patricia Lane, it might be noted, somehow reminds the reader of Patricia Burlingame of the "Parasite Planet" trilogy.

Weinbaum's characteristic mastery of dialogue, apparent in most of his later efforts, is largely lacking here. Spoken lines frequently seem wooden, forced and unnatural. This probably is partly responsible for the love-interest motif seeming slightly overdone, at times outrightly "corny." Again, this belies the author's later naturalness in his love scenes.

The opening of The Mad Brain is entirely typical, showing the leading characters starting a discussion of a scientific or philosophical theory. Here, Nicholas tells Patricia his concept of "pure horror". In "The Circle of Zero" it was Professor de Neant's dissertation on the laws of chance; in "Pygmalion's Spectacles" we had Ludvig's extrapolation on reality and illusion; in all three of the Van Manderpootz tales the openings were similar lines of reasoning spiced with a background of scientific authenticity. This is a favorite Weinbaum device.

A most significant feature of this novel was the several poems which were included. This poetry was fitted into the story pattern, sometimes adroitly, sometimes clumsily. It frequently showed promise, however, and it leads me to hazard the opinion that Weinbaum was potentially a good writer of verse---especially if one takes these poems in conjunction with others he has written, notably "The Last Martian." That the reader of this article may judge for himself the value of this conjecture, I am quoting below two examples of the verse to be found in The Mad Brain:

In no far country's silent ways
Shall I forget one little thing---
The soft intentness of your gaze
The sweetness of your murmuring
Your generously tender praise,
The words just hinted by a breath---
In no far country's silent ways
Unless that country's name be Death---

---oOo---

Long miles above cloud-bank and blast,
And many miles above the sea,
I watch you rise majestically
Feeling your chilly light at last---
Cold beauty in the way you cast
Split silver fragments on the waves,
As if this planet's life were past,
And all men peaceful in their graves.

In the chapter "Gateway to Hell" Weinbaum mentions The Necronomicon, the fabulous book invented by the late H. P. Lovecraft. This is interesting not only because it serves to date The Mad Brain (if we discount the possibility of the reference having been added to the ms. at a later revision---which I am inclined to doubt) but also because it shows Weinbaum to have been familiar with Lovecraft's writings, for he used the reference in the fashion of a man who knows fully its history and potentialities. In this connection it might be noted that Lovecraft was also familiar with the writings of Weinbaum. Critics who make constant use of quotations from Lovecraft's "Supernatural Horror in Literature" to endorse various supernatural works, by implication accepting his judgments as gospel, yet who deprecate the literary quality of Weinbaum's writings, will have to change their views, label Lovecraft as fallible, or expose themselves to the charge of hypocrisy---for Lovecraft had this to say of Stanley G. Weinbaum:

> His stories were first called to my attention last spring [1935] and I saw with pleasure that someone had at last escaped the sickening hackneyedness in which 99.99% of all pulp interplanetary stuff is engulfed. Here, I rejoiced, was someone who could think of another planet in terms of something besides anthropomorphic kings and beautiful princesses and battles of space ships and ray-guns and attacks from the hairy sub men from the "dark side" or the "polar cap" region, etc., etc....somehow he had the imagination to envisage wholly alien situations and psychologies and entities, to devise consistent events from wholly alien motives and to refrain from cheap dramatics in which almost all adventure-pulpists wallow. Now and then a touch of the seemingly trite would appear---but before long it would become obvious that the author had introduced it merely to satirise it. The light touch did not detract from the interest of the tales---and genuine suspense was secured without the catch-penny tricks of the majority. The tales of Mars, I think, were Weinbaum's best---those in which that curiously sympathetic character "Tweel" figure.

(This is quoted from a letter from Lovecraft to Julius Schwartz; it was published

(concluded on page 85)

SLOANE, William Milligan, III (1906-)

The Edge of Running Water

New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939. 295pp. 20cm. $2½.
Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939. 295pp. 20cm. $2½.
London: Methuen, 1940. 277pp. 19cm. 8/3.
London: Methuen, 1941. 277pp. 19cm. 4/-.
New York: World Publishing Co. ("Tower Books"), 1945. 255pp. 19cm. 49¢.

Further information: This novel first appeared as a serial in Black Mask magazine. It was also reprinted in Two Complete Detective Books magazine for Summer, 1940.

Synoptic review: The Edge of Running Water is William Sloane's second and, thus far, final contribution to the literature of the supernatural. It is both unfortunate and disappointing that this novel does not perpetuate the excellence of his fine initial effort, To Walk the Night; it is decidedly a letdown from that unusual and original book.

The Edge of Running Water is concerned with the story of one Richard Sayles, a young university professor, who arrives at Barsham Bay, Maine, in answer to a telegram sent him by a former friend and teacher, Julian Blair. Sayles immediately finds himself involved in a mystery which grows more complex at every step. Blair, an electrophysicist of genius, assisted by Mrs. Walters, a strong-willed and indomitable medium, claims that he has constructed a machine (a plethora of pseudo-scientific jargon is introduced to explain its nature) which will enable him to communicate with his---Blair's---deceased wife. Sayles is understandably skeptical at first. Gradually, however, events disprove his belief that the scientist has been driven to insanity by obsession with his wife's death and that, on the contrary, he has retained all his former brilliancy and has indeed succeeded in penetrating the realm of the dead. Elora Marcy, the housekeeper, is killed when Mrs. Walters tampers with the mechanism. Humming noises produced by the operation of Blair's invention inspire fear in their implication of strange forces pressing on our world. Cool currents of air on windless days carry to Sayles (and to Anne, Blair's sister-in-law, with whom he has fallen in love) the dread of the unknown. The story proceeds into and through detailed investigation of the housekeeper's death and at length approaches a climax. Blair, endangered by the neighboring townspeople and the local police, takes the final step which he believes will restore his wife to him. The house is destroyed, Blair disappears, and everybody present is properly horrified by weird manifestations which presumably issue from "the land beyond."

Mr. Sloane writes in a smoothly flowing style that makes for very easy reading. The emphasis is placed on rapid narrative movement; other factors are subordinated to a large extent. On this basis The Edge of Running Water may be perused with interest and enjoyment. However, the author does make an attempt to produce an atmosphere conducive to a tale of horror and suspense---and it is in this that the book reveals its major weakness. Mr. Sloane either did not take the trouble to iron out the false notes and casual, almost flippant passages, or else he overshot his mark in attempting to achieve effective use of understatement. That the latter is probably the case is seen when one considers his undoubted ability in this direction (e.g., the excellent balance reached in describing the alien force in To Walk the Night). For the workings of the machine and the terrors attendant receive too little description; and that given is too matter-of-fact. The reader is not offered enough to chew on, and he soon loses interest in the story as a tale of supernatural horror. He is forced to depend on whatever other virtues the book may possess. Luckily there are enough compensations to warrant reading. As a member of the school of detective-mystery stories that specializes in mixing a touch of the supernatural into its plots, it

stands reasonably near the head of the class. That it does not quite make the grade as superior supernatural literature is lamentable. One hopes that Mr. Sloane will resume writing and present us with the work of which he is so clearly capable.

---Maynard Solomon.

---oOo---

Tips on Tales

by
A. Langley Searles

Helen Beauclerk's Love of the Foolish Angel (1929): When Satan and his followers, rebelling against celestial authority, were defeated and thrown over the jasper ramparts of Heaven into outer space, there was one among them guiltless of premeditated wrong. This is Tamael, who innocently accepted from Satan a golden feather and wore it on the fatal day, not knowing that it was the badge displayed by the revolutionaries. Tamael is very unhappy in Hell, unsustained by either hatred or thoughts of revenge, for he is gentle, meek and rather guileless of disposition. Finally Satan himself, impatient at his weepings, packs him off to Earth; and he finds himself in Syria during the latter days of the Roman Empire. The Love of the Foolish Angel is concerned with Tamael's adventures there, particularly those involving the beautiful girl Basilea, whom he comes to love. How he almost wins her, loses because he is a demon and not a mortal man, and of what transpires as a result, is told in a prose as warmly lyrical as it is rich and sensitive. The authoress gains a "willing suspension of disbelief" almost immediately, and the reader's attention is firmly held through the concluding chapters, in which Tamael's problems are deftly solved. The novel is well plotted; incident follows incident with a surety that bespeaks careful planning. Characterization is acutely real, and presents a logical subtlety that is a pleasure to encounter. More, a frontispiece and numerous decorations by the well-known artist Edmund Dulac add to the book's already commendable quality. All in all, this writer can find little but praise for Helen Beauclerk's work. If The Love of the Foolish Angel is not a minor classic in the fantasy field it certainly is little short of one, and in any event unquestionably deserving of attention from all followers of the genre who have not as yet read it.

Elswyth Thane's Tryst (1939): Novels about people returning from the dead are by no means unusual, and this one differs from the mediocre norm by virtue of possessing a little more readability and somewhat more believable characters. Despite being cast on a modern plane, it still exhibits all the sentiment usually associated with feminine authors' ghostly visitants, this being made less noticable by a few flashes of genuine humor, some almost incredible naivité, and occasional passages of outrightly good writing. Insofar as plot is concerned, Tryst is vaguely reminiscent of Mildred Cram's shorter Forever (1935), but unfortunately none of the latter's bad features have been rejected in expansion of its basic idea. Somehow, though, the work does seem to hold the reader's interest; and if you happen on a copy, you might be curious enough to speculate on precisely why.

Keble Howard's Peculiar Major (1919): This story somehow never quite "clicks." From the outset, when Major Aubrey Cloudsdale tells of being given by a Turkish priest a strange, jewelled ring which has the power of making its wearer invisible it always falls short of being convincingly real. Cloudsdale himself, the only character of consequence, is never truly believable---probably because Mr. Howard was unable to decide whether he should be primarily an intelligent army officer, a not-too-alert victim of mysterious circumstances, or an outright buffoon. Instead, he is given all three roles to play alternately, and it takes but a few chapters for the reader to discern that the major has forgotten most of the

(continued on page 85)

Rotation for Better Crops of Fantasy

by
Henry Kuttner

When I speak of science-fiction, I mean fantasy too. I've never seen any point in the sharp division some fans make between the two, but that may be because my approach isn't coldly rational and scientific. I suppose the science-fiction story is the one that may come true, and the fantasy never could. But there are plenty of the former that I'm darned sure will never be realized, and my feeling is that the story's the thing. The prime consideration is: is this a good yarn? If it is, I'll accept an ectoplasmic ghost as easily as a robot, suspending critical judgement for the duration of the tale. Both Stribling's "Green Splotches" and Lovecraft's "Colour out of Space" were fine, for my chips, and I've always liked "The Haunters and the Haunted"---which could, in fact, be rewritten and rationalized into science-fiction. What I do dislike are those who criticize scientific flaws in a story, and are totally and regrettably lacking in any sort of genuine literary critical sense---I mean for characterization, atmosphere, dramatic value, and plain good writing.

But I won't argue with them. They're certainly entitled to their standard of values, even though it isn't mine. But far too often a story may be credible scientifically and utterly incredible as far as the characters go. I must, I regret, admit that I've written some of those stinkers myself in the past.

However---it suddenly occurs to me that writing and scientific agriculture have a great deal in common. Remembering the exceptionally good fantasies that have been written and analyzing the circumstances, I worked out a few general ideas that seem pretty accurate. Casting about for a simile, I thought of crop-rotation, fertilizing the soil, climate, irrigation and Luther Burbank.

It applies to all kinds of writing, but I'm primarily interested in fantasy as a fan and as a writer. There are not many writers qualified to turn out fantasy, and not all of these maintain a regularly high standard. I happen to like fantasy. I enjoy writing it. But there are dozens of types of fantasy, and sometimes I'll go completely stale on one type and be unable to turn out anything worth reading. Then, if I'm smart, I'll try another type.

That's crop-rotation. Fertilizing and irrigation---well, a hopper can turn out only what's fed into it, and a writer should be a receiving set, keeping himself tuned to practically everything. Everything he likes, I'll stipulate. There's no use shutting yourself up in an ivory tower and regurgitating wordage; after awhile the well runs dry. But a receiving set can be tuned to many wavelengths, and receives various kinds of programs. People. Inventions. Accidents. Social problems. The silhouette of seaweed on a rising wave. The sound of a jet plane overhead. All stuff for the hopper---eventually, selectively, it'll be used.

Any smart writer knows that. Most of them know about crop-rotation, too. I write not only fantasy, but adventure, mystery, detective, humorous and other kinds of yarns. Generally speaking, I write a story because I enjoy that story at the time. I may get in a streak of wanting to knock out several yarns ---let's say science-fiction type A. Then the soil is used up, and I'll have to plant a different crop. So I'll switch to type B. A may be objective, cool and logical. B may be a romanticized version of legend. C may be---well, anything. There are a hundred different kinds of fantasy, and you write a better story if you rotate the crops, and put in the right kind of crop at the right time.

I've talked in terms of writing because that's what I'm most familiar with. But I think the general idea applies. The top-notch stories have been written when the magazines rotated their crops by changing formula. It's common editorial practice to stick to a formula that's successful and has become popular, though that doesn't apply to fantasy magazines as much as to love pulps or Westerns. Yet at one time Astounding, shortly after Street and Smith bought it, went in for the super-super story so much that some rather silly yarns were published after awhile. But until the formula soured some fine ones were written!

It isn't the editor who makes the policy, either. It's the writer.

Robert Heinlein started a new trend in Astounding. Further back, Weinbaum did the same thing for the whole field. And, at the time, those stories were decidedly off-trail. Yet they were bought and became popular.

Literary courses---those generally useless things---argue gravely that you must first master the general policy of a magazine and then try to write as closely as possible to it. Hew to the line, in other words. And that's pure hogwash. Naturally editors will balk at a story about incest or miscegenation or anything that violates a taboo and might get the magazine banned from the mails or by women's clubs---but a small dose of common sense is enough to tell the writer what to avoid. Good taste will do that. There may be such a thing as formula writing---but you don't get good stories that way.

It's the off-trail story that starts trends. And the editors are not afraid of such yarns. Leo Margolies, Alden Norton, John Campbell and Whitehead won't turn down a tale simply because it's off-trail. They'll reject it fast enough if it's a poor story. But that's another matter entirely. You're more apt to have a poor story if you try to hew to the line and turn out formula junk that simply isn't either convincing or interesting.

If you want to make the rebuttal that formula stories are published---sure. They are. Because the editors can't get enough better stories that aren't formula. An excellent off-trail story would be jumped at by any editor in the field, provided it didn't violate any obvious taboos.

The best fantasies seem to be written when the crops are rotated and the writer, like Luther Burbank, experiments. If he just wants to make money, then to heck with it. But if he's also interested in writing good yarns, he'll loosen the reins a bit and write something he really feels like writing. I could be wrong---but it works that way for me. And if you'll check back over the past twenty years, you'll find that crop-rotation brings out some fine stories. Somebody has to start each trend. It'll be somebody who isn't trying to turn out formula---somebody who just sits down and writes what he feels like writing. If he knows how to write in the first place, he'll sell his yarn easily---and start another trend.

I'm looking forward to that new trend.

---oOo---

Weinbaum's Unpublished Novel, The Mad Brain---concluded from page 81

in the latter's article "Private Papers of a Science Fictioneer," in the September, 1940 issue of Stardust.)

It is because I agree with Lovecraft's summation of Weinbaum's talents that I have felt it incumbent on myself to be coldly critical of any Weinbaum work that is below par. The majority of the criticisms of The Mad Brain voiced in this article were embodied in a personal letter to Mrs. Kay. I recommended that she allow the work to be published if a buyer could be found. The important thing was that any publisher be restrained from presenting the novel as "Weinbaum's greatest novel." The only honest way to launch it is as a collector's item, directed to the many faithful fans of the author who, regardless of the inferior quality of The Mad Brain, would never be happy until they had a chance to read it.

---oOo---

Tips on Tales---concluded from page 83

cues for each. Thus the author has squandered most of the potentialities inherent in the plot, producing situations fraught either with imbecility or boredom, which are all too frequently bolstered by coincidence. There are admittedly a few interesting moments in the book, and even one or two truly humorous ones; but for the most part The Peculiar Major remains an unimaginative and stodgy novel.

The Immortal Storm

A History of Science-Fiction Fandom

by
Sam Moskowitz

(part 8)

XXI
The New Order Progresses

Dozens of new fan magazine titles were being announced everywhere. The Scientifictionist, Luna, Future Science Stories, Fantasia, Tales of Time and Other Dimensions, The Anti-Time Traveller, Cosmic Call and Hackneyed Tales were among these. Some titles thus forecasted---like Science Adventure Stories and Fantascience Digest---did not appear for a year or more; others never appeared at at all. The general impression received from reading such advertisements was that of a fan field weighed down by its own publications. In actuality, however, fan magazines were pitifully few and far between, and most of those which did appear seldom survived more than one or two issues. Everywhere the lament was the same: lack of material. Fans had the time and energy (though not always the ability) to publish, but they had nothing to print. Most professional authors refused to contribute to hektographed or mimeographed periodicals. The older fans contacted, probably unwilling to associate with a more juvenile element, evinced no interest. Of the newcomers and publishers themselves, very few had the ability or background to help---and some who tried were roundly criticized for their amateurishness, when they should have been praised for their willingness to try in the face of their acknowledged handicaps.

Of the comparative newcomers, Moskowitz was one of the few to produce any number of articles and short stories for the fan press, and he too possessed noticable deficiences in spelling and grammar---though still managing to string words together well enough to sound natural when read aloud. (And it should be understood that most of the fan editors of that time not only printed material with all grammatical errors intact, but were unconscious of the fact that any of these were present. More, a large enough percentage of the readers were incapable of recognizing them to make a generally harmonious fan world.)

In the October, 1937 issue of Helios there appeared an announcement of an organization titled Unofficial Society for the Aid of Fan Magazines in Need of Material---later known as Moskowitz's Manuscript Bureau. Moskowitz made a plea for all readers to send him their articles and stories; he would act as central distributor and guarantee that all contributions would be placed with some fan editor. Those who needed material were invited to apply for help. In this way he hoped that not only would existent writings be placed for rapid publication, but that more material would be coaxed from indifferent potential producers.

Editors needed no second invitation. With a swoop they descended upon the Manuscript Bureau. Moskowitz' hopes for incoming material were not realized, however, and situations of supply and demand frequently reached the point where Moskowitz was forced to sit down and grind out literally dozens of articles, using numerous pen names, in order to keep up with requests. As a result, he was jeered at by some as a "fan hack," but his efforts in behalf of others was selfless enough to gain for him from the fan editors, the keystones of the field, a resevoir of good will that later was to serve him well. Moreover, he was beginning to build for himself a following of readers that, partly or wholly, saw eye to eye with the philosophy of fandom and science-fiction that his articles outlined.

Olon F. Wiggins, meanwhile, had been plodding along methodically with his Science Fiction Fan. Though receiving scarcely a word of encouragement and the barest modicum of contributions, he still adhered to a monthly schedule of appearance with determined stubbornness. When Morris Dollens had to give up illustrating the magazine Wiggins was in sore straits indeed. James Taurasi, who

had been contributing crude back-cover illustrations was rushed in to fill the gap. Taurasi's art work was atrocious. The only saving graces it possessed were good underlying ideas and a superior lay-out---the latter quality traceable to ability acquired through his position as an architectural draftsman. Taurasi also was responsible for some science-fiction scarcely superior to his art.

The manuscript bureau beckoned enticingly to Wiggins. There was only one hitch: Wiggins had refused to carry Moskowitz as a Science Fiction Fan subscriber because of the latter's inability to contribute the one dollar ante required at that time. What is more, he had written Moskowitz his succinct opinion of fans "too cheap" to send in dollar subscriptions. But now he swallowed his pride and virtually begged for material, either from the bureau or from Moskowitz himself. To Moskowitz it would have been inexcusable to supply material to a fan magazine as yet unborn and at the same time refuse it to The Science Fiction Fan, which had proved its sincere desire to continue publication and had maintained a regular schedule despite almost insurmountable difficulties. And so, personalities having been put aside, Moskowitz sent Wiggins a contribution from the manuscript bureau.

This action amounted to a mutual rapprochement. To Wiggins it meant more than a regular supply of material: for other fans who had been antagonized by the dollar-or-nothing subscription policy he had instituted likewise began to forget their enmity and lend their aid. And finally Wiggins announced that he would issue his magazine weekly for a month in order to close the four-month gap between printed and hektographed issues that had occurred some time back. James and Mary Rogers were engaged as illustrators for the Fan, and all this improvement presaged the leading role that the magazine was to play in early 1938.

It should not be thought that all fandom was in the throes of turbulent mutation. The editors of the two leading printed periodicals in the field---The Amateur Correspondent and The Science Fiction Critic---were launching worthwhile publishing projects.

Corwin Stickney decided upon receipt of the news of Lovecraft's death in 1937 that he would like to publish a lasting memorial to the man's greatness. This was a not unexpected gesture, for he was a great admirer of Lovecraft; and he had dedicated an issue of his Correspondent to the man, including his portrait by Finlay (a remarkable likeness despite the fact that Finlay had never seen his subject), Lovecraft's own "Notes on the Writing of Weird Fiction," and "The Sage of College Street," a personal appraisal by E. Hoffman Price. Now he decided to issue a small brochure of Lovecraft's select poetry in a limited edition, distributing it free to new subscribers of The Amateur Correspondent and to regular ones sending in renewals. This brochure, printed on high quality paper and enclosed in a leatherette cover, was titled simply H. P. L. The Finlay portrait previously mentioned was used as a frontispiece. There was an introduction by Stickney himself and eight of Lovecraft's poems were included: "In a Suquestered Graveyard Where Once Poe Walked," "The Wood," "Homecoming," "Nostalgia," "Night Gaunts," "The Dweller," "Harbour Whistles" and "Astrophobos."

But there was a totally unexpected aftermath to this brochure. August W. Derleth had, shortly after Lovecraft's death, acquired rights to most of the latter's works. Stickney had no knowledge of this; and, since Lovecraft's kindness to fan editors had been strikingly evident by his numerous contributions to fan magazines, and since all of the above poems had been reprinted from these sources, Stickney had felt that he needed no more than the fan editors' permission to reprint them. (In point of fact he did not require even that: most fan magazines appearing in those days were not copyrighted, and consequently anything appearing in them automatically reverted to the domain of the free press. Since all of Lovecraft's poems in fan journals were printed with his permission, they too were in this category---as, indeed, they are today.) Derleth, in all probability, was not aware of these poems' prior publication. In any event, he promptly threatened to sue Stickney for publishing Lovecraft's material without his permission. Nonplussed, Stickney explained that he could scarcely have had any ulterior motives for producing the brochure: only twenty-five copies had been prepared, and these had been distributed gratis; the whole action had been merely

out of respect to a great author's memory. Derleth took no further action, but this incident left many fans who possessed material of Lovecraft, along with permission from him to publish it, wondering what their position was.

Such a one was John J. Weird, editor of Fantasmagoria, a little magazine emanating from Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Weird had given Stickney permission to reprint "Astrophobos" from his magazine, and had on hand for future appearance Lovecraft's poem, "The Tree." So infrequent was Fantasmagoria's schedule of publication, however, that Weird Tales beat him to printing of the work. (This writer will quietly sidestep the question of who---if anybody---is the legal owner of the copyright of this poem, leaving it for someone more versed in law than he to decide.) Fantasmagoria, it might be remarked, though at times poorly hektographed, contained in the space of its five issues much excellent material by H. P. Lovecraft, Robert Bloch, Henry Kuttner, Hazel Heald, William Lumley, Manly Wade Wellman, Emil Petaja, Robert W. Lowndes, Duane W. Rimel, Clark Ashton Smith, Bernard A. Dwyer, J. Harvey Haggard and others. Its illustrations by Baltadonis were exceptionally fine. But, like other literary publications in the field at this time, it enjoyed small success.

In addition to producing his Science Fiction Critic, Claire P. Beck had founded "The Futile Press" for publishing small books and pamphlets. The first of these was Hammer and Tongs, which reprinted a series of articles of the same title from the pages of earlier Critics. It was neatly printed, bound in boards and sold for twenty-five cents. Though very few copies were sold, its distribution, considering the emaciated aspect of the field, was fairly good. Beck followed this effort with Nero and other Poems by Clark Ashton Smith; this was identical in typography, binding and price with the first volume. In addition to ten poems it contained a long appreciation of Smith and on separate sheets "The Outlanders," which Smith later sold to Weird Tales. The volume was, moreover, autographed by Smith. Later in 1938 the Futile Press issued Lovecraft's Common Place Book, which later appeared in the Arkham House volume Beyond the Wall of Sleep. It was a neat little volume produced in an edition limited to seventy-five copies; it sold for a dollar. Like Beck's other productions, it sold poorly.

Another high quality periodical of the time was Supramundane Stories, published by the Canadian fan Nils H. Frome. Frome illustrated it by hand, and although he possessed no little artistic ability he showed a disquieting dislike for uniformity by illustrating every copy of the magazine differently. For the particular fan collector it would have been necessary to obtain every copy of the periodical in existence in order to own all variations. In his second number, however, Frome hektographed the illustrations. He also presented a selection of superior material, including Lovecraft's "Notes on the Writing of Weird Fiction," poems by Clark Ashton Smith, and other prose by J. Harvey Haggard, Duane W. Rimel, Lionel Dilbeck and others. The Lovecraft contribution was not challenged by Derleth; apparently, then, he had no intention of questioning prior permission of Lovecraft himself. (That he saw this particular number is probable, as it contained a news item he had submitted.) When Supramundane Stories collapsed "What the Moon Brings" by Lovecraft was sent by Frome to Taurasi, who published it in the widely-advertised third anniversary issue of his Cosmic Tales, again without provoking challenge from Derleth.

Thus we see that while fandom in late 1937 possessed little interest in the more literary amateur publications, a sufficient number of tough-minded editors were attempting---not with marked success---to buck the trend. Such titles as The Science Fiction Critic, The Amateur Correspondent, Fantasmagoria and Supramundane Stories showed this tendancy, as did occasional experimental issues of others, such as Helios.

We have seen that both the Los Angeles SFL chapter and the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society had survived the changes undergone by Wonder Stories. It has also been shown that in England this change actually resulted at first in additional SFL chapters. How had the fans of New York fared during this reorganization? The first attempt to produce a new group there was made by Frederick Pohl, who announced the new Brooklyn chapter. The doings of this group (composed of Pohl, Kubilus, Dockweiler and a host of Pohl's pen names) was erroneously re-

ported at length in the SFL column of Wonder Stories (October, 1937); all these activities were figments of Pohl's imagination, as was The Cosmic Call, announced as a forthcoming publication. Apparently Pohl derived much amusement from this hoax. It was left to Taurasi to form the first serious SFL chapter. Prominent also in building up the group was Richard Wilson, who later succeeded in drawing new fan Jack Gillespie into the circle. Robert G. Thompson and Abraham Oshinsky were among those present at the first meeting in July, 1937. Though small in numbers, the Flushing SFL made up in enthusiasm what it lacked in experience. Older fans in the New York area, however, paid little attention to its meetings. A short time later the Washington Heights SFL was formed. This group is of interest only in that it contributed to active fandom two members: Chester Fein and Cyril Kornbluth.

Forming itself slightly previous to these last two groups was a Minneapolis SFL chapter under the leadership of Oliver E. Saari and Douglas Blakely. Prominent authors such as Donald Wandrei and Carl Jacobi attended meetings, but the geographical isolation of the group from other fans conspired to keep it from forming any strong link with others.

XXII
The Fantasy Amateur Press Association

As has been noted, Donald A. Wollheim was the leading fan during the first six months of 1937. And when fandom felt its foundations swept away, naturally all looked to Wollheim for leadership. His first answer was that American fandom had failed, and that all should look to Britain. To those who still wished to publish Wollheim set the example by issuing a series of envelope-sized mimeographed leaflets which he nicknamed "mijimags." These carried such titles The Science Fiction Bard, The Mentator, Voice of the Gostak and others. Some of these were the work of Pohl. Here, said Wollheim, was a cheap form of publishing---"magazines" which could be contributed free to correspondents.

But fans did not take to this idea. Some of them, viewing the large numbers of titles, imagined the field to be as flourishing as ever; they recognized no general collapse, but nevertheless could not help feeling the lack of integration in the field. Wishing to do something about it, they attempted to publish as before, but were met by the obstacles we have already noted and could not understand why conditions were not alleviated.

Then Wollheim, bowing to the desire of fandom to continue on its own, came forward with a second idea, not only much better than his first but of such surprising foresight as almost to fail because the youthful fans were not ready for it. For some time such fans as Wollheim, Shepard and Bloomer had been active in amateur press associations. Indeed, in the fall of 1936 Wollheim had actually discussed with Miller and Blish the possibilities of organizing such a group in the fan field; nothing came of it at that time, however. In mid-1937 he not only proposed the idea as a solution to fandom's problems, but began immediately to work on the material factors needed for its success. Through correspondence and personal contact he convinced such rising leaders of fandom as Baltadonis and Taurasi of the efficacy of his new idea. Then the leading fans of the time received a sample mailing from "The Fantasy Amateur Press Association." This mailing consisted of a number of magazines; outside of Solar, the work of Taurasi, all of them had been published by Wollheim and his friends.

Wollheim's article "Why the Fantasy Amateur Press Association?" in the first issue of The FAPA Fan was a masterpiece of simple, concise, patient explanation. He explained that there were about two dozen titles in the field at the time, appearing with great irregularity. The average circulation of a fan magazine was between twenty and thirty-five. Those surpassing that range were rare exceptions. Was a circulation this low worth the effort expended? The answer, contended Wollheim, was No. Obviously, then, the only gain was the publisher's personal satisfaction.

He told of the amateur press groups, whose members could publish at any

intervals they wished magazines of any shape, size, form or description. The distribution of these publications was emphasized: all members produced enough copies of their magazine to cover the entire membership. These were sent to a mailing manager, who mailed to members at stated intervals a copy of each magazine so contributed. In this way every editor and author could be certain that his work received the widest possible distribution. Wollheim emphasized the money, time and energy saved by eliminating separate postings of magazines by individual editors to subscribers. There were no deadlines to meet, no subscription lists to keep up by advertising, and so on; no fan need be obliged to continue printing a magazine he was no longer interested in because of outstanding subscriptions or any other reason. Concluded Wollheim:

> We limited FAPA to fifty members because hekto magazines cannot exceed that. We limit officers to one term because we do not want this organization to remain in the hands of any single person or group. We limit membership to active fans because we do not want any dead wood. All members must be willing and able to do their share to hold up the fan magazine standard. The number of eligibles exceeds fifty. We believe that we will reach our limit in short order.

Had the fans been a bit older, a bit more mature, they might have realized that here was at least a temporary salvation for them. Active fans then numbered less than fifty---the Fantasy Amateur Press Association could have included <u>every</u> fan of importance. Wollheim's statements anent the circulations of fan magazines were unquestionably true. Thus it might have been expected that fans would flock to the organization immediately, and enter into its activities with enthusiasm. But they did not.

Despite Wollheim's crystal-clear explanation the fans did not understand the FAPA. They did not understand it because nothing of comparable nature had ever entered the sphere of their interests before. The idea of giving fan magazines away was regarded as almost fantastic; "We lose money as it is!" they protested. Some, because of past fracases, distrusted Wollheim himself, mistakenly feeling that the organization belonged to him alone just as a fan magazine belonged to its publisher. In vain Wollheim pointed to the democratic constitution, providing for annual elections, which had been sent out with the mailing. Fans didn't understand that either. There had been plenty of fraternity but little democracy in previous organizations. They remembered the ISA where one group was always ahead of another in its interpretations of the constitution.

Then why didn't the association fail? The answer to that is twofold: Firstly, as we have previously noted, fans of that day were fanatic collectors of their own publications; FAPA magazines could be obtained in only one way---by joining FAPA. And so many joined, probably feeling that for fifty cents they were probably striking a bargain. Secondly, Wollheim virtually begged fans to join. He campaigned continually with all of his plentiful energy. As a result, many fans "did him a favor" and joined. But most of the joiners soon became intrigued after a while, and wondered how they ever could have considered staying out. And still later many fans confined most or all of their activity to FAPA, thus contributing much to the progress and welfare of the group. But that is another story.

By December of 1937 the roster of the association included Rosenblum, Wollheim, Michel, Carnell, Pohl, Kyle, Schwartz, Lowndes, McPhail, Speer, Osheroff, Thompson, Taurasi, Wilson, Wiggins, Baltadonis, Madle, Moskowitz, "Vodoso" (the name under which a Los Angeles group received mailings), Thomas Whiteside and H. C. Koenig. As yet probably no one dreamed that FAPA would amount to much more than a passing fad. For FAPA did not become science-fiction fandom; it simply became another facet of the whole field. Fans continued to publish their own subscription magazines, and contributed worthless little sheets to FAPA. Fandom did not recognize a solution to its problems when it was offered; it continued to work out a salvation in the traditional, if fumbling, fashion.

Perhaps it is fortunate, in the long run, that the Fantasy Amateur Press Association did not achieve its aim of becoming fandom itself. For this would have doomed fans to a cramped and isolated sphere, an obscure unit which might well have stagnated and died for lack of new blood. As an integral part of fandom, however, it continued to remain virile throughout its life.

XXIII
The Third Convention and Michelism

The medium of fast news dispensation in 1937 was first class mail. And some of the most exciting news carried that year emanated from Philadelphia when with thrilling suddenness PSFS members began to tell their correspondents of the convention that the society was planning for that October. Rumors of possible cancellations ran rife, and it was not until a few days before the scheduled date that circulars announcing that it was to take place on October 31st were mailed out. These told interested fans to write Baltadonis for information (which there was simply insufficient time to do) and neglected even to name the meeting-hall. Optimistic out-of-towners simply headed Pennsylvaniaward, trusting to luck. Unquestionably poor handling such as this cut down attendance.

In the background, meanwhile, an event of great future significance had taken place. William Sykora, thought out of fandom forever, the man who had decried the science-fiction fan as hopeless, had unexpectedly attended a meeting of Taurasi's Flushing SFL chapter and been voted into membership. At this same meeting it had been decided to change the name of the group to the Queens Science Fiction League.

Sykora left for Philadelphia on the evening of October 29th. There was much speculation in the Wollheim camp when this, as well as Sykora's return to fandom, was learned. What were the significances of these moves? Did the man hope to swing the Philadelphia group into line with some scheme he had by utilizing his day's advantage in speaking to them? It was all quite mysterious.

All other fans in the New York area (save Mario Racic, Jr., who had taken an earlier train) departed for the convention on the morning of the 31st. They comprised Schwartz, Wollheim, Burg, Burford, Taurasi, Wilson, Pohl, Michel, Gillespie, Thompson, Dockweiler, Landberg, Kyle, Van Houten, Duncan and Moskowitz. On the train Moskowitz and Taurasi met for the first time, and a strong friendship developed between the two immediately, for both saw eye to eye on many points of fan interest. At Philadelphia the group was met by Sykora, Madle and Train, who were to act as their guides.

To add to the conventioneers' troubles, it became necessary at the last moment to find a suitable meeting-place. (It had originally been planned to hold the meeting in a spacious room in the rear of Baltadonis' father's tavern---but suddenly-remembered city ordinance forbidding this, new quarters had to be located.) While frantic efforts in this direction were under way, fans congregated at Baltadonis' home and began to fraternize with earlier arrivals. It should perhaps be emphasized at this point that fans in 1937 were not meeting in order to solve any problems that might be vexing the field. If these happened to be cleared up, well and good; but the prime reason for attending a convention was to meet and talk with other kindred personalities. Indeed, the very concept of a convention was at that time so unusual as to make the gathering together of any group for the purpose of talking about science-fiction an eminently satisfactory end in itself.

Baltadonis had hektographed a special convention booklet for the occasion, and the fashion in which fans began to solicit one another's autographs like high school seniors was incredible. Madle had managed to complete the first issue of the long-awaited Fantascience Digest for the occasion. His grandiose plans for having the magazine professionally printed had at the last minute been dropped, but the resulting hektographed publication that resulted was definitely above average. Almost every fan had brought along some fan magazines of his own to sell, and the bargainers were setting up shop everywhere.

But amid all the hilarity of talking, shouting, buying and selling one

sombre face persisted. One fan drifted aimlessly through the gathered groups, finding common ground nowhere. That fan was William Sykora. If he had hoped to win the Philadelphia group over to some plan of action (possibly the resurrection of the ISA) it was obvious that he had failed. He searched the faces of those present penetratingly, as if seeking allies, and seemed to find little solace in what he read in them.

In one corner of the room Sam Moskowitz had set up business with an entire shoe-box full of fan magazines. Sykora edged forward, examined a few, and proceeded to question the big, seventeen-year-old Newark fan. In Moskowitz' replies there was none of the coldness he had found elsewhere. Between sales Sykora engrossed Moskowitz deeper and deeper into conversation. When the selling was over, the conversation still continued. Moskowitz suggested that Newark would be a better site for a convention than Philadelphia, and Sykora was urging him to sponsor one, even offering to back the event financially. By the time the conversations had been concluded Moskowitz was considering this proposal half-seriously, and the first link had been forged in a friendship that was to be of paramount interest to fandom.

Milton A. Rothman, the chairman, finally opened the convention at 2:37 P. M. with a welcome to the attendees and the introduction of secretary Baltadonis. (Conover, who was to have held this post, was not present.) The minutes of the preceeding convention were read, and then Rothman plunged into his talk "Literature in Science-Fiction." He held that the future of science-fiction rested upon fans' recognizing that certain stories---such as McClary's Rebirth---contained all the essentials of good literature. He concluded with an invitation to others to air their views on the subject.

The guest of honor was R. V. Happel, associate editor of Astounding Stories magazine; he was the most important professional present, and most fans were doing their utmost to give as good an impression of themselves (and therefore of fandom as a whole) as possible. Happel spiked rumors to the effect that Astounding was losing circulation. Indeed, he revealed that it had been the only one in the Street and Smith chain to show a gain in 1937. He spoke of the new editor John W. Campbell, Jr., and of his intention to maintain and better standards set by the previous editor, F. Orlin Tremaine. Campbell had written a talk for the occasion, and this was read by proxy.

Julius Schwartz of Fantasy Magazine fame was next introduced. He electrified the gathering by announcing that Thrilling Wonder Stories would soon be joined by a companion science-fiction magazine, possible a quarterly.

Then drama was enacted. The next scheduled speaker was John B. Michel. When called upon, Wollheim arose in his place and asked that he be allowed to present the speech, since Michel suffered from an impediment of speech which made public speaking difficult. No objection was raised. It was obvious from Wollheim's manner that something unusual was afoot. There was an almost defiant tone to his voice as he began to read. Before he had gone very far fans were startled to hear:

> The Science Fiction Age, as we have known it during the past few years is over. Definitely over and done with. Dead, gentlemen, of intellectual bankruptcy.

How often was that phrase to ring out, again and again!

> In a few words let me put forth my opinion on what we are doing. My opinion is that we are baloney bending, throwing the bull, indulging in dull flights of fancy, tossing barrels of rhodomontade all over the place.

That, too, was to be heard many times more. How is your rhodomontade today? The older opinion of Wollheim that science-fiction had got nowhere, that it was in a hopeless rut, that it had neither aim nor purpose was repeated. Those present were told that although they possessed imagination and ability superior to

that of the average man they were satisfied to do little with it. Simply discussing science-fiction was a senseless routine. Science-fiction must have a purpose. Science-fiction must help lift humanity from the morass of stupidity in which it had become imbedded.

As the speech progressed many of the younger fans lapsed into a mental coma because of their inability to make head or tail out of it. To some it seemed that an unwarranted amount of abuse was being flung at their hobby and indirectly at themselves---but this they felt must be endured because Wollheim was an important fan and crossing him might mean personal extinction as far as science-fiction fandom was concerned. But the older fans present strained for the meaning and implication of every word. They knew the talk was leading up to something. But what? Finally the revelation came---

> and how sick we are at the base of this dull, unsatisfying world, this stupid, asininely organized system of ours which demands that a man brutalize and cynicize himself for the possession of a few dollars in a savage, barbarous, and utterly boring struggle to exist.
>
> Communism!

In 1937 the press of America had made "Communist" and "Red" things to be feared even above Fascism. These were the labels all too frequently applied to liberals who wished to better their status, who asked for the right to live like respectable human beings without having their spirits broken on the yoke of WPA, CCC and "relief." Despite this, there were those present intelligent enough to realize that because a man had ideas of a leftist nature he was not automatically a fiend. But that was not the issue. To most attendees reading and discussing science-fiction was merely a hobby, a diversion. They felt that if organizations for world betterment were to be formed, they should be formed separately, outside of science-fiction. And they probably had less respect for Michel and Wollheim for attempting to disguise cleverly their injection of communistic ideas into fandom than would they have had for open admission, advocation and recruiting for the party. And thus the true issue was not what ideology the majority favored, but rather simply "should there be politics in science-fiction?".

Michel's speech ended in this fashion:

> Therefore: Be it moved that this, the Third Eastern Science-Fiction Convention, shall place itself on record as opposing all forces leading to barbarism, the advancement of pseudo-sciences and militaristic ideologies, and shall further resolve that science fiction should by nature stand for all forces working for a more unified world, a more Utopian existence, the application of science to human happiness, and a saner outlook on life.

Such a Utopian resolution seemed harmless enough, being worded in such a way as to make it difficult to reject. But when discussion was called for plenty of it was to be had. The author Lloyd A. Eshbach was vehemently against what he plainly called "the introduction of politics into science-fiction." William Perlman, a Baltimore fan considerably older than most of those present, attempted to moderate extreme views by saying that although the ideas expressed in the talk (which was later printed under the title Mutation or Death) were "wonderfully and idealistically expressed, the world was not yet ready for such action." Wollheim and some of his friends of course supported the speech on all points. Finally Sykora entered into the discussion and managed to sidetrack the issue, so that controversy was soon centered on "the advisability of a world state." And there it remained permanently mired.

It has been stated by other writers that elaborate plans had been laid by Wollheim and Michel to insure acceptance of this resolution. This has been

stated because Wollheim's inner circle of friends---which included Pohl, Kyle, Dockweiler and others---was supposed to have voted en masse for the resolution on previous instruction. Opinion has also been expressed that the speech actually was written by Wollheim and accredited to Michel as a matter of strategy. Your historian does not agree with either of these views. The style of Mutation or Death is definitely Michel's. It is the fiery, awake-the-future-is-upon-us type of style that he has utilized on so many other occasions. The idea of "Michelism" (as the movement embodying these ideas later came to be known) is also Michel's for he was the first to express such ideas (cf. his article "Look to the Stars!" in a late 1936 International Observer). Wollheim has admitted being indoctrinated by Michel's ideas, besides. And Michel is known to have been the first of the clique to join the Young Communist League. Generally Michel's influence has been sadly underrated, mainly because he let his friends do the bulk of the talking and the writing.

Scarcely noted was the fact that Kyle, one of the Wollheim inner circle, harangued at great length against the Michel speech. Dockweiler and Pohl may, peculiarly enough, never have voted on the resolution at all, since both were inebriated during the proceedings, and out of the room much of the time. Ignored by fan writers also was the fact that although the Michelistic resolution was defeated by a vote of twelve to eight (with many taking neither side), both Moskowitz and Taurasi voted for it! This was not an acceptance or an understanding of its ideas on their part. They were among the younger fans bored by the talk and scarcely understanding or caring what motion was on the floor. Probably others present voted with a similar lack of knowledge.

In later written reviews of the convention Wollheim asserted that for the only concrete proposal for the betterment of science-fiction advanced there to be voted down so thoughtlessly was a stinging slap in the face for all fans. But if it was thought that this defeat disposed of Michelism, this belief was wrong indeed.

XXIV
The Aftermath

It was a strange paradox that a convention that took place for sheer exhiliration should have been followed by a singular resurgence of life in the turgid mass of the field. It was all the more unusual when one recalls that all conferences and conventions have been notorious for the sorry slump in activity that followed in their wake. Perhaps all that fandom needed in late 1937 was an assurance that genuine interest still endured, that all had not been swept away with the old order.

Cosmic Tales, The Science Fiction Collector, Fantasmagoria, The Science Fiction Fan, Helios, The Science Fiction Critic, The Amateur Correspondent---all of these continued to appear, consistently enlarging, consistently improving in content and interest. These publications comprised the very backbone of the field. If they were not printed they were hektographed---for the hektographing era was now in full flower. The consequent flavor and atmosphere of the field was intriguing. The personality of this new fandom was well defined.

Fantascience Digest and the PSFS News continued to appear from Philadelphia. The Fantasy Amateur Press Association was growing steadily to a point where president Wollheim asked for a discontinuance of sample mailings. From the Queens SFL chapter now came its official organ, Jeddara.

To the latter club Moskowitz paid a visit when such intercity travelling was still infrequent. At this meeting he renewed acquaintanceship with Sykora, who again broached the matter of a Newark convention. Moskowitz asked him point-blank precisely how much capital he was willing to risk on such an affair. "One hundred dollars," replied Sykora, and offered to put the pledge in writing. "It's a deal," said Moskowitz; and there remained little question now that a major science-fiction event was now in the offing for 1938. That the convention, when finally held, never cost anything near that figure is irrelevant. If Sykora

had not agreed to advance a sizeable sum for its presentation, if he had not virtually called Moskowitz' bluff and pushed him to the brink, the convention might never have materialized. For it was an undeniable fact that Moskowitz was endowed with a degree of conservatism all out of proportion with his youth. In order to move him to long-term action it was necessary to convince him of the soundness of every part of the proposed plan. Once convinced that he was setting out on the right road, the zeal with which he pursued his object gave the erroneous impression of impulsive, inspired action. Actually the stubbornness with which he sometimes resisted progressive plans was enough to drive his friends to tears.

At this time two events of great importance occurred. The first of these was the appearance of what this writer recognizes as the first true weekly fan journal devoted to the dissemination of news. It was titled The Science Fiction News-Letter, and was the work of Richard Wilson, former editor of The Atom and Jeddara, and one of the brighter lights among the younger fans. This publication proved to be a banner achievement in his career. Its first issue was dated December 4, 1937, and though fans at first grumbled over paying five cents a copy for a single-sheeted journal, the value of a regularly-appearing weekly devoted exclusively to news soon became self-apparent. No one realized it then, but this news weekly began a slow but sure reduction in the volume of correspondence among fans. Of what use was it to write voluminous letters to a dozen fan editors when the News-Letter provided all the up-to-the-minute information about these notables in cheaper, less time-consuming and better integrated form? The day of bragging about one's two dozen correspondents was gone forever.

The second important event was the distribution of Imagination!, which was a poorly hektographed, twenty-paged journal replete with "streamlined" English, Esperanto, atrocious puns and no end of enthusiasm. This magazine is not important because it was the forerunner of the long-lived Voice of the Imagi-Nation. The true significance of Imagination! lay in the fact that it marked the entrance of the Los Angeles SFL chapter into the main stream of fandom. Through this publication, edited by T. Bruce Yerke and Forrest Ackerman, the world's largest fan club gave notice that it was now a factor to be reckoned with. No longer would it remain aloof, disdaining to do more than subscribe to a few fan journals. It was signalling its desire to mix with the Taurasis, Wollheims, Baltadonises, Wilsons and Moskowitzes that made up the vigorously growing fan world of early 1938. It meant that the field was again on a solid basis of near-unity, and that its appearance would henceforth attract new fans rather than repel them.

As 1937 drew to a close, a formerly quiescent fan of unusual ideas and abilities began to project himself more and more into public attention. This fan was Jack Speer, former member of the Oklahoma Scientifiction Association and collector extraordinary of fantasy comic-strips. Speer at first contented himself with producing articles about the collecting trend and about the appearance of a new school of fan writers headed by Lowndes and Moskowitz, which was presenting in its essays a pattern of fan philosophy. He modestly neglected to state that he himself was a leader in this field of fan analysis.

Inspired by the Gallup Poll, Speer founded what he termed The Oklahoma Institute of Private Opinion (usually referred to as the IPO), which was to find out general fan opinion on a number of subjects. Speer was initially interested in the average fan age (which turned out to be in the neighborhood of eighteen), but added other topics as the polls progressed. Ballots for these were mailed out with Wiggins' Science Fiction Fan, and were usually forty in number. Results of these polls were published in that magazine, and showed, among other things, that fans were against a national federation (by almost two to one); that their favorite professional magazine was Astounding Stories; that Wollheim was by far the "top" fan; and that The Science Fiction Fan was the most popular fan journal.

This last was due not only to Wiggins' magazine being the one in which the polls were conducted, but also to its generally high quality. Such features as the IPO, Wollheim's "Fanfarade" column, the improved art work and the regular

supply of articles both from the Moskowitz Manuscript Bureau and from unsolicited sources placed it high in fan esteem.

Initial returns in the poll for the "top" fan showed Moskowitz in second place, well behind Wollheim, and Baltadonis in third. Later votes completely altered this picture, sliding Moskowitz to fifth place, elevating Ackerman to the runner-up spot and giving Wiggins the fourth position, Baltadonis remaining in third. But between the publication of early and complete returns, however, a month intervened. This is mentioned because it was a period in which Moskowitz was psychologically regarded as the country's number two fan, and this was important in shaping his mental attitude during his feud with Wollheim.

For those who may be interested, complete files of the IPO polls may be found in 1938 issues of The Science Fiction Fan; in a special FAPA publication later issued by Wiggins; and in the May, 1944 number of Fantasy Times.

Wollheim was responsible for initiating yet another topic of fan interest in 1937. In the November-December issue of Cosmic Tales, in his column "Phantaflexion," he brought out a sharp attack against religion and fans who accepted it. (This was later reprinted in the first number of The Science Fiction Advance as "Science Fiction and Religion.") The next issue of Cosmic Tales contained an indignant reply from Chester Fein of the Washington Heights SFL chapter. Subsequently Wollheim answered this reply, quoting among other things figures compiled by H. P. Lovecraft on the subject which gave overwhelming support to the materialists. Somewhat surprisingly, the topic never became a bitter issue, and with the exception of one item that will shortly be mentioned was confined almost completely to Cosmic Tales. This was probably due to the fact that little opposition to the materialists was brought up, most fans either possessing already such an outlook themselves, or, lacking it, believing that religion was scarcely a subject that could be resolved satisfactorily by objective debate. McPhail as well as Fein broke with Wollheim on the matter, however, and it seems likely that later anti-Wollheim blocs were contributed to by others who still adhered to the religious principles taught them in their youth.

The one item mentioned in the paragraph above was "Anent Atheism and Stf.," an article published in the March, 1938 number of Imagination!. This bore the byline of "Erick Freyor" (a pseudonym for the California fan Frederick Shroyer), and in expressive style suggested that fans read science-fiction because they already were either agnostics or athiests. Shroyer felt that they were not true escapists, however, because they "realized" what they were doing when they lost themselves in fantastic literature. Religious adherents were labelled the worst type of escapists, since they believed what Shroyer termed the "mumbo-jumbo of the latter day witch-doctors."

One other event of importance should be mentioned here, an event whose genesis takes us back to a few weeks before the Philadelphia convention. At that time Roy A. Squires, who, it will be remembered, had assumed directorship of the Science Fiction Advancement Association upon the retirement of its former head, C. Hamilton Bloomer, turned the SFAA over to Raymond Van Houton, as he himself had been unable to accomplish anything after some months of trial. Van Houten had been a staunch supporter of the organization since its inception, had contributed liberally to the pages of its official organ Tesseract, and appeared from his published work to be a fan of better than average abilities. His cross was lack of funds and a previous aloofness from most of the fan field outside of the SFAA which left him with no circle of active friends on whom he could rely for aid. His sole helper was a fellow Paterson, New Jerseyite named Peter Duncan, whose vituperative articles in The Science Fiction Critic had earned for him the not necessarily complimentary appellation of "the Poison Pen of Paterson."

When Van Houten took over the SFAA it still had 78 members, but not all of them were subscribers to Tesseract. (This contradictory state of affairs was due to the fact that membership in the organization did not include distribution of its official organ, which was obtained separately.) Under Bloomer's ministra-

tions Tesseract had evolved into a neatly mimeographed magazine of high quality. But Van Houten, with disadvantages already mentioned and a hektograph run by inexperienced hands, produced issues of the magazine that compared sadly with its older ones. Its contents were still interesting and readable, but the typography could scarcely be expected to elicit enthusiasm. The lack of response that resulted was not surprising, and was reflected at first in Van Houten's ever more caustic editorial remarks. In a more positive effort to revive lagging interest, he then began printing a series of Duncan's articles, some under the latter's own name and some under the pseudonym of "Loki." He also carried on a one-man campaign to induce John W. Campbell, Jr., to publish a companion quarterly with Astounding Stories---which, incidentally, was unsuccessful. But by March, 1938, when four numbers had not awakened fan interest in Tesseract, Van Houten realized he could no longer carry on.

He then approached Moskowitz and urged him at least to aid the SFAA on a cooperative basis, if not take it over entirely. "You," he said, "have a large following in the field, many friends who would help you; large numbers of fans like what you write. With you behind it, the club could 'go places'." Moskowitz ridiculed the notion of having a fan following, and declined.

But Van Houten had obtained a more accurate perspective of Moskowitz' position in the field at that time than Moskowitz himself realized. Van Houten was well aware that in his manuscript bureau Moskowitz possessed a weapon for political maneuvering unequalled elsewhere in the field. Desperate fan editors would certainly think twice before antagonizing their bread and butter. And so, while the resurrection of the SFAA scarcely affected the course of fandom at all, its availability to Moskowitz on request was to become a vital factor, as will later be shown.

(to be continued)

---oOo---

STAPLEDON, William Olaf

Death into Life

London: Methuen & Co., 1946. vi-159pp. 19cm. 7/6.

Review: The keynote of this unusual work is sounded by an enigmatic comment of the author prefacing it, which states: "This Fantasy is not a Novel." The full intent of this cryptic statement does not make itself felt until after the second chapter, and not with real clarity until the conclusion has been reached.

The "novel" opens casually enough inside a bomber on the way to the accomplishment of what is to be its final mission. Other critics have attempted to make much of this opening from the standpoint of plot; this probably would distress the author considerably---primarily because it soon becomes apparent that Death into Life has no plot in the conventional sense of that term. Stapledon gives a detailed description of the bomber's crew and their psychological reactions; he feels they correspond to an average group of any seven people taken at random and placed in a nerve-racking situation. The thoughts of the crew, and of a moth which chance has symbolically imprisoned in the cabin with them are vividly delineated.

Following the first chapter, "Battle," which ends in the destruction of the bomber and its crew, comes a short selection entitled "First Interlude." The practice of following each chapter with an "interlude" is adhered to throughout the book. In these brief sections is to be found the meat of the work. In each one Stapledon condenses the action of the preceeding chapter into a relevant philosophy written not dryly, but with warm and sympathetic beauty. Otherwise, such interludes enter in no way at all into the development of the "action." The

initial one, "What is This Dying?", serves as an excellent illustration.

In the second chapter, "Ephemeral Spirits," the men's individual psyches unite to form the spirit of the bomber crew. Here the searching psychological study of human types is continued. The chapter's interlude, "The Heart of It," is one of the most beautiful in the book, and expounds a view not unlike that of John Dewey.

Other units merge with the spirit of the bomber crew, finally forming the spirit of man. In the next three chapters the spirit of man goes on to survey his past, consider his present position, and receive glimpses of his future. The past is reviewed from the broad standpoint of trends and movements (rather than isolated incidents) much in the manner of an interested observer who is impotent to alter events. The plights of the present are the deep, fundamental, psychological problems that confront the human race today, here again considered from the standpoint of broad trends. It is interesting to note that in the section where the future is considered Stapledon arrives at one entirely different from those outlined in his Darkness and the Light and Last and First Men trilogy. It is a bit more optimistic in some respects, also, but still is shrouded with that atmosphere of ultimate futility we have come to know so well.

Another of Stapledon's well-known traits, the Platonistic type of development, is to be found here. Much as in Starmaker, the small group gradually becomes more and more all-embracing, until finally the "Cosmos and Beyond" are reached---though only mistily and hazily. The mysticism found in Death into Life tends to impart more reality to the work than it did to Starmaker, however, where the attainment of the cosmic mind actually seemed too rational and lucid to be convincing.

Another of the interludes, "The Broken Toy," is deserving of special mention for its wonderful eloquence in proclaiming that happiness and accomplishment come not in contemplation or fear of the future, but rather through the performance of deeds of kindness and sympathy. This reviewer has read little prose where the use of contrast has been as effectively employed as here, where grandiosity and complexity have been as artfully blended with modesty and simplicity.

"Salvation" is the solo chapter which does not continue the "action" of the story. Rather, it develops the philosophy which has been appearing. In a different manner, but to much the same end as Plato's "Symposium," the author describes and glorifies nothing more unusual than human love.

For his finale Stapledon has chosen to return to the present, and pose all the hopes and fears, the optimisms and pessimisms, that confront the diverse peoples of this world today. These afterthoughts provide neither solution nor remedial philosophy, but merely resolve the questions and problems into logical terms, and cite the difficulties that lie in the way of their solution.

The concluding interlude, "Parenthood," is deserving of special place; for, if it is possible to say that it is a philosophy on the rest of the philosophy without being too cryptic, this would summarize its place very well. Much of this intent can be seen from its concluding words:

> So it is with the world. With bated breath each generation fears for its successor. Yet the world goes on; belying equally the forebodings of the old and the hopes of the young, flowering ever with unforseen disaster and with strange glory.

Here in a few brief sentences are condensed the main elements of the book---the passive fatalism, the mystic awe of the cosmic spirit, the emotional romanticism.

Death into Life presents a more thoughtful, more avowedly mystical Stapledon than we have previously encountered in fiction; but he is as adept a story-teller as ever. Thus, anyone willing to give this work the careful perusal it deserves will find that ample stimulation rewards his effort.

---Richard Witter.

Chaos

by
Thyril L. Ladd

Tales of chaos range in theme from utter destruction of the Earth to the breakdown of civilization. The causes may be wars, plagues or cosmic disasters; but, no matter which variant the particular author may have chosen for his story, the idea has for the reader a sort of horrified fascination---implying as it does that all he knows and all with which he is familiar may suddenly be swept away. Let us review a few examples.

Utter destruction of this globe is, perhaps, somewhat rarer in fiction (save in the pulp magazines) than the more common theme of civilization destroyed. But the world's end is vividly portrayed in the well known When Worlds Collide (1933) of Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie. This novel, perhaps better than all others, makes actually real the approach of doom and its final horrible realization. We live with the characters through the hectic days preceeding the event; thrill with them to the hope that construction of a space-ship, which is to carry a few humans to another planet, will be completed in time; and witness, with these chosen few, the terrible collision that results in the destruction of the Earth. This title proved popular enough to provoke a sequel, After Worlds Collide (1934), that tells of the survivors' adventures on the new planet.

Appearing in magazine form, but never as a book---in 1903, I believe---was a sensationally excellent visualization of a similar occurrence. Its title is The End of the World, and it was written by Professor Simon Newcomb. Scientists, warned by astronomers, view with dismay the approach of a dark star which it is believed will have disastrous results on this planet. One group seals itself behind steel doors in a cavern to escape the end...and does, in fact, emerge therefrom and live for a short time---long enough to witness their final doom. This tale is illustrated in particularly effective fashion: one picture shows people viewing the approaching star from the steps of a public building; another, a city street in wild disorder, with a fire-engine drawn by panic-striken horses running amuck; a third shows the breaking in of the metal door of a sanctuary, with the stellar flames engulfing all, and the trapped people crouched in agonized terror; and yet another portrays two scientists staring aghast, yet thrilled, at the horrible landscape on Earth's last morning.

In the fine novel by Ella Scrymsour, The Perfect World (1922), again a party views the end of the Earth, this time from the air. Disaster in this tale is pictured as coming from internal explosion, the planet's crust being literally rent apart, and whole mountain chains collapsing upon one another. And, as in so many of these tales, here again one small group of people escapes doom and leaves the planet---this time travelling to faraway Jupiter.

Doubtless almost too well known to readers of fantasy to discuss is Camille Flammarion's Omega (1894). Flammarion handles his subject in the scholarly fashion expected of such a savant, and views life as dying out because of the ultimate lack of water. His story is painted on a broad canvas, and shows how man through the centuries has fought off the inevitable end. In his final years great, glass-enclosed cities were erected as protection from the moistureless atmosphere, wherein hive, surrounded by all that Science can devise, the remnants of mankind. But the end is inescapable, and eventually a lifeless, deserted planet swings through space. Especially advised is the purchase of a copy of Omega containing more than eighty illustrations by French artists.

F. Wright Moxley also conceives of a lifeless planet, but his method of attaining this end is unique. One day there falls from the skies a peculiar red mist that seeps through walls, stone, brick, iron---everything. As suddenly and as inexplicably the red rain vanishes. It is considered a nine-days' wonder---nothing more---until the awful results become noticeable. Mankind has been rendered sterile, and the world awakes to the fact that the only humans there will

ever be are those actually living at that hour. We read of the gradual ageing and deterioration of the human race, until finally the last man sinks lifeless and the world is utterly empty. This remarkable tale is Red Snow (1930).

Victor Rousseau has written a lesser-known tale wherein a large chunk of Earth is broken off and set spinning in an independant orbit in space. It is hinted that this is all of the planet left habitable because of a cosmic collision of some sort, but the author is none too clear as regards such details. In any event, he spins an entertaining yarn about the people marooned on this planetary fragment who survived the disaster. The story is titled "World's End," and has never been granted appearance, so far as I can determine, other than in Argosy magazine, where it was published serially in 1933.

There are, of course, innumerable tales wherein the world's destruction is threatened and avoided. John Taine's Green Fire (1928), H. Rider Haggard's When the World Shook (1919), Harold Trevarthon's World D (1935) and Harvey Wickham's Jungle Terror (1920) are all novels of this nature, but since the actual event never materializes they fall outside the scope of this article.

Another, and more copiously employed, fictional theme involves the destruction of civilization. In such tales the author does not bring about the actual end of the world, or wipe out mankind completely, but is only interested in showing what would happen if all of man's works and his science were suddenly demolished. The peculiarly fascinating angle of such a plot lies in depicting the adventures of a few survivors.

Prominent among such, of course, is George Allan England's Darkness and Dawn (1914). This is probably one of the thickest fantastic fiction books extant, since it originally appeared serially as three separate novels which were left uncut. A young engineer and his stenographer awake in the highest office of Metropolitan Tower in New York City to find the great metropolis in ruins, and all mankind vanished. Their adventures, including a battle with savages and the exploration of other ruined cities, is probably one of the most ambitious themes ever successfully treated.

Two of Edgar Rice Burroughs' tales deal with similar happenings. His Moon Maid (1926) tells of man fighting back against invaders from another world who have destroyed his civilization and enslaved him. "Beyond 30," a novel which appeared only in All Around Magazine (February, 1916), tells of how the American continents, to avoid wars and international conflict, created a superior air and sea fleet---and then barred passage, in either direction, of longitude 30. Generations pass, and the fate of Europe, Asia and Africa is completely unknown. A young naval officer, caught in a bad storm, is then one day blown across the forbidden line. He finds that England is now a jungle roamed by tigers; and quickly is plunged into a series of exciting adventures there.

Herbert Best produced a fine variant of this general theme in his 25th Hour (1940). A dreadful plague wipes out almost all life in America after continual wars have accomplished almost the same thing in Europe. A girl and her brother, believing themselves the only people alive, cross the Atlantic in a boat from their West Indian island home. They find other humans in Europe---but they are cannibalistic savages; the brother is killed, and the girl forced to accompany his murderer. In the end, the two find a remnant of surviving culture in the far East. The novel is powerfully written and is a pleasure to read.

Jack London tells of civilization's downfall in his novel The Scarlet Plague (1915) through the lips of an ancient character who recalled the Great Disaster and also many legends of the past. The excellent line drawings present add much to the effectiveness of the story.

In The Lord of Life (1933) Neil Bell tells how the passengers on the U. S. Navy's greatest submarine, because it was on a trial run, escaped a disaster which destroyed all other life on the world's surface. Their attempts to set up life again in a deserted world are engrossingly told.

In an excellently literate fashion not too often found in fantasy fiction, R. C. Sherriff gives us a superb story in The Hopkins Manuscript (1939). A small body of men realizes that the orbit of the moon has become changed, and that slowly but surely the satellite is spiralling inward towards the earth. Collision is inevitable. The moon falls; many die; but, since some precautions had been made, many are saved. But the aftermath is ironic: the moon has fallen into the Atlantic Ocean, thus creating a land-bridge between the Old and New Worlds---and in the strife that develops for its possession nearly all of mankind is slain.

The late M. P. Shiel's Purple Cloud (1901) has always stood in the forefront of this type of tale. Here, a lone explorer returns from the Arctic to discover a deserted world, disease having wiped out the human race. Possibly nothing more powerful in literature has been written than the description of this lone man wandering through the deserted cities of Europe, and of his thoughts on these journeyings.

Very similar to The Purple Cloud is No Other Man (1940), by the poet Alfred Noyes. A man escapes from bondage in an enemy submarine, and swims ashore, only to discover that all have been killed by a new weapon of one of the warring nations. The novel becomes even more interesting when he finds, in a Paris museum, a woman's handbag, inside it a watch that is still ticking! Whereupon he promptly begins his succussful search for its owner.

Dorothy E. Stevenson manages to save some people from a world disaster by having them high above the Earth in an airplane at the moment doom strikes. They land in Scotland, and establish life in the abandoned world once more. This tale, A World in Spell (1939)---published in England a year earlier as The Empty World---is beautifully written, and is one no enthusiast should pass by.

One of my own outstanding favorites is Van Tassel Sutphen's great romance The Doomsman (1906), in the opening scene of which we find mankind living in stockades in a semi-primitive fashion. Not far away is the great city of Doom ---as New York is then known---, now in ruins and inhabited by cut-throats who are descended from the armed bands that roamed the country, murdering and looting, after the Great Disaster. The book is mainly devoted to the adventures of a bold stockader who enters Doom. Sutphen's novel is a masterpiece of its type, thrilling and absorbing throughout.

The popular author Stanley G. Weinbaum wrote of a broken civilization, after some great disaster, now falling under the sway of the "Immortals"---those who jealously guarded the scientific discovery of eternal life. The first, "The Black Flame," appeared only in magazine form (1939); while its sequel, paradoxically enough, was published first, in Dawn of Flame and Other Stories (1936), a memorial volume issued at the time of the author's death. Both are excellent examples of the writer's art.

The British author S. Fowler Wright has executed two superb novels on this general theme, Deluge (1927) and Dawn (1929). Each provides a different account of the same situation: an England almost totally ruined by a disastrous series of inexplicable floods.

In Thomas Calvert McClary's Rebirth (1945) the means to the end are unique. Civilization collapses because everybody suddenly forgets! The motorman allows his train to hurtle on to destruction because he has forgotten not only how to run it, but what it is; a man ascending a ladder falls because he cannot remember what climbing is, nor how to do it; a woman walks serenely forth from a bath, not only unaware of what clothes are but that she lacks them. Man has even forgotten how to eat and drink. He has retained his intelligence, however---and we read with delight of how this combines with necessity to teach him, gradually, how to live once more. This is a fine story: cleverly conceived, artfully executed.

There are, naturally, many others in the same genre. But as this account has had their introduction, not a definitive listing, as its purpose, the writer will conclude by wishing enjoyment to those who may peruse them.

The Birth of Art

by
A. Merritt

The Cave Man slept on his Rocky Lair,
Uneasily rested his Bill-of-Fare,
(He was neither Cleanly nor Debonair)
His wife was beginning to weary him;
She was learning to Cook and had slipped it on
Him with a fricasseed Glyptodon
And a hash of Megatherium.
Do you wonder now
That she was beginning to weary him?

The Cave Man rose from his Bed alone
(Within the Glyptodon made moan)
He seized his flint and his Ax of Stone
Primeval nightmare rode him;
Silurian spectres mocked his pain,
(The Megatherium nipped him again)
To the Walls of his cell he strode him.
With Flint and Ax
To his bare stone walls he strode him.

The Cave Man toiled in the Embers' glow---
(That was really all he could do, you know)
'Twas Night and the Nightmare made him go
To do else he completely lacked will;
His wife on her Carboniferous mat
Lay dreaming of trimming her Winter hat
With a wing of a Pterodactyl.
(A Primitive Rhyme)
A plume from a Pterodactyl.

The Cave Man worked with his Ax and Flint,
He pictured the Mastodon plain as Print
And the sinuous Tail of the sad Edont-
osaurus carved he freely;
He awoke at dawn to hear his Wife
Say "Land's Sake, Why it's almost Life-
Like. Did YOU do it really?
Well, Adam and Eve!
I must call the neighbors, really."

The Cave Man saw what his dreams had wrought,
And though not on record the things he thought
The Ages show that he thoroughly caught
The Somnambulistic Suggestion;
And thus on that Neolithic Morn
Art with the upper-case A was born
Of a Woman and Indigestion.
An Ancient Dame
And Original Indigestion.

The Cave Man aeons agone is dead,

But the Forces Twain that his Fingers led
(Springing to life in his Rocky Bed)
Still gather in the Last Trick;
And back of the Chisel, the Brush, the Pen,
Cause of the Highest Endeavor of Men
Is Pain, Cardiac or Gastric,
Just these---no more,
Pangs Cardiac and Gastric.

---oOo---

TODD, Ruthven

The Lost Traveller

London: The Grey Walls Press, 1943. 159pp. 19cm. 7/6.

Review: It must be evident to any reader of modern fiction that the allegory is coming to the fore. There may be many reasons for this---the tendency to shy away from "realistic" literature in a world where realism is often so unpleasant, the poetic beauty that the finest writers frequently infuse into their allegorical work, and perhaps the desire to have truth pointed out in parable form now that ordinary fiction has grown stale. The allegorical tendency in poetry and short stories is unmistakable; it is now sweeping into the novel. Rex Warner, who shows signs of being influenced by Kafka, has recently achieved remarkable success with Why Was I Killed? and now we have Ruthven Todd, better known as a poet, writing this short but compelling novel.

In brief outline, it tells of a man's transfer from his normal existence to another dimension, an unfamiliar land of nightmarish qualities, where he becomes more and more mad as he finds himself unable to make adjustments with the new way of life.

There are many things about the book that remind one of Rex Warner's Wild Goose Chase. The crazily lopsided world, the horror of uncertainty in surroundings where nothing happens as it should, the symbols that are obviously meant to represent something deeper than what they appear on the surface---these are all reminiscent, but Todd writes with a more lyrical tone than Warner. One feels a growing sense of oppression and futility in the face of unnatural obstacles that cannot be overcome.

In her review of The Lost Traveller for Horizon, Anna Kavan points out that the author has "intentionally or not, produced an ingenious symbolization of the back-to-the-womb complex." Certainly the refusal of Christopher to conform to regulations; his growing estrangement from Omar, his "better half" who believes in falling in with the social scheme; and his final pursuit of "an extinct bird" does, as Miss Kavan suggests, follow "the real life pattern of the introvert, who retreats into neurosis and suicide rather than adapt himself to the world."

This novel reminds one of L. Ron Hubbard's "Fear." Anyone who enjoyed that excellent fantasy will be bound to like Ruthven Todd's more restrained work.

---John F. Burke.

---oOo---

This-'n'-That---continued from page 76

originally collected circa 1680 and first published in 1740, These tales are as enduring as those of Anderson or Grimm. You'll find twenty-three stories, many

(continued on page 109)

Open House

(letters from our readers)

From "way down East" in Rockland, Maine, Norman Stanley writes:

Nitka's review of that Molnar book in Fantasy Commentator #13 brought to mind an interesting item that I can't recall ever having seen mentioned in the fan press. If you can obtain a copy of The Scientific American for March, 1929, you'll find therein a description, with photographs of scenes, of the fantastic play "Mima," which was adapted from Ferenc Molnar's "Red Mill." (The latter, incidentally, has nothing to do with Victor Herbert's operetta of the same name, as I was disappointed to find, years ago.) The scene of the play is laid in Hell, where Magister, one of the region's super-scientists, has labored for five hundred thousand years on the construction of a monstrous machine called the "psycho-corrupter." This is guaranteed to "transform the purest of souls into complete fiendishness in the space of one short hour." The machine constitutes the stage setting, which looks like the inner works of a battleship, with riveted armor, ponderous cylinders, pipes, valves, Geissler tubes and what not. There are two audiences to the drama---one the ticket-buying one, and the other consisting of the Devil and his retinue assembled to witness Magister's demonstration of his newly-created masterpiece. The inventor's fiendish crew search the earth with a huge telescope in quest of a suitably pure man on which to test the powers of the machine, and manage to find a perfect specimen, one Janos, a woodsman. In the meantime Magister, with colored lights and other pseudo-scientific gadgetry, brings to life his other creation, Mima. Mima is a robot in the form of a beautiful woman, and into her composition has gone the dregs of all sin. She of course functions precisely as Magister expected. At this point Magister's fiends enter with Janos, kidnapped from earth, and thrust him into the psycho-corrupter, from which he emerges in due course thoroughly depraved. Introduced to Mima, he proceeds to sin in every possible way, and Magister's triumph at the success of his work seems indeed complete. Triumph becomes disaster, however, when the corrupt Janos, who has determined to kill his temptress, forgets himself so far as to forgive her instead. At that, Hell is thrown into a tumult and the machine collapses into a heap of wreckage. Mima reverts to an immobile manikin, while Janos is returned to earth, after having experienced a lifetime in Hades in the space of an hour. The plot doesn't sound very profound, but the stagecraft, to judge from the photographs, must've been a sight to see.

We hear next from Lloyd A. Eshbach of the newly-organized Fantasy Press:

As you may already know, we've secured book rights to "Dawn of Flame" and "The Black Flame" of Stanley G. Weinbaum, and these are expected to appear under one cover. His "Mad Brain" is being considered for later use. Still later, I hope to bring out a Weinbaum collection of omnibus size---though that's a couple of years away.

E. E. Smith is going to write for Fantasy Press "First Lensman." This will feature the adventures of Virgil Samms (of Triplanetary) as the first wearer of the lens, and will connect that story with the Lensman series. Indeed, if these things go as they should---and initial response to our books indicates that they will---we'll publish the entire Lensman series, including the last one, "Boskonian War: Conclusion," which is now nearing completion. This latter novel will first be serialized in Astounding, it is assumed.

I've also been looking over two of John Taine's unpublished novels with an eye to requirements. Both are good; one, in fact, is a gem. If satisfactory arrangements can be concluded, readers may see some of Taine under the Fantasy Press imprint.

Dr. Smith was very pleased with our artist, A. J. Donnell; I hope the fans are, too.

Forgotten Creators of Ghosts

by
A. Langley Searles

VIII -- A. C. Benson

It is surprising that Arthur Christopher Benson, a well known writer of supernatural fiction of four decades back, should be utterly unknown today. A forgotten creator of ghosts indeed---he is mentioned neither in Scarborough's Supernatural in Modern English Fiction nor Lovecraft's Supernatural Horror in Literature, and most connoisseurs of the genre seem unfamiliar with his name.

Yet his Hill of Trouble (1903) was popular enough to be reprinted several times shortly after publication, and newspaper reviews had unqualified approval for the work. The Yorkshire Post, the Daily Telegraph and the London Times, for example, all were unstinting in their praise; and the latter periodical went so far as to compare the author's work with "Undine" and "Sintram," two recognized classics of the supernatural.

Not all of the stories in The Hill of Trouble are weird, but almost all of them can be classed either as such or as fantasy, although one or two---"The Red Camp" and "Brother Robert"---are purely medieval allegories, and consequently do not warrant our close attention. The title story tells of a vacationing college student's experiences in a western England village. The youth spends most of his time wandering about the countryside environs of the place, and on one of his rambles passes a solitary and apparently uninhabited hill. He is told by a rustic at a near-by farm that it is known as the Hill of Trouble, and that long ago it was the site of decadent pagan worship. For as long as can be remembered the place has had an evil reputation, and those who visit it usually meet with mysterious and violent deaths soon after. But the youth, undaunted, walks there the very next day. Upon the hill is an old man, who, after talking with him for a time, holds up a spherical polished stone, into which he bids the student look. And therein the youth sees three visions, in each of which he himself participates; the last of these shows

> ...something long and white, that glimmered faintly...he perceived that he was looking into the earth; and then with a sickly chill of fear he saw that the thing was indeed the body of a man, wrapped in grave-clothes from head to foot... the corpse seemed to shine with a faint light of its own--- and then he could see the wasted feet, and the thin legs and arms...and his own face....

The implication that these visions purport to represent events in his future life is inescapable. And, at three-year intervals, the first two are realized. With the time for the third approaching, he feels himself strangely drawn to the Hill of Trouble. He visits the spot again---but this is the last time, for he is found dead there shortly afterwards. This story is memorable for the sustained atmosphere of strangeness that pervades it, rather than for isolated portions of unusually effective writing.

Unlike "The Hill of Trouble" in this respect, however, is "The Grey Cat," one of the outstanding works in the volume. A knight and his household, including his wife and son Roderick, live in a remote valley of the Welsh hills. Roderick one day in his wanderings comes upon a strange, deserted lake, and is warned by his parents not to go near it again, as it has an evil name. By questioning in the district he learns that an alien creature, inimical to man, is reputed to dwell there. Roderick's parents are called away; and on the eve of their departure he dreams of the desolate lake and of a strange being emerging

from it. Thereafter he cannot resist the temptation to visit the spot each day. Once he awakens, after sleeping a short while at the water's edge, to discover a huge gray cat at his side. The cat follows him on part of the way back, and on each successive visit goes nearer home with the lad. On the night of his parents' return, it leaps to the window-sill and enters his bedroom. Roderick's sleep becomes fitful; he dreams of strange things, and cries aloud. Then, on All Souls' eve he is taken with sudden dizziness, and in the early hours of the morning he awakes to find the cat within his room. But its appearance has changed; no longer is it sleek, with smooth fur and affectionate mein, but gaunt and famished, its fur dishevelled and eyes gleaming horribly. But his mother enters the room; and, soon after, the family priest arrives; and after driving the beast off they watch until dawn at the boy's bedside. It is a fearful vigil, for in the room is an evil, creeping blackness that gathers itself together as though possessed of some horrible form of life. But as the first faint streaks of dawn appear, "the black form shrank and slipped aside, and seemed to fall on the ground; and outside there was a shrill and bitter cry that echoed horribly on the air...." In the half-light of breaking dawn the priest hastens to the accursed black lake,

> ...and there he saw a dreadful sight. In the water writhed large and luminous worms, that came sometimes to the surface, as though to breathe, and sank again....

Unhesitating, he draws forth from his garments a vessel, and pours its contents into the murky depths---

> But when the holy water touched the lake, there was a strange sight; for the bright worms quivered and fell to the depth of the pool; and a shiver passed over the surface, and the light went out like a flickering lamp. Then there came a foul yelling from the stones; and with a roar like thunder, rocks fell crashing from the face of the peak; and then all was still....

This theme of exorcism is at times encountered in other stories of the supernatural; "Father Meuron's Tale" (in Robert Hugh Benson's Mirror of Shalott) is an excellent example in point, and of course the idea has parallel in actuality, as Catholic theological writings will confirm. "The Grey Cat" is undoubtedly a powerfully fashioned tale, and deserves attention from all serious followers of the outré.

Veering into the region of occult mysticism are "Cerda" and "The Tomb of Heiri." In the latter the supernatural conversion of a native Briton, during the time of the Roman conquest of England, from barbaric pagan sacrificial customs is interestingly told; and the former tale relates of a miraculous visitation of the Christ child. "The Brothers" tells of a mystical metempsychosis, and "The Temple of Death" concerns the weirdly horrible adventures that befell a traveller in ancient Gaul within the dark rooms of a pagan temple.

Very interesting, especially in comparison with stories of similar theme, is "The Light of the Body." This relates the experiences of a man who, after being afflicted with a serious illness, finds himself able to see about everyone a kind of enveloping light, or aura, whose color and form change with the owners' thoughts. Thus he is able to read people's minds to a fair degree of exactitude. He can also, by using this faculty, judge their true characters. His adventures while in temporary possession of this abnormality are interestingly depicted by the author, although his tendency to accentuate morally corrective aspects of the phenomenon seems at times out of place. Connoisseurs will find in J. D. Beresford's "Misanthrope" (in his Nineteen Impressions) that a slightly different ocular derangement gives an individual nearly the same mind-reading

ability, though the ~~two~~ stories are quite dissimilar in motivation and development. Therefore it seems unlikely that Beresford is at all indebted to Benson for his plot. On a chronological basis, however, "The Light of the Body" appears to be the prototype for modern stories in the same vein.

While most of the tales in The Hill of Trouble may be read as allegories, two of them, "Linus" and "The Snake, the Leper, and the Grey Frost," are among those most obviously so constructed. No space will be devoted here to interpreting such "inner meanings", however, as this writer does not believe that they are relevant---unless openly intrusive---to the absolute artistic value of supernatural fiction; and it is from the standpoint of supernatural fiction that these stories are being discussed. "Linus" describes the soul of a man leaving his body to read the Book of Judgement; "The Snake, the Leper, and the Grey Frost" tells of a door in a tiny, forest-shrouded cottage that opens on a strange and faery land. Both are of but mild interest.

The finest episode in the book is undoubtedly "The Closed Window." Roland and Mark de Nort, cousins, live in an old and isolated English mansion. The tower there has a dark name, since Mark's grandfather, an evil and secretive man, had spent his last years there, dabbling in occult arts; and there also he had met his death, in a horrible way. Since that time the turret room has always been kept locked. But one day, lacking other occupation, the two cousins decide to visit it. They find simply a dusty cubicle, windowed on each of the four walls; one of the windows is shuttered and barred, and bears the Latin inscription claudit et nemo aperit ('he shutteth and none openeth'). There is an aura of strangeness about, and they are soon glad to leave. But some days later Mark, alone in the house, succumbs to an irresistible urge to revisit the place. Accompanied by his faithful dog, he ascends to the tower-room. Three of the windows look out on the green-forested landscape surrounding the mansion; on flinging open the shutters of the fourth, Mark peers through the leaden panes into obscurity.

> He drew back for a moment, but, unable to restrain his curiosity, wrenched the rusted casement open. But still all was dark without; and there came in a gusty wind from outside; it was as though something had passed him swiftly, and he heard the old hound utter a strangled howl...saw him spring to his feet with his hair bristling and his teeth bare....

The dog deserts the room in panic; and Mark, curbing his fear, turns back to the window.

> He looked out on a lonely dim hillside, covered with rocks and stones; the hill came up close to the window, so that he could have jumped down upon it, the wall below seeming to be built into the rocks. It was all dark and silent, like a clouded night, with a faint light coming from whence he could not see. ...a little below him some shape like a crouching man seemed to run and slip among the stones....

It is only with difficulty that he resists the impulse to leap out onto this strange land and re-bars the window. He hurriedly slips from the room, locking its door and throwing the key into the well. But one night several weeks later he is awakened by strange noises; and, on investigating, finds that Roland has forced the tower door and entered the forbidden room. There is a rope knotted about the casement bar---and one end of it disappears outward into a horrible liquid blackness, whence Mark hears some frightful tumult raging. Pale lights and vague cloudlike forms move about as he stares outside, and once a great hooded thing brushes his face. He draws in the rope, inch by painful inch, and at length pulls Roland, who had tied the far end about his waist, over the sill.

> ...then Mark looked up; at the window a few feet from him was

> a face, more horrible than he had supposed a human face, if it was human indeed, could be. It was deadly white, and hatred, a baffled rage, and a sort of devilish malignity glared from the white set eyes, and the drawn mouth....

But the faithful dog is at hand to prevent any invasion by alien beings of the outer darkness. Mark has the tower razed, and in time recovers from the harrowing events; but Roland to the end of his life is no better than a mindless idiot.

The device of a door or window opening onto an alien world is apparently a favorite device of A. C. Benson. Not only is it employed here, but also in "The Snake, the Leper and the Grey Frost" and in "Renatus," which will be noted later. It is interesting to recall that the motif was a popular one with Lovecraft, who used it in his "Music of Erich Zann" and other tales.

Benson's second collection of outré fiction is The Isles of Sunset (1904), a slimmer book of seven entries. (It was later combined with The Hill of Trouble to form the volume Paul the Minstrel (1912), where all Benson titles mentioned in this article may be found.) This book, unfortunately, does not equal the quality of its predecessor. It received, however, almost as wide press commendation when it was published.

Four of its stories may be quickly dismissed from our attention: "The Waving of the Sword," "Paul the Minstrel," "The Troth of the Sword" and the title tale---all these are medieval allegories, and the occasional touches of the supernatural they exhibit are incidental rather than of importance to their plots. Another, "Renatus," is little more than such, and is of interest only in connection with employing the device mentioned in the second paragraph above.

More refreshing than these is "The Slype House." This tells of a recluse's conjuring up dark forces of evil to which he almost succumbs. Divine intervention plucks him from disaster at the last moment, and as a result of the experience he forsakes his former heedless ways of life. Because he has squandered a fine plot on what is far too obviously a religious allegory, Benson has succeeded in robbing a potentially fine tale of much quality. Even though the conclusion does prove a let-down, however, early scenes in "The Slype House" still make it well worth perusal.

The outstanding tale in The Isles of Sunset is "Out of the Sea." Here, a small ship is wrecked just off a tiny British coastal village. Only one passenger reaches shore alive, and he is washed unconscious on the beach. There he is found by a man who, with the help of a son, robs him of the money in his coat and buries him alive in the sand. Not long after, the two are subjected to a horrible visitation---a hairy, goatlike creature with eyes of smoky yellow, that they frequently see out of the corner of their eyes, following them; and at the same time is noticed the smell of dank sea water tainted by an odor of dead corruption. Yet however they face about they can never see the thing face-on. The village priest visits their home, finding little; and later the son confesses to him his guilt in the crime, and is shriven. But his father is not saved, being foundlifeless on his bed the next morning, his dead face "strangely bruised and battered, as though it had been stamped upon by the hoofs of some beast." The son is no more troubled,

> ...but it is easier to raise up evil than to lay it; and there are those that say that to this day a man or a woman with an evil thought in their hearts may see on a certain evening in November, at the ebb of the tide, a goatlike thing wade in the water, snuffing at the sand, as though it sought but found not.

The most obvious literary fault possessed by these stories is their wordiness. Fine ideas are often all but choked by excess verbiage. Not unex-

pectedly, the "high points" of the tales suffer the most; and this is all the more to be pitied, for many are not only excellently contrived but even in their diluted form are most effective.

A. C. Benson's style is medievalistic. He admits this in the preface to his Paul the Minstrel:

> I chose, not deliberately but instinctively, the old romantic form for the setting of these tales, a semi-mediaeval atmosphere such as belongs to the literary epic; some of these stories are pure fantasy; but they all aim more or less directly at illustrating the stern necessity of moral choice....

Why should this be their aim? To answer that question we must consider their background. The stories in The Hill of Trouble and The Isles of Sunset were composed while the author was an Eton house-master, and he was accustomed to read them at informal gatherings of the boys there. Thus entertainment, while not always subservient to moral instruction, was usually mingled with it. And the effect on the artistic worth of the stories is noticeably deleterious.

In this connection it is interesting to compare the outlook of the Benson brothers as we see it reflected in their fiction, especially in their work in the supernatural field. With Edward Frederick Benson, the most materialistically (or, more properly, least religiously) inclined of the three, we see an open, direct style, one of a born story-teller; supernatural happenings occur, it might be said, in spite of religion. For Robert Hugh Benson, on the other hand, religion is a constant foil against the supernatural, one which is kept in hand at all times; yet his tales, too, are characterized by forthright presentation. Both writers' prose is keynoted by a surety of purpose---in one case, pure entertainment in a world where religion is an accepted factor; in the other, unmistakable proof not merely of religion's existence but of its necessity to the exclusion of all else. Arthur Christopher Benson steers an uneasy course between these two extremes. This is in a way surprising: he has decided on his purpose, moral instruction; and his vehicle, a medievalistic short story. Why should he hesitate? But he does hesitate. He vacillates, he temporizes (the corollary is verbosity), he cannot seem to make up his mind. The moral instruction is there, but shining out through it, often, is sheerly good writing. I do not mean to suggest that he is adopting a course against his will, but rather that, whatever his beliefs, he was more fitted by nature to write good short stories than clear allegories. Thus he seems never sure when to employ religion against the supernatural, constantly snatching up its foil only to cast it aside the next moment before use. Yet on the occasions when he does grasp it firmly and bring it into play at once he is eminently successful.

"The Grey Cat" and "The Closed Window" show the author's abilities more clearly than any other stories, and make us regret we have no more of his work like them. Perhaps they are in part responsible for the over-eulogistic reviews that greeted The Hill of Trouble and The Isles of Sunset. In any event, reconsideration shows that while Arthur C. Benson's art by no means equals that of the average capable writer's, it nevertheless is not deserving of oblivion; and his best work does not compare unfavorably with the more popular efforts of his illustrious brother, Edward Frederick.

---oOo---

This-'n'-That---concluded from page 103

of them by well known Weird Tales authors, in Tales of the Undead: Vampires and Visitants, edited and illustrated by Elinore Blaisdell (Crowell, $3½). And, although he has not seen the book, you editor suspects that Norman Corwin's Untit-

led and other Radio Dramas (Holt, $3) contains some fantasy, as did his previous volumes of radio plays. Yet another anthology of supernatural tales is with us: Prince of Darkness, edited by Jerrold Vernon (Westhouse, 8/6); this is of but average quality, however. Much better is Ray Bradbury's first collection of tales, Dark Carnival (Arkham, $3); it is a must for all serious collectors. No less than three omnibus volumes collecting various popular and lesser-known works of Robert Louis Stevenson have appeared; these naturally include a fair share of his fantasy production. They are: The Tales of Tusitala (Art & Educational Publishers, 8/6); Novels and Short Stories by Robert Louis Stevenson, selected and with an introduction by V. S. Pritchett (Duell, Sloane & Pierce, $3.95); and Selected Writings of Robert Louis Stevenson, edited with an introduction by Saxe Commins (Random House, $5), which gives you most for your money, having some 1140 pages.

Let us pause a moment to take a deep breath before we plunge in again ---though this time we shall stay nearer the surface. Here's a list of all novels which have appeared since the last Commentator. Fantasy Press (P.O.box 159, Reading, Pa.) has followed up its first offering, E. E. Smith's Spacehounds of IPC, with The Legion of Space by Jack Williamson, which has been revised and lengthened since its 1934 magazine appearance; the price is $3, and a bargain. A. M. Phillips' Mislaid Charm and a selection of the science-fiction short stories of George O. Smith are the first two titles scheduled by another new outfit, The Prime Press (Box 2019, Middle City Sta., Philadelphia 3, Pa.); priced at $3 each, the second volume mentioned is to be distributed in July. And finally, Trover Hall is offering Edwin M. Clinton, Jr.'s science-fiction novel Voyage in the Dark at the same figure.

New Fiction

Elsewhere, the old theme of catastrophe killing off all but a few people on this planet is resurrected in Robert Lewis Taylor's Adrift in a Boneyard (Doubleday, $2½); the author manages to do a good job of it, too. Add to Prime Press note: Phillips' Mislaid Charm, not the Smith title, is the initial release; price is $1¾---and it carries your editor's hearty recommendation. Francis Ashton's Breaking of the Seals (Dakers, 9/6) tells how a man is carried via trance to a past age when a smaller satellite collided with the Earth. Two stinkeroos by H. Kaner are noted in conclusion: People of the Twilight and The Sun Queen (Kaner, 8/6); people who have been crying for "the good old days" should read 'em---they'd stop. A pleasant anodyne for these is A. L. Gould's fantasy, An Airplane in the Arabian Nights (Laurie, 8/6). And if a novel about a hidden race inside a mountain appeals to you, try The Sealed Entrance, by C. Voss-Bark (Chapman & Hall, 8/6). And last of all there's F. Horace Rose's Maniac's Dream (Duckworth, 8/6), a mad scientist and atomic bomb combination that is distinctly depressing.

Three more names there are to be filed with those who will write fantasy no more. The most famous is that of Matthew Phipps Shiel, who died at the age of 82 on February 17th last. Least known was Maurice Hugi, the British fantasy author known chiefly for his efforts in magazines of the genre. And latest to pass was Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, one of Switzerland's best known contemporary novelists, at the age of 69; he will be remembered for his recent End of All Men (1944).

Necrology

Of the current crop of reprints---which will be listed in more detail in next issue's "This-'n'-That" column---the most interesting is that of Mrs. J. H. Riddell's Weird Stories (Home & Van Thal, 8/6), which has been out of print since the late nineteenth century. This neglected collection is a must for every connoisseur of the genre. The same company announces future publication of yet another old and rare item: Rhoda Broughton's Twilight Stories.

Surprised to see Fantasy Commentator so soon? The fact is, your editor felt that if if this issue was got out sooner, your and his vacation would be a little less crowded. So, don't expect #16 to pop through your mail-slot until, say, some time in October. But it'll be worth waiting for---because something really special is scheduled for that issue. Until then, have a pleasant time!

---A.L.S.