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, Darrell C. Richardson, Richard Witter

Vol. II, No. 5 ---oOo--- Winter 1948

C O N T E N T S

EDITORIAL:

This-'n'-That	A. Langley Searles	148

ARTICLES:

This Is About Ray Cummings	Thyril L. Ladd	149
Fantasy in All-American Fiction	William H. Evans	152
Little Known Fantasy - I	Darrell C. Richardson	154
Unwritten Books	David H. Keller, M. D.	155
Something About Vampires	George T. Wetzel	168
The Immortal Storm (part 10)	Sam Moskowitz	171

VERSE:

A Wine of Wizardry	George Sterling	160
(with four illustrations by Joseph Krucher)		

REGULAR FEATURES:

Book Reviews:		
Stapledon's Flames	Sam Moskowitz	157
Cabell's There Were Two Pirates	Paul Spencer	184
Tips on Tales	A. Langley Searles	169

This is the seventeenth number of Fantasy Commentator, an amateur, non-profit periodical of limited circulation appearing at quarterly intervals. Subscription rates: 25¢ per copy, five copies 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

As usual, editorializing is passed by in the interest of listing new books that are of interest to fantasy readers. We begin with non-fiction. Most interesting of the recent arrivals is Of Worlds Beyond: the Science of Science-Fiction Writing, edited by Lloyd A. Eshbach (Fantasy Press, $2); Mssrs. Campbell, Taine, van Vogt, Heinlein, de Camp and Smith have contributed to this symposium, which is one of the most entertaining this writer has read in a long time. Another recommended purchase is Witchcraft in England by Christina Hole (Scribners, $3); circumstantial excerpts from records and the suitably sinister illustrations of Mervyn Peake combine well indeed. On the other hand, Harry E. Wedeck's Mortal Hunger (Sheridan, $2½) is a very poor biography of fantasy author Lafcadio Hearn---steer clear of it! The Story of Hypnotism by Robert W. Marks (Prentice-Hall, $3) covers its topic fairly well from Mesmer to Freud. Two books deal with a rediscovered fantasy writer: Kafka's Prayer by Paul Goodman (Vanguard, $3), an analysis of his writings; and Franz Kafka: a Biography by Max Brod (Schocken, $3) is an American edition of a 1937 issue newly translated from the German by G. Humphreys Roberts. J.O. Bailey's long-awaited Pilgrims through Space and Time: Trends and Patterns in Scientific and Utopian Fiction (Argus, $5) has finally appeared; it is a must for every connoisseur in the field. J. B. Rhine's newest volume, The Reach of the Mind (Sloane, $3½) has mainly to do with the mind's ability to project itself into the future, but psychokinesis, telepathy and clairvoyance are dealt with as well. Nowhere Was Somewhere (Univ. of North Carolina Press, $2½) is Arthur E. Morgan's unusual attempt to link More's Utopia with an ancient Peruvian civilization; interesting and often striking parallels are drawn.

Non-Fiction

Appointment with Fear (Flatteau, 2/-) is a familiar selection from Poe, Bierce, Jacobs, etc., tales which were broadcast on the BBC; pass it by. Truly a bargain is The Collected Writings of Ambrose Bierce (Citadel, $4), which has an introduction by Clifton Fadiman and runs to over 800 pages. The Night Side edited by August W. Derleth (Rinehart, $3½) is a fairly good collection of supernatural yarns. Two books recently published by Longmans, Green at $2½ have already been noted in British editions in this column: Sir Andrew Caldecott's Not Exactly Ghosts and M. P. Dare's Unholy Relics and other Uncanny Tales. Philosopher's Quest by Irwin Edman (Viking, $3) isn't exactly a book of short stories, but a collection of essays which have a noticeable fantasy and allegory content. Clare Winger Harris' Away from Here and Now: Stories in Pseudo-Science (Dorrance, $2½) consists of a rather musty and dated selection published nearly two decades ago in magazine form. Erik Linklater's Sealskin Trousers (Hart-Davis, 8/6) contains a few short fantasies. The latest collection from Arkham House is Night's Black Agents: ten stories by Fritz Leiber, Jr. ($3). Not all of the tales in Alfred Hitchcock's Fireside Book of Suspense (Simon & Schuster, $3½) are fantasy, but the twenty-seven have enough macabre atmosphere to warrant purchase. Better fare than this, however, is to be found in Travellers in Time (Doubleday, $3½), a fine, unhackneyed anthology of inexplicable journeyings into the past and future, compiled by Philip Van Doren Stern. Infernal Machine by A. Fleming Macleish and Robert de San Marzano (Houghton-Mifflin, $2½) is an allegedly humorous pastiche of parodies that you would do well to leave strictly alone. Supernatural shorts are to be found in J. F. Powers' Prince of Darkness and other Stories (Doubleday, $2¾). Another collection previously printed in Britain is Edna's Fruit Hat and Other Stories (Harper, $2½) written by the one-time RAF pilot John Pudney. Lastly there's Verne's From the Earth to the Moon and Round the Moon (Didier, $3), a newly translated and revised edition with an introduction by Clyde Fisher.

Anthologies and Collections of Short Stories

(concluded on page 159)

THIS IS ABOUT RAY CUMMINGS

by
Thyril L. Ladd

The name of Ray Cummings is certainly familiar to all fantasy readers. A legion of his stories have appeared in various magazines, and half a dozen of his novels have been printed in book form, including one in England. Moreover, he is really one of the old-timers of the fantasy-writing field, having been in it over a quarter of a century. Without use of literary trickery or verbose erudite passages he has written to entertain---and the fact that he has succeeded in entertaining his followers royally through the years merits no little praise.

It is not my purpose to discuss or review Mr. Cummings' stories, however, but rather to tell something of a grand visit with him and his daughter, Betty, which it was my good fortune to experience. It was a visit lasting all afternoon---six or seven hours---during which I learned much about my host that, to the best of my knowledge, has never been revealed to any of his readers.

I arrived at his hotel a bit damp from an unexpected summer cloudburst at 12:05 P.M. I remember the exact time because it turned out to be quite important. Under no conditions (such are his orders at the hotel desk) is he to be disturbed before twelve noon, or are incoming phone calls to be put through to his suite. So, as you see, I was just past the deadline.

His voice answered my call, and I was informed I would be met in the lobby very soon. And just a few minutes later I spied emerging from an elevator the tall, snowy-haired figure which could be no one but Ray Cummings. He greeted me cordially, and from beneath thick eyebrows his sharp eyes quickly scanned me. "We're going to eat breakfast now," he said, "though for you it will be lunch." So we ate, Betty joining us in a few minutes, and just to keep in tune I ordered corn flakes.

The meal over, we went up to his suite, where we remained all afternoon, talking, talking, talking through a curtain of cigarette smoke which grew thicker and more impenetrable as the hours went by. In the presence of these two amiable, cordial people I was completely at ease.

But before I go further I think I should say something about Betty Cummings. A woman visitor could probably tell you what she wore, and how her hair was done---but I can say only that aside from her being dressed in black she impressed me as being attired smartly, in up-to-the-minute fashion. She is a blonde of average height, slender, and very attractive. In fact, out-and-out pretty! She is young; I'm not at all sure that she is yet eligible to vote.

These qualities usually suffice for a girl, but of Betty Cummings there is more to relate. Obviously she is very much a major part of her father's life. More, she is an author in her own right, and her stories are being printed regularly. "Whodunits" are her speciality, and it is really quite surprising to know that this young girl is adept at weaving yarns of crime, blood and murder. Her first tale was printed in Liberty magazine when she was only thirteen. It caused something of a sensation, and there is a framed letter on the wall from Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt congratulating her on this feat. Thus it appears that she has inherited from her father not only friendliness and charm, but writing-talent as well. Her work usually appears under her first two names: Elizabeth Starr.

I asked Ray Cummings how many stories he had written. He didn't know, but thought there might be a thousand of them, not all fantasy, of course. Then I learned how and when the two wrote. They arise about noon, and spend the afternoon doing anything that interests them. Dinner comes in the late evening; whatever at hand seems best until midnight; and then home to write. For they nearly

always begin writing around midnight, and keep at it until daybreak. These sessions of creative energy are helped along by coffee and many cigarettes. Ray Cummings would be lost without cigarettes---he estimated that he could use a hundred a day if put to it, though in practice his actual consumption is somewhat less. Betty puffs a few to keep him company. At dawn, if the ever-present deadlines have been met, they seek their beds. Naturally, this program is varied by special occasions and broken by vacations (they like Bermuda very much), but it is their normal routine of living.

I asked Mr. Cummings about the account of his life given on the dust-wrapper of his book The Sea Girl. Apparently much of this account is more imaginative than factual, and so it would be better to turn to the man himself for an accurate picture.

"I was born on Times Square, here in New York City, on August 30, 1887," he said. "A couple of years ago, Betty and I used to eat many dinners in Toffenetti's Restaurant, 43rd Street and Broadway. We always had the same table, which had a particular interest for me. One night Mr. Toffenetti, on from Chicago where he lives, was wandering around the place. I called him over, introduced myself, and told him I was probably a unique customer, for I had been born just about twenty feet directly over that very table! A little brick apartment was there, then, facing a little triangular park. Mr. Toffenetti said he was going to send me a medal, or a diploma, or something---but to date he hasn't."

I could see that Mr. Cummings got quite a kick out of this circumstance. The grin on his face, as he recounted it, was positively boyish.

"How Times Square has changed," he went on, "since I was wheeled around it in a baby carriage---or toddled on the grass! I recall my father telling how he remembered it as a dishevelled cow-pasture, and how he thought two of his friends crazy when they wanted him to go in with them and buy it for fifteen thousand dollars. Would he put up five thousand for a third-interest in such a purchase? Indeed he wouldn't!"

"Look, Mr. Cummings," I said. "This account on the dust-wrapper says you once had extensive orange groves---"

He shook his head. "I never had any orange groves. My father and two older brothers were wealthy, and were adventurous, too. I had been a freshman at Princeton University only two months when---at the age of about sixteen, I guess ---father and mother yanked me out of that ivied environment, and took me to Porto Rico. My brothers were buying land and planting orange groves there, and father was selling them in New York. He sold about half a million dollars' worth, and everybody had plenty of money. Indeed, it was an effort to spend it as fast as we got it; but, somehow, we seemed to manage that!"

"So," I said, "two months at Princeton was as far as your education went?"

"Yes, Thyril," answered Ray, "in a way that was the end of my formal education, except that we took a young tutor to Porto Rico with us to instill further book-learning in me. Our school room was a little tent under the palms behind the kitchen of the plantation house. My tutor's name was Herbert Shaffer. I had a great affection for Herbert; he and I saw eye to eye. We agreed that as long as father paid Herbert his weekly stipend, the main reason for his being in Porto Rico was accomplished. So, whenever father was away or wasn't thinking of me, Herbert and I dismissed ourselves from the tent. Or, he explained to my parent the necessity of an entomological trip into the hills---and we'd flag the little train for San Juan. Catching bugs and learning their classifications and habits in the plaza of San Juan was difficult, I'll admit---but the chocolate and pan de majorca in the plaza cafes were tasty, and the parading senoritas were very nice...."

I asked him if his family had stayed in Porto Rico all year round.

"We used to spend winters in Porto Rico and summers in New York City," he replied. "I think it was in the second winter down there when my father got to understand my tutor---and Herbert offered his resignation. And that was the complete end of my formal education to date. But Herbert did all right for himself. He immediately established a tiny Porto Rican Express Company---which today is a huge organization spread all over the West Indies."

Ray Cummings leaned back comfortably as he reminisced about those long ago days. "Conditions were very primitive in the mountains of Porto Rico then," he continued. "I recall, one winter, when I was about nineteen, our native overseer offered me his youngest and prettiest daughter, and a wee thatched shack under the palms near our plantation house, where she would keep house and cook for me---in all the grand style to which a young American was entitled! I thought this offer was just fine, but there were complications: would you believe it, my mother and father didn't seem to take to the idea at all! Looking back on it now, I'm a bit sorry, too, for she was a very pretty little thing, and we liked each other although she spoke only three or four words of English.

"That Sea Girl dust-wrapper mentions my 'adventures' with oil wells in Wyoming and placer mines in British Columbia and Alaska---but all that was just with the family, after the Porto Rican period. As a matter of fact, the only job I've ever had at all was editor of house organs for Thomas A. Edison, which I held in my late twenties. While at that I wrote 'The Girl in the Golden Atom.'"

Ray Cummings loves to stress the point that this youthful Edison employment is the only time he ever worked---despite the fact that he regularly pounds out fiction from midnight to dawn. My guess is that he has worked far harder writing than ever he did for Edison---though doubtless he would be the first to deny this!

He told me that "The Girl in the Golden Atom" has always remained his favorite, and said that readers seemed to endorse this view. He readily admitted that his later works varied greatly in quality. Incidentally, Ray Cummings does not even own all of the books he has written. I noticed he had a fine first edition of The Man Who Mastered Time, but none of the others. Betty said that he had given them all away to admirers.

Mr. Cummings is a little dilatory about some things---or, putting it more diplomatically, he is quite busy. At any rate, when I brought up the matter of a friend who had hopefully written him for an autograph but never received it, he stated: "When anyone is so interested as to write me for an autograph, I honestly want him to have one---but I never seem to get around to sending it!"

He has two hobbies, I learned. One is collecting postage stamps, the other, playing chess. Betty and her father belong to one of the city's major chess clubs where (as Ray himself puts it) they have "the enviable distinction of being the two worst players the club has, or ever has had, or probably ever will have!"

Analyzing himself, Ray Cummings remarked, "I'm impossible to be with until mid-afternoon; then I get more human as night wears on." (However, I found him pleasant and genial from the first instant I met him.) "And I don't drink," he added, "unless you could count one at 6 P.M. with another only after a considerable time-lapse. Sobriety is forced upon me by the workings of my insides." But how he smokes! During all of the time I was with him, I never once saw him without a cigarette in his hand.

Except when editorial stubbornness or skullduggery have intervened, he has always used his own name on his writings. The latter exception occurred when a Canadian firm issued his novel Brigands of the Moon in pocket-book form, crediting it to "John Campbell." And more recently an entirely unauthorized edition

of The Shadow Girl was published in England.

Gazing around their comfortable suite, I cogitated. Here were two people who followed a way of life which apparently brought them very near to what so many people seek in life---satisfaction. They want to write stories---and so they write them. I gazed at the walls, on which were hung numerous photographs, autographed, of various people---here an author, there an author, and so on. A superb original by Varga (I believe Betty said she had posed for it) was among them.

Thus the afternoon waned. And when I left, sincerely regretting that I must do so, I knew I had met two people whose friendship would always be dear to me. Betty had been charming and pleasant; and as for Ray Cummings himself, I had always admired him as an author---but now I admired him even more as a human being.

---oOo---

FANTASY IN ALL-AMERICAN FICTION

compiled by
William H. Evans

All-American Fiction magazine started as a monthly general adventure "pulp" of about 130 pages with the November, 1937 issue. With the March-April, 1938 number it became a bimonthly. It combined with Argosy after the September October, 1938 issue. Argosy carried the All-American Fiction name on its cover for about six issues (from that of October 8th to the middle of November).

November, 1937---vol. 1, no. 1

"I'm Dangerous Tonight" by Cornell Woolrich (44pp)

A dress designer in Paris is visited by the devil, and as a result makes a a dress that causes the wearer to be temporarily possessed and kill the nearest person who catches her interest. This theme is mingled with that of a New York secret service agent investigating a narcotic-smuggling ring. In the end the garment is destroyed. The result is a fairly good hard-boiled detective tale with fantasy overtones.

January, 1938---vol. 1, no. 3

"The Obsidian Ape" by Robert Neal Leath (55pp)

This is a readable adventure story about an inhabited Mayan city hidden by a wall of invisibility. Bing Matthews goes into it after a missing professor, finds that his fianceehas been kidnapped, meets the usual princess who falls in love with him, and escapes in the confusion of a revolt.

February, 1938---vol. 1, no. 4

"Beyond Space and Time" by Joel Townsley Rogers (27pp)

The first interstellar flight has a man find a second Earth with reverse entropy and other strange properties. He returns, finally, just after he started. Rather unusual writing of an average story.

"Midnight Keep" by Theodore Roscoe (40pp)

A man apparently goes back through time somehow to the period of Cromwell's battle with the Cavaliers on the Scottish border. It finally turns out, however, that he is on a mist-hidden island, connected with the mainland by a tunnel, where descendants of the original fighters have continued life as before. Roscoe has written here an unusual, interesting tale.

March-April, 1938---vol. 1, no. 5

"Without Horns" by Robert Carse (11pp)

Mark Collins, a travel-writer, visits Haiti and is taken to see a real voodoo ceremony. Later he starts to weave the event into a story, but dies of heart trouble, the shadow of a "goat with horns" seeming to haunt him. The tale is a "borderline" one, depending mostly on unsustained atmosphere.

"Duello" by Richard Sale (11pp)

John Souci fights a duel---and realizes suddenly that he is dead. Sale has handled the theme very well.

"Jane Brown's Body" by Cornell Woolrich (48pp)

A doctor revives a young girl after her death; her memory is gone, and he keeps her isolated in the hills, giving her periodically the injections she needs to remain alive. An aviator, O'Shaughnessy, makes a forced landing in the vicinity and meets her; he falls in love with her and takes her away, thinking the doctor is holding her prisoner. A Chicago gang recognizes the girl as a big shot's former moll who was murdered because of her knowledge of the rackets, and they are greatly alarmed. She and O'Shaughnessy go to China where they live happily for a short time until the decay of death finally catches up with her because of lack of injections. This story is very well written, and parts of it are unusually effective fantasy.

May-June, 1938---vol. 1, no. 6

"The Hand of Glory" by H. Bedford-Jones (12pp)

This is the first of the "Halfway House" stories, and a general description of it will serve to introduce the whole series. Sir Roger Balke invents a gadget that can reproduce events that have occurred in the presence of certain objects during the past. "The Hand of Glory" tells of Nostradamus and magic in medieval France; it is inferior Bedford-Jones---pass it by.

"Speak No Evil" by Max Brand, pseud. (Frederick Faust)

"Lefty" turns a friend over to the police and receives a reward of thirty dollars---which he cannot spend. A good handling of an old theme.

"White Lady" by Robert Cochran (9pp)

A vampire story with very unusual trimmings. A nurse in the Kentucky mountains discovers that she has a disease which requires frequent transfusions so she traps strangers---tramps---for their blood. Quite well done.

July-August, 1938---vol. 2, no. 1

"The Vase of Heaven and Earth" by H. Bedford-Jones (11pp)

Halfway House again---this time looking to the China of the Manchus. Hack; skip it.

September-October, 1938---vol. 2, no. 2

"Pearls of Destiny" by H. Bedford-Jones (12pp)

As before, this time with Casanova and Cagliostro's magic.

"The Devil Made a Derringer" by Richard Sale (42pp)

The devil visits an eighteenth century gunsmith, who makes a gun that will always shoot true, yet upon which is laid the curse "Who fires this piece himself destroys." In modern times this gun figures in mysterious happenings during which the curse finally backfires. It is a good detective story with an interesting atmosphere.

---oOo---

Unwritten Books---concluded from page 156

finish them, though Sam Moskowitz insists I follow tradition by leaving something to be completed after my death. When I am caught up with my typing I will probably work on some of the above titles. The Passionate Lover interests me, but perhaps for the sake of what little reputation I have left it would be better to choose one with less fire. If I were certain of fifteen years' more life, I might start that wonder work, Thirty-Two Thousand Ways of Satisfying a Woman.

LITTLE KNOWN FANTASY

by
Darrell C. Richardson

(Editor's note: In this column, which will be featured in Fantasy Commentator from time to time, you will find discussed stories of varying length which are either so obscure or little-noticed that they have not received their due attention. If you can suggest tales for mention here, we will be glad to hear from you.)

I---"The Second Man"

Outstanding among the fantastic tales which appeared in the Munsey publications is the comparatively unknown novel "The Second Man---a Story of a New Eden," which was printed in All-Story magazine for February, 1913. The author was given as "Lee Robinet"---which is now known to be a pseudonym; his real name, however, has not yet been unearthed. A review of this novel should be of interest, since it is a fine example of the early imaginative tales which preceeded more modern classics of fantasy and science-fiction.

Kenmore, with his half-breed guide, is hunting in the north woods. The two move into a section which is locally reputed to be haunted by a "mist spirit." Leaving the guide in camp, Kenmore goes on alone. Suddenly he spies a human form against the leafy green background. Moving closer, he sees it is a lovely golden-haired girl who looks like a wood-nymph. But he has been noticed, and with the quickness of a timid fawn the creature vanishes in the maze of undergrowth.

A strange fog comes up as Kenmore heads back to the camp, and as he nears it he sees a gray shadow rise up out of the whiteness beside his motor-boat and then vanish. Arriving at the camp-site he finds the guide either unconscious or dead---he has been struck, apparently, by some great beast. Kenmore vainly follows the tracks of a giant cougar that are near-by, then returns to discover the half-breed's body gone. He discovers further that the motor-boat has been sabotaged beyond repair.

The only thing to do is track down the cougar, Kenmore decides. After miles of trudging through the forest's gloomy silence, he is suddenly attacked by a huge grizzly bear. His rifle bullet crashes into its brain, but not in time to prevent its knocking him unconscious by its death-throes.

Kenmore awakes to find himself riding through the forest on the back of a giant moose; beside it, keeping him from falling off, is the mysterious wood maiden. Believing him to be a devil, she entreats him to leave before Adam casts him "down into hell." It develops that her name is Lilith, and that the only man and woman she has ever known are called Adam and Eve and live in the "Garden of Eden." Adam has dominion over all beasts of the field. Through mysterious mental forces he calls up a savage wolverine and sets it on Kenmore's trail. By mistake it attacks Lilith instead, she being saved by Kenmore's rifle when Adam fails to beat the animal off. Because of this deed, Adam allows a brief time of truce to exist between him and Kenmore.

After passing through some tests, Kenmore is led blindfolded through a cave into the hidden valley which is the Garden of Eden, and there meets Eve and her baby. Through exercising some uncanny psychic force Adam can make the child actually speak plainly, though it is just a few months old.

The rest of the novel involves such fantastic happenings as mind-reading at great distances, child-sacrifice, suspended animation and the weird rite of purification by fire, in which both Adam and Lilith walk unharmed through raging flames.

(concluded on page 159)

UNWRITTEN BOOKS

by
Lt. Col. David H. Keller, M.D.

"Half a Century of Writing" was printed in Fantasy Commentator (vol. 2 no. 2). This covered the history of my literary ventures and contained a bibliography of all stories published up to that time. "Unborn Babies" was printed in Variant (vol. 1 no. 3). This article gave in some detail the reasons why so many of my stories have never been printed. I believe that this may be the first time an author has publicly admitted that he has written much which publishers would not buy. At the same time, judging from the requests received, many of these unborn babies will finally be wrapped in the swaddling clothes of fan magazines.

In order to complete this trilogy it seems necessary to add some comments on my unwritten books. In reviewing my files I was impressed by the number of these, many of which have attached to them descriptions that make them quite interesting.

As books are found usually in a library or book-shop it was most appropriate that Christopher Wren, in his book-shop at The Sign of the Burning Hart, located on the main street of Arcadia, should have many unwritten books for sale. Wren explained that he had not had time to write them, but thought that some taste had been exercised in the choice of titles. In order to help the readers of The Sign of the Burning Hart to separate these imaginary books from the actual books which I have mentioned, I have made a list of these imaginary volumes in Christopher Wren's shop. The first one was written by "Henry Tutor," the second, by "Cleo Patria," and the remainder of the list by Wren himself.

The Sanctity of Marriage
The Life of a Virgin
Poems by a Mendicant of Flanders
Music of Avalon by the Sea
Rhymes of Childhood's Happy Hours
The Cecils of Cecilborough
The Wyerling-Spencer Family
The Complete Lineage of Christopher Wren
A Documentary History of Cecil County, Georgia
Letters from My Dead Friends
Love Letters Written but Never Sent
Letters Which Might Have Been Written to Me by Fair Ladies, but Were Not
Causes of Famous Wars
The Influence of Names on Personalities
Murders of One Hundred Famous Men
Explorations into Feminine Psychology
Actual Lives of Patriots
The Passionate Lover
Tales from Aragon

Twenty titles! As Wren was only twenty-one at the time it is no wonder that he had not found the time to compose any more than the wording of the titles alone.

In my unpublished novel The Adorable Fool the hero, Jacob Hubler, spends much time in writing an anthropological work, The Love Life of the Solomon Islanders. Previous to this he had devoted some years to the compilation of The History of the Hubler (Hubelaire) Family of Georgia, which was printed privately in three volumes.

My short story "The Typewriter" was printed in Fanciful Tales (vol. 1

no. 1). Here an author, John Hunting, writes a very celebrated book, The Perpetual Honeymoon, the heroine of which is a very beautiful woman, Angelica Lamereux. His wife, Amy, becomes jealous of this woman and ultimately destroys her, Hunting and his typewriter.

My novel The Eternal Conflict will be published some time during the next year. In the library of the castle there are three very unusual books. One is The Autobiography of Shakespeare, certainly a rare tome. Also there is a volume mentioned by many ancients, but of which no copy supposedly remains. This is Elephantis. Cecil, overlord of Cornwall, had a copy which was presented to him by the devil. Whether it was written by a charming Egyptian lady or whether it is simply thirty-two playing card-sized sheets of horn, each engraved with pleasures of our ancestors, remains open to argument. The third book is called Thirty-Two Thousand Ways of Satisfying a Woman. The unnamed author spent thirty years in writing it, and when he had finished found that his wife had run away with another man a decade before.

In a short story soon to be published an author writes a best-seller, titled Eternal Empires. He is never, to his sorrow, able to duplicate this. If you are interested to learn why, watch for the story when it appears.

The magazine Vortex will shortly print my story The Invisibles. The hero is an author and explorer. He has written and sold twelves tales of adventure among primitive peoples, which were published as a collection Far Away and Long Ago. That book should actually be written some day---at least it has a very promising title!

I have just finished writing a novel called The Deepening Shadows. Some day I may locate a publisher who would dare to print it. One entire chapter is devoted to reviewing the book Sacramental Cakes, an Anthropological Study of Religious Foods, by Anton Zarewsky of Poland, translated by Herbus Young, F.R.A.C. of London, and priced at ten pounds. I am aconfident that anyone who reads this review will want to own the book. In fact, I would like to have a copy myself!

Of all my imaginary books I consider the one described in the story "The Last Page" to be the most beautiful. This is The Story of the Knight of the Woods. It is an elephantine folio of forty-eight vellum pages, alternately a page of illustration and a page of text. The latter is written in Carolinian characters, decorated with gold. The illustrations, all in somber black spattered with colors, each fill an entire page. The volume is bound in tanned unicorn hide, and reinforced with pieces of unicorn horn. Here is a book finely bound and illustrated, and written in a language few could read today, one which might well find an honored place in the best library of the world.

Fine bindings have always pleased me, though I have been unable to possess many. An unusual one is described in "Binding de Luxe," where thirty-two volumes of The Encyclopedia Britannica mentioned are bound in human skin, titles having been tattooed on the skins before the donors were killed and flayed. Thirty-one volumes are bound in male skin, the other with female skin. The story itself will have to be read in entirely if the reader wishes to know why.

Finally there is the unpublished novel The Homunculus. It mentions at some length a monumental work by a German, Van Slussen, the twelve volume Origins of the Human Race. Colonel Horatio Bumble thinks of condensing this into a thin book so that its basic ideas can become available to the men of the world. It would be of little interest to the women, as the German holds to the idea that the original females were all monkeys.

Thus, in one way or another, I have dreamed of many books. In this I have followed an example set by two great authors, Cabell and Lovecraft. At the present time I am working on three extensive literary projects---I would like to

(concluded on page 153)

STAPLEDON, William Olaf

The Flames: a Fantasy

London: Secker & Warburg, Ltd., 1947. 84pp. 19 cm. 6/-.

Review: Every new book from that titan of science-fiction, Olaf Stapledon, is an event of stellar importance to readers and collectors alike. Stapledon is one of the few science-fiction authors (whose output has been confined to books) who is accepted by fans as worthy to promote tales in their favorite genre.

He has also gained the notice of critics in the much broader field of general literature, which science-fiction has recently been permitted to enter in freshman status. Stapledon's recognition by critics can be traced in part to his reputation as a contemporary thinker, of course, with such books to his credit as Philosophy and Living, A Modern Theory of Ethics and Saints and Revolutionaries. Because philosophy has always been his strong suit it is not surprising to see it play such a major role in his fiction that the latter can rarely be judged without considering its philosophical scaffolding.

Apart from philosophy, Stapledon's forte has been a brilliant imagination which is capable of driving science-fiction to the utmost limits within which it can still be conceived of as science-fiction. Of late, however, he has gone on beyond these boundaries, apparently in an attempt to find a short-cut to the riddle of the universe and the mystery of life. This excursion into mysticism was openly apparent in his last novel, Death into Life. Science-fiction readers have observed the trend with some trepidation, little wishing to lose a champion of their creed to a school of thought that all too often plays the role of narcotic to the scientifically frustrated.

The Flames, however, shows an almost startling reversal of form. It is, by every reasonable standard, a philosophical science-fiction story. The theme is that of intelligent life on the sun. Though old---it can be traced back to The Voyages of Cyrano de Bergerac---this idea is not a common one in present-day science-fiction because of the fantastic improvisations needed to explain the existence of any recognizable life-form in that great atomic furnace.

In his latest novel Stapledon presents the most logically contrived arrangement of conditions for this theme that I have yet read of. The reader can accept his set-up easily. For the intelligences of the sun are flames---flames composed of extremely tenuous yet very real matter. At a certain period in the sun's development it threw toward its surface substances which, in disruption, behaved as follows:

> Wisps of incandescent matter, streaming upward from the photosphere, would disintegrate into myriads of bright flakes, like your snow flakes; and each of these was the raw material, so to speak, of an organized, sentient and minded individual. Hosts of these were doomed never to come to maturity, but to be dissipated into the solar atmosphere by adverse conditions. But the fortunate were so molded by the pressure of circumstances that they developed into highly organized living flames.

The foregoing quotation is taken from the explanation given by one of those very flames to a telepathically receptive earthman.

The story tells of an Englishman who is drawn by the power of the flames to pick up a piece of rock he has come upon and toss it into his fireplace. The heat releases a tiny flame which has hibernated for ages in the rock's interior. Millions of others like it have been trapped in rocks of the planet. They were

in the mass of molten matter thrown off from the sun when the earth was created, and when the crust of the planet hardened they retreated deep into the still-molten rocks; and when these, too, cooled, they degenerated into an almost immortal powder form that could be revived if subjected to sufficient heat. Thus the holocausts of man's wars released many, some of whom still exist in blast furnaces and similar places. The atomic bomb was their godsend, and the sole object of their communication with a human being is to persuade him to induce the governments of the world to create a zone of continuous atomic action in a sparsely populated area so that they all may revive and live normally again. In return, they offer earthmen sufficient spiritual guidance to enable them to avoid future wars and other disturbances which would threaten their progress.

When the Englishman protests that as a single individual he could do little to influence entire nations, he is told that the flames have the power of mentally influencing human actions, and that in the past this power was used to cultivate in him a mental receptivity for the flames' thoughts. This information proves to be the flames' undoing, however, for the Englishman remembers that it was his own fervent interest in telepathic research which led to estrangement with his wife and her resultant suicide, and he feels that with this power of the flames human beings would no longer possess wills of their own. In sudden inspiration he flings a jug of water on the fire, extinguishing it and killing the alien being there.

Other free flames in the world realize what he has done, and concentrate their powers on him. But the Englishman steels his mind against their recriminations and begins a deliberate campaign of examining blast furnaces and systematically extinguishing them if any flames exist there. Eventually his actions result in commitment to an institution for the insane. There the cumulative effect of the flames' influence is to win him to their way of thinking, and then he belatedly attempts to arrange communication between them and human scientists ---but to no avail. In the end he is burned to death by a mysterious fire that somehow breaks out in his room.

A friend of the deceased conducts extensive research, but is unable to find the slimmest shred of objective evidence to support the existence of the flames. Thus the story has two alternatives---one, that the Englishman suffers from a queer mental aberration; the other, that alien beings such as he described actually do exist. Stapledon tells the story with sufficient conviction that the reader believes in the latter case.

The author's observations of human beings as seen through the eyes of the flame creatures fail to reveal any new patterns of thought; only the old, accepted, often-rehashed appraisal of mankind's faults and failings is forthcoming. Toward the end of the book, in the fashion of an afterthought, Stapledon has the flames reveal that in the past their race had been in communication with many other intelligences of the universes, and that these had striven toward the realization of the Cosmic Mind, the great, the all, the creator of things, the master intelligence of the universe---only to find that what they had conceived was only a reflection of their most earnest wishes, and that no such all-pervading mind actually existed, or if it did exist the wrong methods had been used in attempting to contact it. This, of course, symbolizes Stapledon's views on religion, and is brought up to date by introducing groups whose actions parallel that of Soviet Russia, which allowed the return of religion merely as a diplomatic maneuver.

All this misleads no careful follower of this author. Time and again Olaf Stapledon has tried to solve the eternal riddle. He struck far out in Last and First Men, and farther still in Star-Maker, where his ultimate concept was a Cosmic Mind. Yet this Cosmic Mind as he described it was no different from God

(concluded on page 170)

Little Known Fantasy---concluded from page 154

The story comes to a sharp climax when Kenmore, Lilith, Eve, the baby and the half-breed guide (who has been restored to life by Adam) attempt to escape the Garden of Eden by canoe. At first they are pursued by packs of great timber wolves. Then, as they enter the lake which leads to freedom, Adam appears on the bank and with all his mesmeric power wills them to return to shore. Kenmore fights off the influence, but must forcibly restrain Lilith to keep her from jumping overboard. And as the canoe slowly slips away Adam actually walks out over the water after them. But when Kenmore refuses to believe his vision, Adam sinks below the waves to his death and the spell is broken.

Considering the period during which this novel was written it is an excellent one indeed, showing unusual imagery of style. It proved popular enough with readers for the Chicago publishing house of Browne & Howell Co. to bring it out in 1914 as a book titled The Forest Maiden.

---oOo---

This-'n'-That---concluded from page 148

The successful Broadway play (still running) Brigadoon by Alan J. Lerner (Coward-McCann, $2½) is now in book form; it tells of a Scottish town that is invisible---save once in a hundred years. The Fall of the Magicians by Weldon Kees (Reynal & Hitchcock, $2) is a collection of fantastic poetry.

Plays, Poems and Cartoons

Charles Baudelaire's Flowers of Evil is now available in a new translation by Geoffrey Wagner with an introduction by Enid Starkie (New Directions, $1½). Addams and Evil (Random House, $2¾) is a fine collection of sinister and macabre pictorial humor by Charles Addams. Abner Dean's What Am I Doing Here? (Simon & Schuster, $3) is another recommended selection of satirical fantasy drawings; get it.

The Romance of Boston Bay (Tudor, $3½) is a collection of New England legends and sea lore. Tall tales, native folklore and pseudo-history are found in The American Imagination at Work, edited by Ben C. Clough (Knopf, $6). Quest for Sita by Maurice Collis (Day, $3) is a free adaption of a well-known Sanskrit epic Ramayana; Mervyn Peake has illustrated it. Harold W. Felton has compiled Legends of Paul Bunyan (Knopf, $5), which contains a bibliography of all writing, music, drama, painting and sculpture pertaining to this character; the collection is a fine one, expertly illustrated by Richard Bennett. Vance Randolph's Ozark Superstitions (Columbia University Press, $3¾) is a treasury of hillbilly tall tales and magic; the author has studied and written about his subject for nearly a quarter of a century, and this is one of his best efforts. Another collection of folk tales, carrying an introduction by Padraic Colum and nine full-page paintings in color is Ghosts in Irish Houses (Creative Age, $12); as might be expected, the volume is beautifully bound and printed, with high-quality paper.

Folklore; Mythology

Two famous writers have left us since the last number of this magazine appeared. One, Mrs. Montague Barstow, Baroness Orczy, will be remembered by her fine fantasy novel, By the Gods Beloved. She passed away on November 12th at the age of 82. The other, two years her senior, is the literary titan Arthur Machen, who will long be remembered by readers of his classic Three Imposters or Hill of Dreams. His contributions to the fantasy field have enriched it immeasurably. He died on December 15th last.

Necrology

Special thanks are due to contributing editor William H. Evans for his generous contribution, without which the illustrations by Joseph Krucher in this issue might not have appeared this quickly... . Next time "This-'n'-That" will return to the task of listing books crowded out of this issue's column. ---A.L.S.

A WINE OF WIZARDRY*

by
George Sterling

"When mountains were stained as with wine
By the dawning of Time, and as wine
Were the seas."
Ambrose Bierce.

Without, the battlements of sunset shine,
'Mid domes the sea-winds rear and overwhelm.
Into a crystal cup the dusky wine
I pour, and, musing at so rich a shrine,
I watch the star that haunts its ruddy gloom.
Now Fancy, empress of a purpled realm,
Awakes with brow caressed by poppy-bloom,
And wings in sudden dalliance her flight
To strands where opals of the shattered light
Gleam in the wind-strewn foam, and maidens flee
A little past the striving billows' reach,
Or seek the russet mosses of the sea,
And wrinkled shells that lure along the beach,
And please the heart of Fancy; yet she turns,
Tho' trembling, to a grotto rosy-sparred,
Where wattled monsters redly gape, that guard
A cowled magician peering on the damned
Thro' vials wherein a splendid poison burns,
Sifting Satanic gules athwart his brow.
So Fancy will not gaze with him, and now
She wanders to an iceberg oriflammed
With rayed, auroral guidons of the North---
Wherein hath winter hidden ardent gems
And treasuries of frozen anadems,
Alight with timid sapphires of the snow.
But she would dream of warmer gems, and so
Ere long her eyes in fastnesses look forth
O'er blue profounds mysterious whence glow
The coals of Tartarus on the moonless air,
As Titans plan to storm Olympus' throne,
'Mid pulse of dungeoned forces down the stunned,
Undominated firmament, and glare
Of Cyclopean furnaces unsunned.

Then hastens she in refuge to a lone,
Immortal garden of the eastern hours,
Where Dawn upon a pansy's breast hath laid
A single tear, and whence the wind hath flown
And left a silence. Far on shadowy tow'rs
Droop blazoned banners, and the woodland shade,
With leafy flames and dyes autumnal hung,
Makes beautiful the twilight of the year.

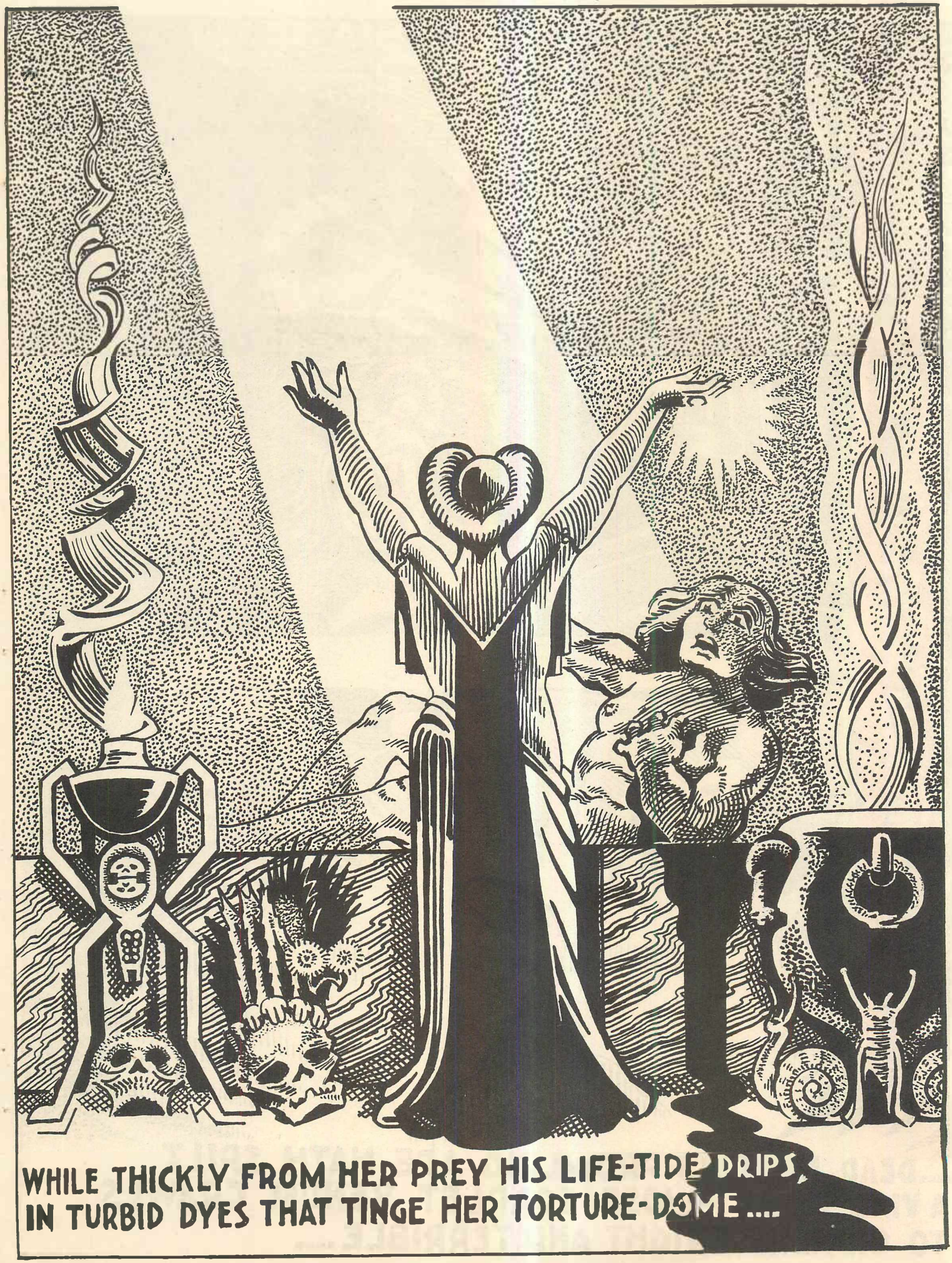

KRUCHOK
NOW FANCY, EMPRESS OF A PURPLED REALM, AWAKES....


PERTURBED MEN THAT TREMBLE AT A SOUND,
AND PONDER WORDS ON GHASTLY VELLUM WRIT..

For this the fays will dance, for elfin cheer,
Within a dell where some mad girl hath flung
A bracelet that the painted lizards fear---
Red pyres of muffled light! Yet Fancy spurns
The revel, and to eastern hazard turns,
And glaring beacons of the Soldan's shores,
When in a Syrian treasure-house she pours,
From caskets rich and amethystine urns,
Dull fires of dusty jewels that have bound
The brows of naked Ashtaroth around.
Or hushed, at fall of some disastrous night,
When sunset, like a crimson throat to hell,
Is cavernous, she marks the seaward flight
Of homing dragons dark upon the West;
Till, drawn by tales the winds of ocean toll,
And mute amid the splendors of her quest,
To some red city of the Djinns she flees
And, lost in palaces of silence, sees
Within a porphyry crypt the murderous light
Of garnet-crusted lamps whereunder sit
Perturbéd men that tremble at a sound,
And ponder words on ghastly vellum writ,
In vipers' blood, to whispers from the night---
Infernal rubrics, sung to Satan's might,
Or chaunted to the Dragon in his gyre.
But she would blot from memory the sight,
And seeks a stainéd twilight of the South,
Where crafty gnomes with scarlet eyes conspire
To quench Aldebaran's affronting fire,
Low sparkling just beyond their cavern's mouth,
Above a wicked queen's unhallowed tomb.
There lichens brown, incredulous of fame,
Whisper to veinéd flowers her body's shame,
Mid stillness of all pageantries of bloom.
Within, lurk orbs that graven monsters clasp;
Red-embered rubies smolder in the gloom,
Betrayed by lamps that nurse a sullen flame,
And livid roots writhe in the marble's grasp,
As moaning airs invoke the conquered rust
Of lordly helms made equal in the dust.
Without, where baleful cypresses make rich
The bleeding sun's phantasmagoric gules,
Are fungus-tapers of the twilight witch
(Seen by the bat above unfathomed pools)
And tiger-lilies known to silent ghouls,
Whose king hath digged a somber carcanet
And necklaces with fevered opals set.
But Fancy, well affrighted at his gaze,
Flies to a violet headland of the West,
About whose base the sun-lashed billows blaze,
Ending in precious foam their fatal quest,
As far below the deep-hued ocean molds,
With waters' toil and polished pebbles' fret,
The tiny twilight in the jacinth set,
The wintry orb the moonstone-crystal holds,
Snapt coral twigs and winy agates wet,

Translucencies of jasper, and the folds
Of banded onyx, and vermilion breast
Of cinnabar. Anear on orange sands,
With prows of bronze the sea-stained galleys rest,
And swarthy mariners from alien strands
Stare at the red horizon, for their eyes
Behold a beacon burn on evening skies,
As fed with sanguine oils at touch of night.
Forth from that pharos-flame a radiance flies,
To spill in vinous gleams on ruddy decks;
And overside, when leap the startled waves
And crimson bubbles rise from battle-wrecks,
Unresting hydras wrought of bloody light
Dip to the ocean's phosphorescent caves.

So Fancy's carvel seeks an isle afar,
Led by the Scorpion's rubescent star,
Until in templed zones she smiles to see
Black incense glow, and scarlet-bellied snakes
Sway to the tawny flutes of sorcery.
There priestesses in purple robes hold each
A sultry garnet to the sea-linkt sun,
Or, just before the colored morning shakes
A splendor on the ruby-sanded beach,
Cry unto Betelguese a mystic word.
But Fancy, amorous of evening, takes
Her flight to groves whence lustrous rivers run,
Thro' hyacinth, a minster wall to gird,
Where, in the hushed cathedral's jeweled gloom,
Ere Faith return, and azure censers fume,
She kneels, in solomn quietude, to mark
The suppliant day from gorgeous oriels float
And altar-lamps immure the deathless spark;
Till, all her dreams made rich with fervent hues,
She goes to watch, beside a lurid moat,
The kingdoms of the afterglow suffuse
A sentinel mountain stationed toward the night---
Whose broken tombs betray their ghastly trust,
Till bloodshot gems stare up like eyes of lust.
And now she knows, at agate portals bright,
How Circe and her poisons have a home,
Carved in one ruby that a Titan lost,
Where icy philters brim with scarlet foam,
'Mid hiss of oils in burnished caldrons tost,
While thickly from her prey his life-tide drips,
In turbid dyes that tinge her torture-dome;
As craftily she gleans her deadly dews,
With gyving spells not Pluto's queen can use,
Or listens to her victim's moan, and sips
Her darkest wine, and smiles with wicked lips.
Nor comes a god with any power to break
The red alembics whence her gleaming broths
Obscenely fume, as asp or adder froths,
To lethal mists whose writhing vapors make
Dim augury, till shapes of men that were
Point, weeping, at tremendous dooms to be,


WHILE THICKLY FROM HER PREY HIS LIFE-TIDE DRIPS,
IN TURBID DYES THAT TINGE HER TORTURE-DOME....

....DEAD MERLIN'S PROWLING APE HATH SPILT A VIAL SQUAT WHOSE SCARLET VENOM CRAWLS TO CIPHERS BRIGHT AND TERRIBLE.....

When pillared pomps and thrones supreme shall stir,
Unstable as the foam-dreams of the sea.

But Fancy still is fugitive, and turns
To caverns where a demon altar burns,
And Satan, yawning on his brazen seat,
Fondles a screaming thing his fiends have flayed,
Ere Lilith come his indolence to greet,
Who leads from hell his whitest queens, arrayed
In chains so heated at their master's fire
That one new-damned had thought their bright attire
Indeed were coral, till the dazzling dance
So terribly that brilliance shall enhance.
But Fancy is unsatisfied, and soon
She seeks the silence of a vaster night,
Where powers of wizadry, with faltering sight
(Whenas the hours creep farthest from the noon)
Seek by the glow-worm's lantern cold and dull
A crimson spider hidden in a skull,
Or search for mottled vines with berries white,
Where waters mutter to the gibbous moon.
There, clothed in cerements of malignant light,
A sick enchantress scans the dark to curse,
Beside a caldron vext with Harlots' blood,
The stars of that red Sign which spells her doom.

Then Fancy cleaves the palmy skies adverse
To sunset barriers. By the Ganges' flood
She sees, in her dim temple, Siva loom
And, visioned with a monstrous ruby, glare
On distant twilight where the burning-ghaut
Is lit with glowering pyres that seem the eyes
Of her abhorrent dragon-worms that bear
The pestilence, by Death in darkness wrought.
So Fancy's wings forsake the Asian skies,
And now her heart is curious of halls
In which dead Merlin's prowling ape hath spilt
A vial squat whose scarlet venom crawls
To ciphers bright and terrible, that tell
The sins of demons and the encharneled guilt
That breathes a phantom at whose cry the owl,
Malignly mute above the midnight well,
Is dolorous, and Hecate lifts her cowl
To mutter swift a minatory rune;
And, ere the tomb-thrown echoings have ceased,
The blue-eyed vampire, sated at her feast,
Smiles bloodily against the leprous moon.

But evening now is come, and Fancy folds
Her splendid plumes, nor any longer holds
Adventurous quest o'er stained lands and seas---
Fled to a star above the sunset lees,
O'er onyx waters stilled by gorgeous oils
That toward the twilight reach emblazoned coils.
And I, albeit Merlin-sage hath said,
"A vyper lurketh in ye wine-cuppe redde,"
Gaze pensively upon the way she went,
Drink at her font, and smile as one content.

SOMETHING ABOUT VAMPIRES

by
George T. Wetzel

In The Acolyte magazine for Winter, 1946 (#13) Forrest Ackerman, while reviewing the fantasy film Isle of the Dead, posed a question as to the divergent spellings of the Grecian version of the word "vampire." According to him the film used "vorvalaka," while a story in the April, 1932 issue of Weird Tales magazine employed "vrykolakes." Clarification of this situation was requested, and since to my knowledge no one has so far done so, it is perhaps fitting that I should make the attempt.

"Vrykolakes" is the correct etymological rendering of the word "vampire" in Greek. Perhaps not surprisingly, its various names in other neighboring countries are linked phonetically. In Bulgaria and Slovakia it is "vrkolak"; in Serbia, "vukodlak"; in Bohemia, "vlkodlak"; and in Turkey, "vurkolak." The word underwent radical changes as it migrated into the tongues of the more northerly races. Thus in South Russia we have "upuir"; in Russia proper, "vampir"; in Poland, "upior"; and so on.

Animated corpses---vampires---have often played a part in the mythology of other lands, but it is among the Slavs and the races of Slavic origin that they have flourished most luxuriantly. The "vrykolakes" of Greece is a more modern superstition; the closest approach in classic Greek mythology to these creatures is the Chthonioi. The relationship between these two legendary demons is more easily understood when one reflects that almost without exception all folktales evolve from---or can be traced back to---alternate interpretations of established nature-myths. An example of this has been shown in the various developments of the "psychopompos" theme: the personification of the wind as Hermes, the same characterization of Odhin (one of his demonic attributes being the lurer of souls), and finally the Teutonic cast of the same myth in the tale of the Pied Piper of Hamlin.

Some of the superstitious beliefs regarding the "vrylakes" are even more interesting. The belief of the medieval Greeks in their existence was modified somewhat by Christianity into the supposition that vampires were excommunicated persons kept alive by Satan through substituting blood for the wine of communion. In medieval continental Europe was thought to be a witch, a wizard, someone who had been cursed, he whom another vampire had slain, or a corpse over which a cat or dog had leaped. The Scotch held to the last belief, and thought that the only effective counter-measure was killing the offending animal. Until about 1880 Slavonian peasants maintained some sort of unwritten law which required that a stake be driven through the heart of a suicide, else a vampire was sure to result.

Even on the question of a vampire's destruction one finds conflicting views. In Russia an aspen stake was preferred, while in other regions it was one of thorn-wood. However, it was generally conceded that the stake had to be driven through the vampire's heart by a single blow---for a second would restore it to life. The only certain methods of total destruction were consuming the vampire's body by fire and chopping off its head with a stroke of the grave-digger's shovel.

Any way that one considers these matters they argue for a rather grisly and morbid state of mind for people of the old world not so very long ago. Indeed, probably in some isolated sections they still dread the approach of certain days of the year, and avoid certain lonely, legend-shrouded parts of the countryside.

TIPS ON TALES

by
A. Langley Searles

Martin Swayne's Blue Germ (1918): The Sarakoff-Harden bacillus, a laboratory creation of two British biologists, shows itself capable of giving certain insects life-spans 25,000 times that normally observed. The bacillus accomplishes this by destroying all harmful bacteria in its host. The discoverers introduce cultures of it into a midland city reservoir, believing they will thus eventually render humanity virtually immortal. Ultra-microscopic and capable of multiplying in almost any medium, the germs soon spread the "Blue Disease" throughout all England. Its initial symptoms are the expected ones: a faint blueness of the skin and whites of the eyes, and an immunity to all harm save injury by violence. But later unforeseen psychological effects quickly come to light: those afflicted lose worldly ambitions and most physical desires, and are left with only two alternating emotions---a perfect calmness and horrible fear of harm by violence. Because of the latter, all activities involving danger cease immediately. Coal mines are abandoned; trains no longer operate; London streets are empty. This is a fascinating conception, and the author certainly has not ignored its physical aspects. The psychological ones (so often glossed over by "pulpists") likewise receive treatment, which, if not as extensive as one might like, at least is passably adequate. Swayne's prose has a tendency toward abruptness, but his theme carries along the reader's interest easily enough for one to overlook this fault. One cannot, however, overlook the novel's ambiguous ending. After several days' incubation in the body, the bacillus causes drowsiness, and, finally, deep sleep of a week's duration. Are those who awake free from the disease, and once more mortal? Or have they merely weathered a temporary phase of the illness, being left with all the personal and social problems of immortality facing them as before? Swayne never makes the point clear, and this lack of resolution is chiefly responsible for The Blue Germ's being a fairly entertaining novel rather than an unexpectedly fine one.

G. G. A. Murray's Gobi or Shamo (1889): By poring over ancient, half-forgotten manuscripts in ecclesiastical libraries Soteria Mavrones hoped to make some important discovery, and this he did---though not in the way he anticipated. For the discovery was made by examining the parchment binding of a fifteenth century ms., a binding which proved to be part of a document dating back to 350 B.C. Written by a party of Ionians who escaped from the slavery of Darius, it told of their migration to India and thence northward to a region somewhere in central Asia that was ringed about by volcanic peaks and surrounded on all sides by arid desert. Thence Mavrones and two friends travel, hoping to find archeological relics of importance. Murray's novel is a description of their journey to and sojourn in the still-intact colony, where the isolated Greeks have attained a culture and scientific achievements far superior in many respects to those of nineteenth century Europe. Despite being almost sixty years old, Gobi or Shamo is not only still readable but considerably entertaining, and is notable for its authentic and circumstantial background. Indeed, it stands head and shoulders above many novels of similar theme published today, and can safely be recommended not only to all those who enjoy a well-written, action-filled "lost race" tale, but to a fair percentage of those who do not.

Mervyn Wall's Unfortunate Fursey (1947): Ireland in the tenth century was by nature a rigorous enough place in which to live, but the presence of goblins, disembodied spirits, ghouls and other hellish demons---all marshalled under the lead-

ership of the devil himself---made the inhabitants' everyday life more unpredictable than ever. And of these no one took part in a more unusual series of adventures than Brother Fursey of Clonmacnoise Monastery. He is, in brief, an appealingly humorous stooge, a humble, self-effacing individual with sense enough to apply logic occasionally when his life depends on it---and once, at the conclusion of the book, when his future happiness is at stake. Mervyn Wall has created in him a memorable character indeed. Equally three-dimensional are Bishop Flanagan, whose "odor of sanctity" is "clearly discernible from his breath and person," and Father Furiosus, a wandering friar who specializes in ferreting out necromancers. More obliquely viewed, but as authentic to the mind's eye, are Albert, for some time Fursey's familiar; the Gentle Anchorite, as bawdy when inebriated as he is devout when sober; and Cuthbert, a sly sorcerer. They seem so real that one can accept without a flicker of the eyelash a far greater assortment of fantastic creatures and situations than the authors of most fantasies would dare mingle with their plots. In addition, the novel abounds in humor, from overt slapstick to subtle understatement. There is satire, too, which sometimes bites almost too deeply for comfort; and more than one example of human kindliness that even an age of superstition and hardship cannot suppress. Mervyn Wall has broken all the accepted rules for writing an enjoyable fantasy---and broken them so successfully that The Unfortunate Fursey is one of the most irresistible and entertaining concoctions published since Pratt and de Camp's Incomplete Enchanter.

---•Oo---

review of The Flames---concluded from page 158

as the orthodox religions would have him. Thus Stapledon has started out from a first cause and returned to a first cause, and it may well be that the mental frustration resulting---conscious or unconscious---caused him temporarily to embrace mysticism in Death Into Life. With The Flames, however, he has returned to a fragment that confines itself to an idea treated as were his earlier ones. Yet as the book concludes we find Stapledon still testing his failure, briefly pursuing the closed circle that has led him from God back to God in a vain attempt to circumvent the predicament, and shaking his head in bafflement. The truth is that he has long since said all he is capable of saying on the subject; he has reached the limits of his imagination, and is forced to retreat to outlining in greater detail portions of his over-all concept.

Other authors have followed similar roads in science-fiction. Starting with "The Skylark of Space," E.E.Smith began pushing out, expounding new ideas that were carried still further in "Skylark Three" and finally exhausted in "The Skylark of Valeron." Having gone as far as super-science would carry him and recognizing the fact that he had reached his limit, Smith did the logical thing: he started at the beginning, building up an entirely new type of universe with his "Lensman" novels. On the other hand, when Clifford D. Simak ran out of ideas for his "Cities" series, he resorted to fantasy instead of sensibly stopping. Thus "Aesop," the latest in the series, is dangerously close to a fairy tale.

Stapledon was following for a time in Simak's path, but apparently is now retreating reluctantly from his original premise, though not deserting it. There still remains for him the possibility of producing very great stories, for his style is vigorous, colorful and sharply individualistic, and he can hold the readers' interest easily. But if his next book does not show some new road of thought, there is no question in my mind that he is through as a philosopher. If he will admit this to himself and concentrate upon the story element, Stapledon may produce still more outstanding works of fiction. He needs to be reminded that there are countless good stories which have outlived inadequate philosophies.

---Sam Moskowitz.

THE IMMORTAL STORM

A History of Science-Fiction Fandom

by
Sam Moskowitz

(part 10)

Led by Dale Hart, meanwhile, a Texas group that was shortly to become very active in the fan world was organizing. This group formed a "Tri-Cities Chapter" under the SFL banner, and embraced interested fans in the communities of Baytown, Goose Creek and Pelley. A. S. Johnston, author of several tales in the old Amazing Stories, was a member, as were Percy T. Wilkinson and Arthur Nelson. By dint of diligent effort Hart eventually assembled in the Houston area, from this nucleus, one of the largest fan groups Texas had ever known; this Tri-Cities Chapter later proved quite active, and was noted for the delegations it sent to the World Science-Fiction Convention in New York and later events. Associated directly or indirectly with it by 1939 were Alfred Moskowitz, John Ellis, Julius Pohl, Jr., Louis Bains, Chester Jordan, Allen R. Charpentier, Robert Young and many others.

In upper Manhattan the Washington Heights SFL chapter had begun a series of mutations of name and policy that carried it through the titles of the Washington Heights Scientifiction Club, the Inter-Fantasy Circle, and finally the Fantasy Circle. The eventual inclination of the club was toward fantasy and the supernatural rather than science-fiction, and for this purpose its director (then Chester Fein) obtained from James Taurasi the rights to the title Weird and Fantasy Fiction for use as the official club organ. As far as your historian can determine, however, no magazine bearing this title was ever published by this group. From reports of Richard Wilson and Jack Gillespie, the meetings of the Fantasy Circle were largely rounds of tomfoolery. Not surprisingly, the club was soon heard from no more, though it is not known whether it dissolved officially or simply petered out through lack of interest. However, such members as Cyril Kornbluth, Chester Fein and David Charney played later parts in this history.

Neither this account nor another of similar length can be expected to do justice to the long history of activity of Science Fiction League chapter #4: Los Angeles. The LASFL had been back into the swing of fandom since the fall of 1937, but despite its crescendo of activity it gave the impression of being apart and different from the field at large. This view was heightened by the innumerable affectations adopted by club members on their stationery, publications, etc.---such as support of "simplified" spelling, technocracy, Esperanto. Much of this was but a superficial veneer applied by Forrest J. Ackerman, leading light of the organization for many years, and was often an issue hotly debated at meetings, though little mention of such opposition ever leaked out.

A very fine personalized history of the club's activity during 1937-38 may be found in T. Bruce Yerke's booklet Memoirs of a Superfluous Fan, which was distributed through a FAPA mailing in 1944. It was the first of a projected series of four such booklets---but was the only one to appear. And truly, a club of the size, duration and all-around importance of the LASFL needs a novel-length resume to do it credit.

The framework of the organization was the interests of the numerous fans who composed it. Included on its roster were such names as Forrest Ackerman, Ray Bradbury, Frederick Shroyer, T. Bruce Yerke, Morojo, James Mooney, Paul Freehafer, Russell J. Hodgkins, Pogo, Roy Squires, Franklyn Brady and A.K.Barnes.

The director of this club of thirty regular members was Hodgkins. But so informal were its gatherings that the director was regarded as a convenience when the club was suddenly confronted by a celebrity and a temporary show of parliamentary procedure was required.

So often did members convene that gatherings were little more than gab fests. Almost every time a new member joined, as in the case of Shroyer, a plea for planned programs would arise. The club might take this seriously for several meetings, but as soon as the new member became acclimated to the group a slump back to the old informal order of things proved inevitable.

This attitude did not preclude worthwhile activity, however, for in 1938, in addition to publishing Imagination!, The Hyborean Age and The Television Detective, the club distinguished itself by sponsoring such lively discussions as a debate on the relative qualities of weird and science-fiction, with Henry Kuttner championing the former. Besides, numerous excursions to places of fan interest were made by members, such as those to a mathematical lecture by Eric Temple Bell ("John Taine") and to the home offices of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc., in Tarzana, California.

The LASFL itself received many visitors. Dr. David H. Keller, Joseph Skidmore (since deceased) and Arthur J. Burks were among these. Hannes Bok, then an unknown, aspiring artist, stopped in once in early 1938. The resultant friendship between him and Ray Bradbury proved of much ultimate benefit to Bok. The only evidence of his visit to the club, however, is a rather poorly mimeographed drawing which appeared on the cover of the May, 1938 Imagination!.

Charles D. Hornig, the former science-fiction magazine editor, dropped in on the LASFL also, and caused a furore by guest-editing the June, 1938 number of the club magazine in normal style---i.e., with all of Ackerman's innovations omitted. Though many preferred "Madge" (as Imagination had come to be nicknamed) in this format, it was evident that much of its charm and atmosphere had been sacrificed in the process. A chapter vote was taken, and by the slim margin of two ballots it was decided to retain the old form.

Prior to Hornig's experiment, it should be remarked, there had been considerable discussion in the club as to the advisability of discarding "simplified" and "phonetic" spelling in the magazine, as well as many other of its ruffles. When the issue was forced, editors Morojo and Ackerman offered to withdraw in favor of anyone else who cared to edit Imagination!. It was a safe offer, for none of the critics were willing or able---and so the magazine remained as it was. But gradually a larger percentage of the material was printed in more or less standard format, with more emphasis laid on cleverness of handling than on uniqueness of language.

Thirteen was a very unlucky number for "Madge," for with the issue of that number she stumbled, sighed and gave up the ghost. What was to have been a magnificent anniversary issue dwindled down to a dozen pages of readers' letters and editorial excuses. Too few people had been bearing the brunt of work on the magazine; and now that Ackerman was working at irregular hours the coordination of editorial effort became impossible.

But from the corpse of Imagination! there arose a small, quarterly pereodical composed entirely of readers' letters---in short, a sort of expanded version of the Madge letter column, which had long been one of the most popular of its features. This new periodical was titled Voice of the Imagi-Nation (for short, Vom).

The material on hand for publication in the now-defunct club organ was published in several new individual titles that appeared irregularly from time to time. Some appeared in two untitled issues of a magazine later named Mikros and used to propagandize the gospel of technocracy throughout fandom. However, most

of the articles saw print in a pamphlet entitled Madge's Prize Manuscripts (thus named because most entries were submissions to a fan article contest intended for the ill-fated anniversary issue). Among them was Jack Speer's "After 1939---What?." Whatever interest Speer had lost in professional fantasy itself had been more than compensated for by his increased interest in fandom and the psychology of the fans themselves. In this prize-winning article he predicted that the first world science-fiction convention would mean greater cooperation and publicity from the professional magazines and hence an influx of new fans into the field ---which would in turn raise the circulation of fan journals into the hundreds and necessitate their using a more general type of material. He further considered the possibility of a war and its probable results on the field.

During its early numbers Imagination! had been disliked by many. But as the magazine maintained its mimeographed format and twenty large-sized pages month after month it slowly attained not only popularity but a certain amount of respect. This was partly due, no doubt, to the fact that a mimeographed journal in those times of hektography was roughly equivalent to a professionally printed one today. And its demise was marked by sincere regrets, even from some of its severest critics. Yet although Imagination! was in point of reproduction ahead of its time (mimeography did not come into general usage until almost a year later) this made it in a sense a magazine apart, one which augmented other activity in the field rather than worked hand in hand with it.

XXVII
The Factions Allign Themselves

Meanwhile the Wollheim-Moskowitz feud was continuing to run full-tilt. Here and there were still some who teetered on the tight-rope of diplomacy, but who realized that sooner or later they would probably have to choose sides. Among those were Richard Wilson and Jack Gillespie. Wilson was of course well known as publisher of the weekly Science Fiction News-Letter, and was among the ten most popular fans of the day. He had previously printed an issue of Moskowitz's journal Helios. Gillespie had time and again, in uncertain fashion, attempted activity in the field, but had somehow never quite entered the main current of the stream. He was well known to Moskowitz, who had in fact personally initiated him into the whys and wherefores of the fan world much in the fashion of a Dutch uncle.

The curious set of circumstances which led to the open break between these two and Moskowitz has many extremely humorous aspects. Much of the account was told by Wilson in "Newark Pilgrimage," an article that appeared in the second issue of his news-sheet's supplement, The Science Fiction Dividend. "It all began sanely enough," he stated. "Donald A. Wollheim, John B. Michel, James V. Taurasi, Jack Gillespie, Robert G. Thompson, Fred Pohl and I gathered at the home of Herbert E. Goudket on the night of Saturday, March 12, 1938 in order to see our unlovely faces in the movies he had taken of us the previous Sunday." On conclusion of this visit all but Taurasi and Thompson treated themselves to a showing of a surrealist film Blood of a Poet and the fantasy The Crazy Ray at a Greenwich Village theater. This was more than adequate fare for putting a science fiction fan in a peculiar state of mind, so after a very late cafeteria repast Wilson and Gillespie took leave of their friends and strolled uptown to the ferry, which they took to Weehawken, New Jersey. On impulse they decided to pay a visit to Moskowitz who lived in nearby Newark, and after a somewhat roundabout trip reached the door of the Moskowitz abode at exactly 5:45 A.M.

Neither Sam Moskowitz nor the other members of his family had any acquaintance with the spectre of insomnia, and when the bell interrupted their re-

pose with its insistent clamor at that hour of the morning, speculations soared from such trivialities as the house being afire on up the scale of the imagination. On being confronted by Wilson and Gillespie, Moskowitz demanded to know what urgency prompted visiting him at such an hour of the morning. With eyes almost brimming with tears, Gillespie broke the "news" that William Sykora had "passed on." Moskowitz was assured that this was an irrevocable fact, having been ascertained by Jack Rubinson, who, when he happened to pass the Sykora residence, had seen a wreath of flowers on the door. Upon inquiring, he had been informed of the event, but had not, he said, queried the bereaved further as to the cause.

The strangeness of the early visit, the vividness of the detail and the note of sorrow in their voices added up to the real McCoy to Moskowitz, who told the news to his family (who knew Sykora well), all of whom swallowed the story with incredible naivité and much sympathy. Gillespie and Wilson were given refreshments, and offered the use of a bed if they wished to sleep. Moskowitz now had every intention of calling off the projected Newark convention, since it had been Sykora's idea. At this point his visitors apparently realized that their prank was getting out of hand, for they tried to dissuade their host from such an action. However, during the dawn hours while they sat waiting for the world to wake up, their remarks concerning Moskowitz, his family and place of residence were insultingly caustic. Quite naturally Moskowitz took offense, though he remained silent.

An early morning visit was made to Alex Osheroff, and quite deliberately (since he was still somewhat annoyed by their behavior) Moskowitz conducted Gillespie and Wilson several miles to the residence of William Miller, who was not at home, and then to an address of James Blish which proved to be incorrect. Extremely wearied, the two departed for New York---without disclosing their hoax.

Fortunately Moskowitz dispatched a letter of condolence to the Sykora family on the same day as the visit; upon receiving it, Sykora himself made a quick trip to Newark in time to forestall Moskowitz's intentions to dismantle convention preparations. Just before his arrival he received several sarcastic postal cards from Gillespie and Wilson, informing him of the truth.

The relief felt on learning that Sykora was still alive almost cancelled an explosion Wilsonward that would have been Moskowitz's normal reaction. However, he was definitely affected by the whole affair, since he had always played the fan game naively "straight," and since this experience was a sort of climax to many shoddy stories he had heard. Previously he had written for Wiggins' Science Fiction Fan an article titled "They're Grand," in which the virtues of fans in general were extolled to the skies. Now his views swung to the other extreme, and he found psychological relief in penning for The Science Fiction Collector an essay "They're Grand---But They Have Their Faults." The appearance of such lines as the following was a shock to the fan world of 1938:

> Imagine for yourself the terrific shock I received when upon acquaintance with these "top" fans I found a number of them reeling unsteadily about, definitely under the influence of alcohol. I took all that in, being careful not to let one example influence my opinion of all others. I made reservation for the fact that black sheep were present in all circles. The crowning blow came when I met one time a few fans whom I had always respected, whom I thought tremendously of, prancing crazily about at all hours of the night, obviously intoxicated or the next best thing to it. One was fifteen years old!

In this day, when the average fan age is higher, drunkenness is more common and regarded more liberally, but in 1938, when most fans were from fourteen to nineteen years of age, imbibing of alcoholic beverages by fans was looked upon as outright perversion---as, indeed, the law has always recognized it for minors.

The response to this article was rapid. Both Oliver Saari and Milton Rothman wrote lengthy replies of analysis and comment, concluding that New York fans were not typical of those throughout the rest of the country, and chastising Moskowitz for his "hero-worship and idealism." Richard Wilson had also read the article, and, despite the fact that no names had been mentioned, he took it personally, and stoutly denied being a drunkard. "Moskowitz," said he, "is a liar."

And henceforth all Moskowitz publications, articles and projects began to receive decidedly sour notices both in Wilson's own publications and in those where his influence was considerable. For some months Moskowitz made no reply, but when silence and attempts to smooth out differences alike did not alter Wilson's attitude, Moskowitz took steps which were directly responsible for cutting down The Science Fiction News Letter's influence in the field, and in some measure prompting its eventual discontinuance.

Meanwhile, Will Sykora, still attempting to reaffirm his newly-won foothold in the fan field, did not content himself merely with the belief that Moskowitz would carry out with him plans for a science-fiction convention. He continued to probe incessantly for other possibilities. When it seemed that Stickney would suspend publication of The Amateur Correspondent, Sykora wrote to Willis Conover, and inquired if he still had the rights to the title Fantasy Magazine, and proposing, if so, that it be continued with Conover as editor and he business manager. For a short time it appeared that some progress in this direction was going to be made; but as soon as Stickney caught wind of these plans he promptly announced that he himself intended to continue The Amateur Correspondent (though he never actually did), and since the latter title was the successor filling Fantasy Magazine's obligations, Stickney probably had legal grounds for spiking Sykora's revival plans had he chosen to do so. In any event, nothing further ever came of the matter.

Nothing daunted, Sykora next tackled a matter vibrant with potentialities for disaster. He set about to prove that the dissolution of the ISA had been accomplished illegally. He organized what he termed "the ISA Committee for Reorganization." Robert Madle was contacted and offered the presidency of the resurrected club. Madle was amenable to the suggestion, and supported the idea in an editorial of the March-April, 1938 issue of Fantascience Digest. But the surprise came when Sykora announced that he had contacted members of the old ISA and alleged to have in his possession signed statements from a majority affirming that they had had no voice in the dissolution of the group.

Sykora's claims were naturally thoroughly alarming to the Wollheim faction which he held responsible. The result was concerted action against him by the Committee for the Political Advancement of Science-Fiction (CPASF), the group into which such leftist-inclined fans as Wollheim, Michel, Lowndes, Pohl, Rubinson, Dockweiler, Cohen and others had united shortly after the 1937 Philadelphia convention for the purposes of propagandizing Michelism and similar purposes. Sykora was ill-prepared for countering their actions.

Next, Sykora announced the formation of the Scientific Cinema Club of New York (whose function in all probability was that of a "front" for ISA-revival activities), and named January 30, 1938 as the date for a get-together meeting. At this time, related announcement circulars, there would be shown a revival of the science-fiction film The Lost World (from the Doyle novel of the same title) as well as a short fantasy cartoon and a film showing former ISA activities (the rocketry experiments).

On the scheduled Sunday this meeting took place at Bohemian Hall, the site of the New York fan convention of the previous year. Not only were several fans from the metropolitan district present, but a Philadelphia delegation composed of Agnew, Madle and Baltadonis as well. Upon conclusion of the showing of the films, Sykora, Goudket and Fein presided over a discussion as to plans for a local club whose chief interest would be the production of an amateur "scientifilm."

Only a short bit of The Lost World had been shown, however, when Harry Dockweiler (a CPASF member), influenced by liberal imbibition of alcoholic beverages, began to misbehave. His actions became so annoying that a police officer had to be summoned to remove him from the hall. Frederick Pohl decided to leave with him. If Dockweiler's action had been prompted by a desire to disrupt the meeting (which your historian doubts), certainly the attempt had been foiled by the expedient of summoning the law to the scene. But the CPASF did not have to rely on such crude devices; it had far subtler methods at its command.

When Sykora walked into the next meeting of the club at the home of Goudket he found himself confronted by a major delegation of his opposition in the persons of Wollheim, Michel, Pohl, Gillespie and Lowndes. The only one present (with the exception of Goudket) that he could count on as favoring him was Mario Racic, Jr. Shocked by this turn of events, Sykora refused to meet the members of the CPASF, and retired to another room. No amount of argument could persuade him that these fans were sincere in their desire to aid in the production of a fantasy film. And in desperation he threatened to resign from the organization should they be elected. They were elected, however. Sykora promptly resigned, predicting that the club would be destroyed by the actions of the newcomers, and promising to return to Goudket after the inevitable disruption and start anew.

This prophecy materialized with clock-like precision at the following meeting of the Scientific Cinema Club in June, when it was unanimously resolved to disband the club. Unable to resist the opportunity for placing of this, too, on the shoulders of Sykora, members "bemoaned the manipulations" by which he had "crassly" arranged to reimburse himself for the bare expenses of showing The Lost World at the expense of the club treasury.

But Sykora had not waited for the disbandment before striking out anew on his own. In early May, 1938 he launched a club known as The Scientifilmakers and even distributed one issue of its official organ (The Scientifilmaker) at the convention held in the same month. The back cover of the magazine carried an advertisement for the ISA, which was characterized as "never legally dissolved!" In the same number was an article, with diagrams, "Make Your Own Cartoon Movies" by James Taurasi. Even more pertinent, however, was Sykora's editorial "What I Have Done to Get Metropolis." In this he claimed to have failed in his attempts to procure a print of that famous fantasy film originally produced in Germany eleven years before, but stated that he had begun negotiations with UFA, the original makers. This last remark was to have later repercussions, as we shall see.

XXVIII
The First National Science-Fiction Convention

Although Moskowitz and Sykora had in common the desire to sponsor a successful convention, and the fact that both had been attacked by Wollheim, they had theretofore cooperated little along other lines. Moskowitz had done nothing to aid the proposed revival of the ISA, for example, other than announcing in his magazine Helios that Sykora intended to resurrect it. He was not, at that time, actually aware of many of the currents of fan politics that eddied about him, and maintained a patently naive and idealistic attitude toward both the convention

and fans' actions in general. On his part, Sykora offered little or no enlightenment to Moskowitz prior to the convention, not even advising him regarding the trouble he was having with Wollheim. These facts should be kept in mind by the reader as we lift the curtain on events transpiring at the Newark convention.

As this gathering proved to be the most successful up to that time on the bases of both attendance and program, it behooves us to consider in some detail the preparations preceding it.

Newark had been favored as the convention site for several reasons. First of all, it was a city close enough to New York to assure maximum attendance from that source, as well as being near Philadelphia, home of the PSFS. Secondly, since many New Jersey names had been noted in fantasy magazine readers' columns, it was hoped that many of these could be lured to a local site. Thirdly, Moskowitz's work on the convention would be facilitated, since he lived in Newark. Finally, prices were generally lower there than, for example, in New York; as a criterion, the well-kept Slovak Sokol Hall (which was finally chosen as the meeting place) which boasted two podiums and seats for a hundred people was obtained for the modest sum of three dollars.

Originally it had been intended to hold a three-day convention. Ultimately, however, this idea was discarded. Instead, a one-day affair that would not try (as previously announced) to be as much of an end in itself as a trial for judging the feasibility of a longer, world convention in 1939 was decided upon. Originally, too, the provision of a complete dinner for attendees was contemplated; but in view of the hoped-for large attendance a buffet was scheduled in its place. Even the titling of the affair had provided food for thought. In early stages of planning "The First National Fantasy Convention" was considered suitable; but eventually this was altered to "The First National Science-Fiction Convention," it being felt that the word "fantasy" might lead people to misconstrue the scope of the gathering. An elaborate printed program (such as later conventions featured) was vetoed on the grounds of the difficulty that would be encountered in obtaining advertisements to support it considering the economic state of the country at that time.

Publicity for the convention was disseminated in the form of posters, mimeographed circulars and notices in fan magazines. In the fan press this was poorly organized, but what did appear contained the proper appeal. Helios ran sizeable notices in its fifth and sixth issues; Taurasi's Cosmic Tales published another; and a convention flyer, The First National Fantasy Bulletin, was circulated among FAPA members. For the first time a convention was advertised by professionally printed posters, which were displayed in Newark and New York museums, libraries and schools. These furnished essential information about the affair in compact, eye-catching manner, and are known to have been responsible for luring at least two visitors to the hall. But the most important device utilized to attract attendees were the circulars, which were mailed to a large list of near-by fans. These drew the crowd. They included a brief description of the affair (with a program), an explanation of the stake every reader, author, artist, editor and fan had in the convention, and complete travelling instructions. The writing, mimeographing and mailing of these circulars was entirely the work of Sykora. It will be noticed that there was no publicity whatsoever in the professional fantasy publications. This should not be surprising, inasmuch as rapprochement between the fans and professionals had not as yet been consummated. In fact, the convention proposed to do that very thing.

It was announced that sponsorship of the convention was the joint project of Helios, the Scientifilmakers and the ISA Committee for Reorganization---but this was the veriest camouflage, for the task was pure and simple the personal burden of Sykora and Moskowitz.

At first Sykora had intended to pay the entire bill for the convention and not try in any fashion to retrieve his money; but, prompted by the urgings of Moskowitz, he decided to make some attempt to cover the expenses. In those days, when fans were avid collectors of their little amateur journals and steep prices were paid even for announcement circulars, selling fan magazines was a possibility to be considered. But where could these be obtained? Moskowitz conceived the answer: Have fans publish them---magazines of not less than twelve pages, in fifty-copy editions. These would be sent to the convention sponsors, and in exchange each publisher would receive a free copy of every other magazine similarly contributed plus a premium---this being a bound set of eight issues of Alex Osheroff's Science Fiction Scout. Excess copies would be sold.

This plan had tremendous appeal to distant fans who had no hope of being present, yet who all but wept at the thought of having a dozen or more magazines missing from their collections. The response was immediate. Ackerman contributed Baroque, Bagatales, Brobdingnagian, a pamphlet for attendees' autographs. Marconette turned out a special issue of Scienti-Snaps. Wiggins produced The Science Fiction Conventioneer. Madle brought out Cosmos. Wilson published The Convention Crier. The Canadian fan Nils H. Frome hektographed a Fantasy Pictorial. McPhail mailed in Stf. and Nonesense. Thompson contributed a short story titled The Magic Drug of Witch-Dr. Boog. Taurasi submitted Wonder Fiction Annual. Larry B. Farsaci mimeographed a collectors' magazine, Fantastic. Both Sykora and Moskowitz had their convention journals, titled respectively The Scientifilmaker and Different. Even the CPASF members came through with The Science Fiction Advance and Rejected---Convention Committee, neither of which was calculated to do the gathering any good.

The auction idea was used for the first time at a fan convention when a contribution of professional fantasy publications and fan journals was received from Forrest Ackerman. In deciphering Ackerman's ambiguous wording and spelling eccentricities it was understood that half of the money received from auctioning these items was to be applied to defraying convention expenses and that the other half Ackerman would accept in the form of convention publications. In view of the fact that he was a dealer who bought and sold such items, this agreement appeared perfectly understandable. But when it had been fulfilled in this way Ackerman wrote Moskowitz indignantly:

> My meaning was: 50% of the sales I was to receive in cash to offset my expenditures, U to keep the other ½ & send me fanmags. I'll concede it's conceivable U coudve interpreted "fanmags" as Convention mags; what I really had in mind, hwever, was issues of Helios & other duplicates in Ur possession. In other words, if U disposed of my stuff at $3 I got $1.50 & U the opportunity to sell me $1.50 worth of Ur stuff for Ur "trouble" (fun). I wonder how U woudve disposed of all those Con-mags if U hadnt unloaded m on me??? ... Seriously---I shall really scandalize U in scientifictional circles Samuel, letting all the lads know.

The above quotation will give the reader a rough idea of the difficulties under which correspondence with Ackerman operated at that time. Moskowitz refused to remit him further consideration, maintaining that Ackerman's original letter suggesting the agreement would remain in his files as evidence that his interpretation had been reasonable; that the contribution had been unsolicited; and that, even without Ackerman's contributions, the extra convention journals would have found ready buyers. He returned to Ackerman, after some delay, a copy of the first issue of Imagination!, which had not been sold at the auction. (Ackerman

had intimated that Moskowitz intended to keep and eventually sell this item for a small fortune.) This exchange was the foundation of the anti-Moskowitz attitude held by Ackerman thenceforth.

As luck would have it, the weather was exquisite on Sunday, May 29th. But this was small consolation to the fingernail-biting convention committee, as by three hours before convention time, no one had yet arrived at the hall. This lack of early-birds was a matter of grave concern, for at past gatherings fans usually arrived many hours in advance. At two o'clock, one hour before starting time, a scant fifteen people had put in their appearance. Thus arrival on the scene of Astounding Science-Fiction's new editor, John W. Campbell, Jr., was the cause of more trepidation than rejoicing, if this skimpy showing was the best that could be made. Campbell's murmur of "Better than I expected," (which might have referred either to the attendance or the hall) was noted with uneasiness. Twenty-five attendees now appeared the maximum to be hoped for. Then abruptly, just twenty minutes before commencement time, a veritable cloud-burst of people converged on the hall. The scene grew with amazing speed to the aspects of a mob. There was a wild melee of talking, drinking, gesticulating, photograph-snapping fans. The hundred available seats filled up almost immediately, and a mass of standees began to assemble in the rear of the hall. It was fantastic, it was unbelievable---but in the vicinity of 125 people were jammed into the room---more fans than had attended all past conventions put together!

They had turned out from every nearby state---New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Rhode Island, Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire. It was virtually a "Who's Who" showing of past, present and future fandom. Professionals were likewise well represented, among them being authors Otis Adelbert Kline, Eando Binder, L. Sprague de Camp, Frank Belknap Long, Manly Wade Wellman, Lloyd A. Eshbach and John D. Clark; in addition to Campbell, Mortimer Weisinger (editor of Thrilling Wonder Stories) was present, and with him Leo Margulies, the editorial director of Standard Publications itself.

This last-minute onrush of fans resulted in the convention's being called to order one-half hour late. At 3:30 P.M. chairman Moskowitz rapped the gavel on the speaker's stand for order. Robert Madle, taking the place of Baltadonis (who was too ill to attend) read the minutes of the Third Eastern Science Fiction Convention held in Philadelphia the previous year. Then the chairman launched into the welcoming address. He emphasized the fact that present were representatives of every category in the field---the publisher, the editor, the author, the artist, the reader, the active fan, the science-hobbyist. This, he maintained, was the ideal opportunity for ironing out misunderstandings.

Sykora, the first speaker on the program, swerved from the sweeping generalities of the chairman's address. He emphasized that the large gathering before him assured the success of a world science-fiction convention. He proposed that such a major event be held in conjunction with the World's Fair in New York City in 1939. With the active cooperation of all parties concerned, he maintained, there were virtually no limits to the possibilities offered.

Rothman, the chairman of the two previous Philadelphia conventions, expanded still further those possibilities, and then veered into a talk drawing an analogy between the past histories of music and science-fiction. He concluded by asserting that he felt a golden age was in prospect for both.

Inspired by this support, Sykora moved that the chairman be given power to appoint a temporary or a permanent committee to lay the groundwork for such an event. This motion aroused general comment. Herbert Goudket asked if editors would pledge their aid to a 1939 world convention. The chair remarked that it would be unfair to coerce the editors into a hasty decision. Goudket then moved that the motion be tabled for later discussion. Here occurred a peculiar event

that has often been misinterpreted. Moskowitz had never heard the expression "tabled" before. Befuddled, he requested Goudket to repeat his words, which Goudket did to no better effect. Moskowitz then conceded his position to Sykora, under whose chairmanship the motion was passed. Moskowitz after this reassumed the chair.

Campbell, the feature speaker, was then introduced. His topic aroused much surprise: he was going to speak about science-fiction fandom. For the first time an editor was publicly acknowledging the existence of such an entity. Campbell outlined his views of an inner circle of fans (the letter-writers, amateur publishers and participants in associated activities), and the outer circle of fans (those who were merely readers). He announced his intention of aiding this inner circle by offering to print in "Brass Tacks" (Astounding's readers' column) a letter of what amounted to free advertising to any fan publication that could support an expanding audience. (This would of course exclude hektographed journals.) Also he was honestly interested in obtaining more of these amateur periodicals. As this and later events proved, Campbell was undeniably a very real fan himself. He answered Goudket's question anent editorial support for a 1939 world convention by implying that he was ready to support the efforts of any generally recognized group to sponsor such an event.

In the address of Mort Weisinger which followed, however, there were no such qualifications. He pledged that Thrilling Wonder Stories would give such a convention a prominent advertisement at no cost. Then he revealed that plans were afoot to publish a companion magazine to Thrilling Wonder. This proposed magazine would specialize in printing full-length novels, and Stanley Weinbaum's "Black Flame" was then under consideration for use in it.

Goudket expressed a few definitely uncomplimentary opinions of the Science Fiction League, and asked Weisinger what would be done to remedy the stagnant status into which it had deteriorated. Weisinger replied somewhat evasively that a remedy would be apparent in the next published column.

A fifteen-minute recess was called, and motion picture projectors were set up. Then the showing of the scheduled films began. First there was a "Stanley Ink" cartoon portraying a trip to Mars. Next on the program was a short picture illustrating Einstein's theory of relativity, and close upon the heels of this a comedy titled "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp." Presentation of the main feature, "The Lost World," had to be terminated after fifteen minutes because of the dullness of the silent film technique and the poor print that had been obtained.

An intermission was called and buffet refreshments brought in. These might have served a maximum of fifty people, but under the onslaught of 125 the result was so farcical as to inspire Richard Wilson's article "Way Down East" (published in Imagination! for July, 1938). Under the heading of "The Battle of the Buffet" he related a very funny and painfully authentic account of his attempts to assuage the urgings of the inner man.

During this intermission a telegram was received from the newly-published Marvel Science Stories in which its editors asked for an account of the convention for publication and wished attendees "an effective and enjoyable" time. The New York Times also telephoned for information, but neither periodical ever actually published news of the affair. A short squib in a Long Island paper was the closest thing to a professional write-up the convention obtained.

After the gathering had again been called to order Sykora, acting as master of eulogies, introduced many of the celebreties present. These introductions and the remarks they prompted combined to make one of the most interesting and successful parts of the program.

After the eulogies were over the next item on the agenda was fan business. And anticipating trouble, the professionals began their hasty departure.

They had ample justification for concern, since CPASF members present had come well loaded with ammunition. Moskowitz had been handed (as convention booklets) by Wollheim and Michel The Science Fiction Advance and Rejected--Convention Committee, the latter bearing the subtitle "Speeches by Donald A. Wollheim and John B. Michel Suppressed by the Committee of the Newark Convention." Both of these were placed on sale at the official table with all other convention publications. (Advance sold out completely, and Wollheim of course received a set of the promised booklets in exchange for its submission. Rejected failing to sell, Michel agreed for it to be given away; he was denied a set of booklets, however, when he later claimed undistributed copies.)

Prior to the convention a rule had been stipulated to the effect that all speeches should be submitted in advance to the convention committee. Both of these two speeches had been rejected for specific and fair reasons. Wollheim's talk, "Science Fiction and Science," had been excluded because it contained passages which might offend Campbell, the feature speaker, who had a technical education. For example:

> Does a man study science in high school and college, master a B.D., an M.S., or finally perhaps a Ph.D. only to become the editor of a pulp magazine? Why did he not utilize this hard won technical knowledge to pursue a research career? . . . The answer is easy but sad. Society had no place for this trained mind....

Michel's proposed speech, "The Position of Science Corelative to Science Fiction and the Present and Developing International Economic, Political, Social and Cultural Crisis," was rejected because it was considered too dull and too far removed from probable interests of attendees. The following are typical passages from it:

> The dialectic is a process resulting from the conflicts of the varied interests of humanity which coalesces the nebulous forces released by these conflicts into a rigid thread running through history which determines irrevocably the course of human affairs and which lasts as long as opposing interests exist in human intercourse.

And:

> This [the perversion of science to war] is due entirely to the economic contradictions of the present economic system, namely capitalism. On every hand these contradictions appear, throttling the very life out of scientific research.

Also in the booklet with these two speeches was an exceedingly uncomplimentary editorial regarding the convention and its sponsors.

The Science Fiction Advance, official organ of the Michelistic CPASF, was simply an easy-stage education in communism. As such, it was by 1938 standards blatantly obvious, though today, when many socialistic tenets have been more thoughtfully evaluated by sober liberals, it would seem quite mild. This issue contained a cartoon-illustrated poem by Pohl poking fun at Moskowitz, Sykora and Speer in decidedly unpleasant fashion.

But this was not all. In addition, CPASF members distributed by hand four different leaflets. One protested the discharge of a Thrilling Wonder Stories printer who was a member of the CIO. Another, aimed to counteract the possibility of Sykora's debating the legality of the ISA dissolution, announced the formation of an organization titled "Friends of the ISA"; this group was opposed to "the efforts of those who would willingly distort to selfish and inimical ends the history of the ISA and the facts concerning it," etc. A third circular asked

fans to vote for Michel as president of the FAPA on a free speech, free press and no censorship platform. And the last of the quartet contained lyrics by Michel titled "Science Fiction Internationale" which were to be sung to the tune of "The Internationale."

At no time was an attempt of any nature made to curtail the distribution of all this CPASF literature, which quite obviously was not calculated to promote a harmonious gathering. This pertinent fact should be kept in mind when one remembers the later charges of "dictatorship" and "suppression" that were launched at the convention and its sponsors.

Sykora conducted the business portion of the convention, since obviously his knowledge of parliamentary procedure was superior to that of Moskowitz. Sykora first spoke of the necessity of having a special group formed to sponsor the proposed 1939 convention. David Kyle, agreeing, moved that an organization be formed for this purpose; the motion was carried unanimously, a few not voting.

Immediately following this, another motion was made to the effect that a temporary committee be appointed by the acting chairman to work on the project, and that this temporary committee be invested with the power to choose a permanent committee of at least twenty members. At this point it was recalled that a similar committee had already been appointed at the second convention in New York in February, 1937. This committee had done virtually nothing in the interim. Sykora stated that if a majority of those present voted for the motion on the floor the old committee would automatically be disbanded, since such a majority would exceed in number those who voted to create the original committee. Upon being put to a vote, the motion was then passed with only a few dissenters.

Sykora appointed Goudket, Fein, Kubilus, Moskowitz and himself to this committee. It might be mentioned that of these the first three named had proved themselves generally more friendly to the CPASF than to Sykora. Kyle protested the choice on the grounds that there was a group present (the CPASF) not represented. Sykora replied that in boosting science-fiction he recognized no group distinctions, and that in any event several other factions present, such as the Philadelphia fans, were likewise unrepresented. But since this committee was temporary in nature, he said, such faults---if faults they were---could be remedied when the permanent membership was appointed. This discussion might have proceeded further had not Alex Osheroff moved for adjournment; this motion was carried, and the group began to disband.

This official closing was followed by the first auction ever held at a science-fiction convention. Moskowitz, who was to be seen in this role in later years, officiated. By the standards of today, when many beautiful and valuable original drawings, great piles of rare fantasy magazines and books, and unusual collectors' items of every sort are commonplace sights at such affairs, this initial auction, at which a small box filled with fan magazines was the main attraction, may appear extremely modest. Yet in those depression years fans whistled in amazement to hear two dollars bid for a set of twenty stills from films, or the bidding on issues of The Time Traveller and Science Fiction Digest rise to a dollar a copy. An advertisement for a West Coast fan journal on a single sheet of paper was knocked down at fifty cents, on bids raised a penny at a time. Similar selling prices prevailed on other rare items. Yet despite this the convention was a financial failure---approximately twenty-five dollars having been expended, and only fifteen regained. The deficit was footed by Sykora.

Before and during the auction many events of political significance had been transpiring. The group headed by Wollheim had been giving its circulars the widest possible circulation. David Kyle had written a petition protesting against methods used for choosing the committee (spoken of above) in the blank pages of the convention autograph book Baroque, Bagatales, Brobdingnagian. With this he so-

licited signatures, obtaining many from the closest friends of Sykora and Moskowitz, who in most instances had no idea that they were signing a petition, since Kyle never bothered to explain that he was doing more than soliciting autographs. The petition thus obtained was duly notarized, and Frederick Pohl at a later date delegated to show it to various New York science-fiction magazine editors.

The far-reaching consequences of the First National Science-Fiction Convention have never been clearly delineated. Today fans read of a gathering with 125 attendees and tend to regard it as a freakish development in an otherwise orderly history. The sole reason for this is the fantastically poor news coverage the affair received.

The one weekly journal in the field at the time was Richard Wilson's Science Fiction News-Letter. Wilson had attended the convention, published The Science Fiction Crier for distribution there, and had shown himself sufficiently interested in the event to print, beforehand, such derogatory remarks as "It probably won't be worth while." His weekly was in its twenty-sixth issue at convention time, and subscribers looked forward to the twenty-seventh---June 4th---number, which might reasonably be expected to carry an account of the affair. But when that number appeared its entire space was found to be devoted to reviewing in detail the convention booklets. Neither did the twenty-eighth number have a single line appropos the convention, being devoted instead mainly to a review of the latest FAPA mailing. Paradoxically, Wilson's article "Way Down East," which has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, contained more information about the convention than did his own journal.

Thus it happened that a magazine which did not appear until fully a month after the event had a news scoop of the convention. This was McPhail's mimeographed Rocket, a quarterly FAPA periodical. Yet even here the bulk of the account was devoted to a description of the wrangling of various factions over the choice of fans for the temporary convention committee. Still later the June-July, 1938 issue of The Science Fiction Collector published an unsigned commentary titled "Comments on the Convention," which took it for granted that all relevant facts were already available, and mentioned merely the "lowlights" of the gathering. Not until the long-delayed last issue of Helios appeared almost three months later with seven pages of pertinent information did fandom have a well-rounded picture of what had transpired. Since none of the journals named above had a circulation of more than fifty, the passing years have screened the important influence of a convention that boasted an attendance of twice as many fans as there were believed to be in active fandom at that period.

The subsequent account in the SFL column of Thrilling Wonder Stories for October, 1938 contained the only widely-circularized account the convention received. And oddly enough, this account was contributed, without the knowledge of the convention committee, by one of its opponents, who labelled the gathering the Fourth Eastern Science Fiction Convention in an effort to minimize its importance. Although the designation "First National Science Fiction Convention" did eventually triumph, there was for a time a field-day for advocates of the what's-in-a-name? philosophy.

By the statements of cooperation drawn from editors of professional fantasy magazines this convention was vitally important in redirecting the interest of fandom from the fans themselves back to the professionals. Just as surely its very size and general air of success convinced the editors that fandom was not without its potent influence, and that it would be wise not to disregard it. Finally, it was a new type of activity that differentiated the newer fandom from the old. The Fantasy Magazine group had produced publications which its followers were unable to match; the newer fans produced conventions, which their forbears had never dared to attempt, and which as a factor for boosting science-

fiction were infinitely superior in range of influence.

(to be continued)

---oOo---

CABELL, James Branch (1879-)

There Were Two Pirates: a Comedy of Division

New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., Inc., 1946. x-121pp. 21 cm. $3.

Review: The writings of James Branch Cabell seem to arouse violent reactions---either rapturous delight or utter aversion. This most recent of his novels is no exception. The editor of this magazine, for example, found it intolerably dull; while the present reviewer admits to deriving from it a great deal of pleasure.

It is a curious mixture of history and fantasy. The central figure and narrator is an authentic historical personage: the pirate Jose Gasparilla, who appears to have been the scourge of the waters off the Florida coast some hundred and fifty years ago. About half of the book deals with his activities, presumably with a fair degree of authenticity. After that, however, Jose meets an enigmatic gentleman in black and silver, Don Diego de Arredondo, who may or may not be the devil. Through the power of a magical watch-fob given him by Don Diego, Jose voyages into a realm outside our space-time where people cast no shadows and where the past yet endures.

However, Jose overshoots his mark; he aimed at the days of his young manhood, when he was the lover of the beautiful Isabel de Castro, but he finds himself instead back in his boyhood, when he has no idea of being a pirate (although the professions of knight-errant and saint have some appeal), and when Isabel de Castro is a homely and exasperating little girl.

His sojourn in this land of youth regained is brief; he soon finds himself back in his proper time. It appears, though, that the Don's magic has, during Jose's absence, provided a supernatural double for the pirate, who has carried on his extra-legal activities. This, of course, makes two Joses---and complications.

The story is written in Cabell's usual precise (sometimes over-precise), sonorous and witty style; it abounds in sly humor and barbed satire, particularly in the early portions. With the introduction of the fantasy element, and particularly during the period of Jose's regained youth, the style changes to a lighter, simpler and---to my taste---very delightful manner which reflects the naive thought-processes of the boy. With Jose's return to the real world, the style returns to urbane cynicism. Throughout, satire and sentiment are pleasantly interwoven, and one gets the impression that Cabell wrote the novel in high good humor.

There Were Two Pirates is in no sense an important book. Neither does it compare with the best Cabell did during the 1920's. It is full of echoes of his earlier work, and it is all rather trivial. Yet, provided you like Cabell's manner, it makes exceedingly enjoyable reading; and is, in fact, one of the most thoroughly entertaining stories the author has told in recent years.

The book has also some bibliographic interest as the first publication of the firm of Farrar and Straus; and it is handsomely bound, with many attractive illustrations and decorations.

---Paul Spencer.

---oOo---

The following back issues of Fantasy Commentator are available at 25¢ per copy, five for $1: #2, ~~X~~, 8, ~~IX~~, 15 and 16. Please order promptly; supplies are limited.