FANTASY COMMENTATOR

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

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editor and publisher

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CONTENTS

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THIS-'N'-THAT

Perhaps listing books concisely in alphabetical order would cram more new arrivals into this allegedly editorial column. Let's try it!

Akutagawa, Ryunosuke: Kappa (translated from the Japanese, with an introductory note, by S. Shirojiri). A caricature of modern Japanese with fantasy overtones.

Bechdolt, Jack: The Torch (Prime Press, $2½). America in 3010 A.D.

Berrow, Norman: The Three Tiers of Fantasy (Ward, Lock, 8/6). Everything's explained away in the end.

Bombal, Maria Louisa: The House of Mist (Farrar, Straus, $2¾). A fey atmospheric tale about a woman's dream world. Somewhat borderline.

Browne, Reginald: The School in Space (Swan, 5/-). Juvenile space opera.

Bylise, Marguerite: Earth Eagles (Holt, $2½). Very appealing novel about the ghost of a race-horse.

Campbell, John W., Jr.: The Mightiest Machine (Hadley, $3). Space opera.

Carlson, Esther: Moon over the Back Fence (Doubleday, $2½). A little girl's imaginary companion, "Uncle George." Rather good, too.

Coppard, A.E.: The Collected Tales of A.E.Coppard (Knopf, $5). 38 entries; many are fantastic, all are good.

Couppey, Madeline: Rumor in the Forest (translated from the French)(Scribner, $2). An animal allegory, well done.

Cross, John Kior: The Other Side of Green Hills (Coward-McCann, $2½). A strange fantasy about conflict between good and evil; for adults as well as the older children it was intended for.

Del Rey, Lester: "...And Some Were Human." (Prime Press, $3). Some of the short stories in this collection are as memorable as its title. Get it.

Dunsany, Lord: The Fourth Book of Jorkens (Jarrolds, 9/6). An utterly delightful must for every reader!

Echard, Margaret: Dark Fantastic ($2½, Doubleday). A good combination murder and ghost story; the locale, post-Civil War Indiana.

Eldershaw, M. Barnard: Tomorrow and Tomorrow (Georgian House, 13/6). Time travel to 2300 A.D. An Australian book.

Engel, Leonard & Piller, Emanuel: World Aflame: the Russian-American War of 1950 (Dial, $2). A trifle early: I'd guess about 1951. Not bad; sleazily bound.

Enright, Elizabeth: The Maple Tree and other Stories (Heinemann, 8/6). Title tale is a good ghostly one; the rest---not fantasy, not well written.

Fisher, Vardis: Adam and the Serpent (Vanguard, $2¾). More prehistoric stuff.

Fletcher, Geo. U.: The Well of the Unicorn (Sloane, $3½). Corn is right. If you like Eddison, though, you'll probably find it very intriguing. Personally, I think Eddison is extremely dull.

Frost, Conrad: Evidence Before Gabriel (Aldor, 9/6). Wellsian---but fantasy?

Gottleib, Hinko: The Key to the Great Gate (Simon & Schuster, $2¾). This will be reviewed in the next issue.

Grant, Joan: Return to Elysium (Methuen, 9/6). An interesting account of occult power development.

Green, R. L.: From the World's End (7/6, Ward). An adult fairy tale. Nothing at all original, but entertainingly done.

Heard, H. F. The Lost Cavern (Vanguard, $3). Fine stories---but the paper binding makes the price seem exhorbitant.

Heine, T. T.: I Wait for Miracles (Greenberg, $3½). But you won't find them in this boring political allegory.

Heinlein, Robert: Rocket Ship "Galileo" (Scribner, $2). Acceptable juvenile.

Hodges, C. W.: Sky High (Coward-McCann, $2½). A not-so-juvenile fairy tale.

Hodgson, W. Hope: Carnacki, the Ghost Finder (Mycroft & Moran, $3). A must.

Holm, John C.: McGarrity and the Pigeons (Rinehart, $2¾). A whimsical account of the horse that could talk to birds.

Jones, Ewart C.: How Now, Brown Cow? (Home & Van Thal, 7/6). What would you do if you suddenly changed into a cow?

Jones, Guy & Constance: There Was a Little Man (Random, $2½). An amusing novel about a leprechaun, as good as Peabody's Mermaid.

(concluded on page 218)

JOHN BUCHAN: A POSSIBLE INFLUENCE ON LOVECRAFT

by

Sam Moskowitz

In the field of the mystery story the name of John Buchan has been all but immortalized because of his fine novel The Thirty-Nine Steps. Short of a few about Sherlock Holmes there are scarcely any titles better known, particularly in view of the literally continuous reprinting of the story since its original appearance and the showing and reshowing of its cinema adaptation. Thus a book by this author with so provocative a title as The Watcher at the Threshold---bringing to mind Hichens' Lurker at the Threshold and Lovecraft's "Thing on the Doorstep"---would seem to promise interesting fare for connoisseurs of supernatural fiction, and upon reading it this promise was more than amply fulfilled. The Watcher at the Threshold proved to be a collection of short stories of noteworthy merit, one of which---"No Man's Land"---showed sufficiently close similarity to certain works of H. P. Lovecraft to warrant careful study.

But before this is attempted, let us establish one or two important facts. First of all, the chronology: John Buchan's book was first published in this country in 1918, shortly before Lovecraft composed very much supernatural fiction. And probably the story that is of chief interest to us appeared in magazine form previous to that date, as it was Buchan's policy to sell his work to periodicals prior to collecting it in book form. This naturally brings up the question, "Was Lovecraft familiar with his writings?" Even if we did not know that Lovecraft was a regular reader of the Munsey magazines, where much of Buchan's fiction was published, we could answer this question in the affirmative by referring to "Supernatural Horror in Literature," where Lovecraft stated as follows:

> In the novel Witch-Wood John Buchan depicts with tremendous force a survival of the evil Sabbat in a lonely district of Scotland. The description of the black forest with the evil stone, and of the terrible cosmic adumbrations when the horror is finally extirpated, will repay one for wading through the very gradual action and plethora of Scottish dialect. Some of Mr. Buchan's short stories are also extremely vivid in their spectral intimations; The Green Wildebeast, a tale of African witchcraft, The Wind in the Portico, with its awakening of dead Brittano-Roman horrors, and Skule Skerry with its touches of sub-arctic fright, being especially remarkable.

There is scant criticism and undisguised admiration in the foregoing.

Before speaking of similarities, one obvious dissimilarity between the work of the two authors should be cited. It must be firmly emphasized that their styles of writing do not even remotely resemble each other. But the likenesses of technique are in one instance so striking as to lead one to the conclusion that the basic plot framework of Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythology tales might conceivably have impinged on his mind while reading "No Man's Land" of John Buchan.

Let us now consider the essential ingredients of the later Lovecraft stories, the devices he utilized which helped them become unique among those of other authors of the macabre. First we find expert use of local color. Descriptions of the New England scene are always vivid and detailed. Authenticity is lent stories like "The Shadow over Innsmouth" by references to architecture, the looks of the stores, the state of repair of the roads, the local industries. In

"The Dunwich Horror" one finds detailed descriptions of the countryside and more especially of its inhabitants, the condition of their farms, characteristic provincialisms of speech and the local superstitions. Second, there is mention of the "Elder Gods"---frequent references to older races than man which once held sway upon the earth. Though they have lost supremacy they still lurk behind tenuous barriers, ready to unleash their powers if probed at by incautious investigators. Third, we have imaginary books. In Lovecraft's case it is the Necronomicon, fabulous weird tome which has successfully become a part of the mythology of supernatural literature. And fourth, there is some unspeakable horror. Lovecraft incessantly referred to and hinted at horrors too awful to be imagined. Perhaps one of the greatest failings of his work, in this writer's opinion, was the apparent inability of his imagination to conceive anything horrible enough to justify his elaborate build-ups.

In "No Man's Land" John Buchan uses all the above-listed ingredients in the identical well-balanced fashion that typifies Lovecraft's later tales. There may or may not be some significance to the fact that Lovecraft did not---to the best of my knowledge---write any story embodying these essentials prior to 1919. In 1920 there emerged "Nyarlathotep," a sort of experimental beginning of a new type of story; and then in 1921 "The Nameless City," a full-fledged tale of the type which made the author famous, though not equal to later ones since it lacked their authentic New England background and suffered somewhat from admixture of a Dunsanian influence. But in "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Shadow over Innsmouth" we find a perfect fruition of technique involving the four essential ingredients. Using these stories as a measuring stick, let us proceed with the examination of Buchan's effort.

"No Man's Land" is laid against the background of the black Scottish hills. It clearly shows that Buchan's knowledge of Scotland, its geographical features, historical background, people, and their way of speaking and thinking is, if anything, above Lovecraft's class. Its style, of course, is not akin to Lovecraft's studied, scholarly approach, but makes much freer use of emotional accentuations. Dialect is handled with the facility and accuracy of a master.

As for the "Elder Gods," consider this description of Buchan's hero's musings early in the tale:

> And then with some uneasiness I reflected on that older and stranger race who were said to have held the hilltops. The Picts, the Picti---what in the name of goodness were they? They had troubled me in all my studies, a sort of blank wall to put an end to speculation. We know nothing of them save certain strange names which men called Pictish, the names of those hills in front of me---the Muneraw, the Yirnie, the Calmarton. They were the corpus vile for learned experiment; but Heaven alone knew what dark abyss of savagery once yawned in the midst of this desert.

Although Buchan does not carry this device to the fantastic extremes that Lovecraft does the device seems still the same.

Then there is the motif of terrible forgotten books on eldritch lore. While searching for clues to the rumors and hints of a forgotten people still lurking in the foothills, a pupil of Buchan's hero produces

> a large leather-bound book. It was lettered, in the rococo style of a young man's taste, "Glimpses of the Unknown," and some of the said glimpses he proceeded to impart to me. It was not pleasant reading; indeed, I had rarely heard anything so well fitted to shatter sensitive nerves. The early part

> consisted of folk-tales . . . some of them wholly obscure, some of them with a glint of meaning, but all of them with some hint of a mystery in the hills.... But the second part was the stranger for it was made up of actual tales, most of them with date and place appended. It was a most Bedlamite catalogue of horrors, which, if true, made the wholesome moors a place instinct with tragedy.

Again this device seems in principle the same as the Necronomicon. Buchan buttresses some of his legends with footnotes (much in the manner of Lovecraft's referring to the Miskatonic Institute in Arkham) but I am unable to state whether or not these are factual references.

The unspeakable horror? Transpose this quotation into New England dialect and see how familiar it becomes:

> "What do ye ken about it?" he cried. 'You that bides in a southern toun, what can ye ken o' the God that works in thae hills and the Devil---ay, the manifold devils---that He suffers to bide here? I tell ye, man, that if ye had seen what I have seen ye wad be on your knees at this moment praying to God to pardon your unbelief. There are devils at the back o' every stane and hidin' in every cleuch, and it's by the grace o' God alone that a man is alive upon the earth."

Or:

> ...swimming in that black bog water, pursued by those nameless things, I seemed to be in a world of horror far removed from the kindly world of men.

Or:

> The shepherd's fear came back on me like a thunderclap. For one awful instant my legs failed me, and I had almost fallen. The next I had turned and ran shrieking up the hill.

"No Man's Land" tells of a man who believes the legends he hears about old Scotland, who verifies them through a book hinting at the survival of an elder race that is a constant menace to present-day mankind. He learns to dread the nameless things which pursue him through lonely glens, and is later captured by and escapes from these ancient survivals in the hills. This is as typical a story as Lovecraft ever produced---except that Buchan wrote it first!

It is quite possible, of course, that the juxtaposition of all these similarities is mere coincidence. But speaking for myself at least, I do not think so. It is my opinion that Lovecraft recognized the potentialities of the combination Buchan had stumbled upon and in later years developed them to achieve his most successful stories. How close this opinion approximates truth I leave to the judgement of the individual reader.

The Watcher by the Threshold shows Buchan to be an author possessed of forceful narrative gifts too pronounced, in some instances, for his own good. "No Man's Land" is an effective and exciting story, but it is scarcely in the same class as "The Dunwich Horror." Buchan plagues himself with anti-climaxes. Like Lovecraft's, his horror is never as horrible as it should be. Within the space of a few paragraphs Buchan can pick up the thread of action and weave it into whatever mood suits him---and he does so often. But "No Man's Land" is not integrated into a compact unit. Able to do whatever he cared to do at any time he wished, Buchan is too often careless.

Although they have little bearing on the literary comparison that has been this article's prime purpose, a few descriptive words should be said about the other tales in this collection. The title story is similar in theme to Fitz-James O'Brien's classic "What Was It?" or "The Horla" of de Maupassant. It is a

tale of a strange invisible form of life---not a ghost---that lives side by side with man and makes its presence felt to the perceptive few. The Scottish background is magnificent in this tale, and the gradual build-up, even if a trifle long, is classically done; the "thing" is neither a hoax nor an illusion, and does its dirty work in the approved fashion.

One of the most fiercely vivid tales of love and horror I have ever read is "The Outgoing of the Tide." Here Buchan lashes his talents and produces word-effects the like of which have rarely been matched. Against an atmospheric background of old Scotland we are told of a lad and a lass, and of his urging her to prove her love by keeping a tryst with him on the Sker. The heavy rain on the night of the tryst, the Sker flood, and the lad's wild ride on a stallion to save his love combine into a mounting crescendo of fierce power. The final horror comes as he braves the surging flood waters to greet the incoming tide, on which floats the body of his beloved, her long yellow hair streaming behind her. The writing in this powerful tale of unrequited love is truly inspired.

"The Far Islands" is the story of a boy grown to manhood and haunted by an ever-present vision of the sea parting to reveal a white path that runs out to distant isles promising fulfillment of his dreams. In the manner of Lovecraft's "Quest of Iranon" we follow the life and travels of this man as each new experience finds him only further from realization of his shining vision, until, like Iranon, his ultimate wish is granted by death.

(concluded on page 205)

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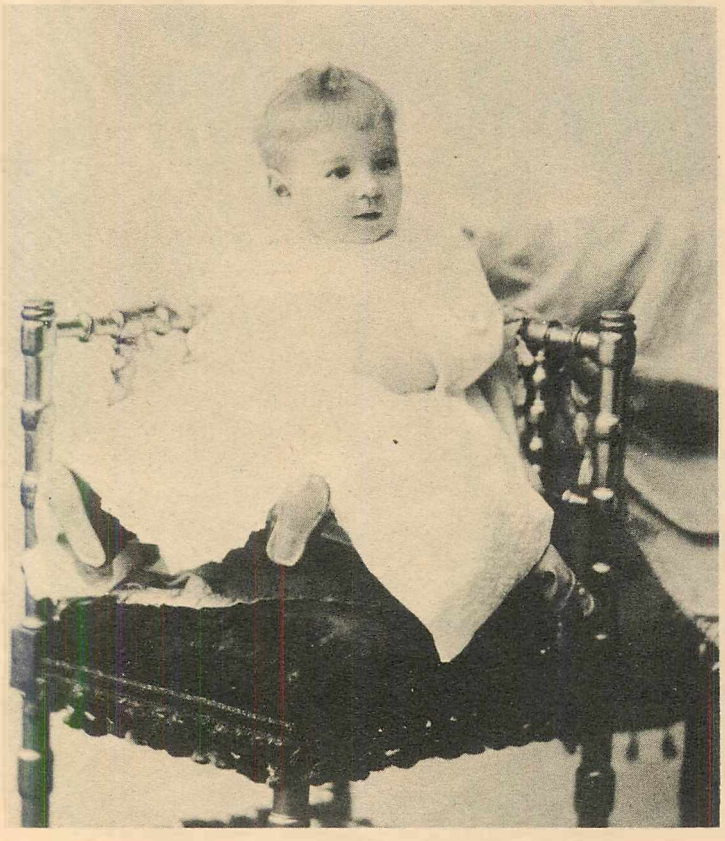
CLOUDS*

by
H. P. Lovecraft

Of late I climb'd a lonely height
And watched the moon-streak'd clouds in flight,
Whose forms fantastic reel'd and whirl'd
Like genii of a spectral world.
Thin cirri veil'd the silv'ry dome
And waver'd like the ocean foam,
While shapes of darker, heavier kind
Scudded before a daemon wind.
Methought the churning vapors took
Now and anon a fearsome look,
As if amidst the fog and blur
Marched figures known and sinister.
From west to east the things advanc'd---
A mocking train that leap'd and danc'd
Like Baccanals with joined hands
In endless files thro' airy lands.
Aerial mutt'rings, dimly heard,
The comfort of my spirit stirr'd
With hideous thoughts, that bade me screen
My sight from the portentous scene.
"Yon fleeing mists," the murmurs said,
"Are ghosts of hopes, deny'd and dead."

*from Spaceways, 1, 3 (February, 1939); by permission of Harry Warner, Jr.

ERICH ZANN WAS A GENIUS OF WILD POWER



Upper left: Mr. Phillips, maternal grandfather of H. P. Lovecraft.

Upper right: Mrs. Winfield Lovecraft (née Susan Phillips), H. P. Lovecraft's mother.

Lower left: Howard Phillips Lovecraft at the age of 8½ months.

CHARON—IN REVERSE

or,

H. P. LOVECRAFT VERSUS THE "REALISTS" OF FANTASY

by
Matthew H. Onderdonk

I

Every imaginative author may be thought of as a more or less benign Charon who ferries our spirits over the river of skepticism towards that dark and murky shore of the unknown and perhaps the unknowable. Whatever we may think of the ignorance of science and the sometimes ridiculous theological dogmas held by the old masters of the supernatural tale, at least we may agree that they had some convictions and a philosophy of sorts. The bank to which they conveyed us had some glimmerings of light; a coherence of concept; a vague dignity and grandeur. There was a step or two carved into the rocky shore for our faltering feet as we landed.

Too many of our present-day writers in the genre seem to have foundered in mid-stream and perished miserably. A few have been caught in obscure eddies and washed into some shunned cove where all is a morass of slime and weeds. They strive mightily to clamber up the treacherous slope, but for every inch gained upward they slide back two, and beneath them the fen is grimly waiting...

A decade has passed since the death of Howard Lovecraft and as his work falls into proper perspective perhaps it is not too soon for some evaluative comment to appear. Personally, I like to think of him as a Charon in reverse, one who picks up dissatisfied and bewildered spirits from the haven of the old masters and throws an occasional rope to the struggling wretches in the marsh. His destination is back to an intellectually brighter shore where the footing is dry and firm. A sturdy dock awaits the mooring of our craft...

II

Now, it is a fair question to ask why the average modern spectral tale is so unrewarding and unmemorable. It contains most of the ingredients and component factors of the classic story: a weird situation, an unhealthy locale, macabre characters and in some cases a brooding, oppressive and uneasy atmosphere. Our modern writers are not all hacks, either---some of them are conscientious and competent craftsmen. Yet the fact remains that the latter-day product seems puerile and pointless; we are seldom stirred and we forget the whole thing with almost indecent haste. On the other hand, the great works of the past grip our imaginations and our memories for all time. They pluck the subtlest strings of our personalities, and they have the innate power to evoke again and again the original emotions and moods.

The authors are not entirely to blame, either. If there did not exist an uncritical audience having neither the wit nor the ambition to protest, they would be forced to retire to their former haunts of the confession or western story magazines. As long as people will exchange coin of the realm for this sort of bilge, just so long will the men at the typewriters pound it out.

Why are so many of the readers intellectually bovine and apathetic? Why are the majority of the authors so uninspired, so sterile, so seemingly self-dedicated to literary oblivion? I think that the answer is twofold and that its deepest roots lie in the heart of the dilemma of modern mankind. It is merely one aspect of the sordid spectacle of our current frustration and indecision.

III

Modern man has lost sight of the dignity of the individual and hence has become callous towards the spectre of death and dissolution. In addition, and of more primary importance, modern man no longer believes in the objective reality of Evil; the concept of sin in its old sense has become untenable; the thought of punishments and rewards in some hypothetical hereafter has become a nursery tale for children. I believe that this is the dual explanation for our present-day chaotic moral and intellectual climate. The effect of it upon the supernatural story is only one infinitesimal facet of its composite impact upon life and manners.

No true scapegoat can be assigned to bear the blame for these happenings. It just seems to be our misfortune that the progress of modern science and the deluge of mechanical gadgets flowing therefrom has far outstripped our moral or intellectual ability to cope with the situation at hand. We are like infants wandering through a chemical laboratory---and just as dangerous.

Certainly science itself is not at fault. Science is only what we make of it and do with it. It is a banal truism to repeat that science has all the potentialities for unimaginable utopias. It is up to us to make the necessary adjustments, broaden our outlooks, and adopt the requisite controls if we are to survive.

IV

What has all this to do with our topic under discussion? Well, we know that the callousness towards the individual brought about by the wholesale slaughter of modern warfare and the pressure of social and economic inequalities and the totalitarian philosophies arising therefrom has resulted in a profound disillusionment in the spirit of modern man. Likewise, the loss of faith in a supernatural basis for ethics and the decline of hope for anything like a more congenial hereafter has lead men towards a "live for today" attitude. Whatever we do doesn't matter so long as we keep out of trouble with the constituted authorities.

For better or worse, evil was a real and potent force to the writers of an older generation. Man was a sacred creature, the temple of God even although somewhat tarnished. They intuitively knew the truth of these statements. Today the only evil is the result of the maladjustment of the individual to his environment. Man is merely a slightly higher animal with no hope for peace or happiness on his planet, and no possibility of having injustices and inequalities compensated for on any other plane of existence.

Regardless of the truth or falsity of any of the above beliefs (even if it were possible definitely to prove or disprove any of them) it cannot be denied that the modern attitude leaves a colossal vacuum in the realm of the human spirit. It breeds an intellectual nihilism which appals the sensitive. It leaves naught but an unsatisfactory negative attitude towards all living and conduct. Regardless of how close to the truth it may or may not be, a mere negative approach to things is always profoundly distasteful to the ordinary human being.

V

So out of the welter of American letters, Howard Lovecraft's work emerges as that of a literary Charon who picks up the apparently incompatible denizens from the realms of darkness and, reversing the classic role, conveys them back to the light again. From both camps, the ancient and the modern, he draws his passengers; and the place and atmosphere wherein he lands them is most propitious to a compromise of their differences. Reconciliation of a sort is possible, and something resembling a positive attitude towards things seems a quite

probable end result.

Lovecraft did not make the mistake of dumping the entire classical position merely because he realized the truth and reality of modern science as far as men could interpret it. Neither did he blink at any of the implications of science in an attempt to squeeze that edifice into the narrow and ill-fitting confines of the older supernatural credo. Rather, he took the lofty, cosmic attitude that there was much truth in both fields, and he attempted to extract the essence from each and combine them into a new eclectic approach. The real secret of his method, which has not been appreciated by many, was its inverted form. Whereas most apologists attempt to reassess the older beliefs in the light of our modern scientific knowledge, Lovecraft hit upon the brilliant idea of interpreting modern science's undeniable facts in the light of our heritage from the past, and he did it with the detachment and exactitude of a scientist.

He realized that the primal belief in evil was as old as mankind, and that what all races of men in all climes and ages had held to so devoutly must have some peculiar basic affinity to the human animal in its mental processes. Also, he knew that there was an undeniable fund of arcane knowledge, much of which has forever been lost to us of the present day. He likewise was cognizant of the fact that the universe was far from being the simple structure visualized by our grandfathers. The findings of modern physicists regarding relativity and space-time and sub-atomic particles made their conceptions per se ridiculous unless the modern discoveries and interpretations were taken into account. To collate this vast body of information and cause it to coalesce into a clear and significant attitude was a truly tremendous undertaking and we know that Lovecraft was far from being successful. Probably no man, however gifted, could have accomplished it within the span of a mortal lifetime. His work is important, however, not only for what he attempted but for the genuine contributions which he actually made to the art of the modern spectral tale.

His writing is definitely not science-fiction, nor is it supernatural writing---and certainly it is far more than just weird literature. It is a fresh mutant in which may be found features of all three, together with the cosmic viewpoint of religion and philosophy. There are no obvious clichés such as ghosts in his fiction. What might have been called supernatural incidents in the works of others seem merely super-mundane and supernormal in his hands. This is an achievement of some moment, and we shall try to analyze it a bit more thoroughly in the following paragraphs.

VI

So, because he realized the basic soundness and importance of the idea of evil in human psychology, Lovecraft had no choice but to bring it back full-blown to the realm of spectral literature. It was a different concept of evil, however. Not the familiar Hades and devils stemming from old-time theology, and even more definitely not the barren social and behavioristic superficialities of modern thinking. It was a much grander concept, a truly cosmic viewpoint. Lovecraft saw the power of evil as extending throughout all space and time. It predated man from an infinity in the past and would most certainly succeed the disappearance of man and his puny planet into an infinity of the future. Of course the mere ideas of past and future were only convenient mental hooks upon which man hung his psychological apparel. They had no meaning against the eternal backdrop of the universe.

These ageless entities which ruled the cosmos were of course not evil in the narrow human sense except as their manifestations interfered with the small purposes of man. In other words, whatever is inimical to man and his schemes is evil in his eyes---but aside from the accident of man's brief appearance on the scene the activity of these forces is beyond good an evil, absolutely amoral.

Without the existence of man, the conventional concept of evil is meaningless. For ages mankind has been waging an almost hopeless battle against these entities. They have been kept at bay except in rare cases involving the careers of ill-starred individuals of our race. It is with the grim histories of such rash and doomed persons that his writing is concerned.

Dramatic meaning and appeal to readers could not be attained by a dry discussion of abstract forces and academic perils. Therefore Lovecraft had to personify his entities by giving them definite names and attributes. Thus the famous mythos was born. It gave coherence and meaning to what might otherwise have been merely a scattered series of tales. So when the initiated reader peruses one of the stories he has in his mental background the whole tapestry of arcane worlds, forbidden books and malignant powers of unimaginable potency.

VII

Whereas an older supernaturalism had looked entirely outside of man for its evil entities and the brash modern viewpoint tends to delve almost completely within man's psyche for its terrors, Lovecraft took the middle ground. The dark powers were not only throughout the universe but within man himself as well. The outside entities had the power to enter minds and bodies of certain individuals, to use them as a temporary abode, and to direct them against the rest of humanity. An idea of this sort, which is a modern elaboration of the age-old legend of possession together with present-day theories of split-personality, was developed to a considerable extent by Lovecraft. Many instances come readily to the mind of the experienced reader.

Lovecraft made the individual important in his stories also. This idea was naturally not new, but it had suffered considerable eclipse among modern writers, who tended to look upon man as a mere machine or puppet without free will which could only obey strings pulled by the masters of the show. His individuals are lonely recluses, learned delvers into forbidden lore, doomed wretches ---but at least they put up a struggle before succumbing. In their battle is mirrored the life-long combat of all mankind against his grim fate.

VIII

So we see that it is the dual conception of arcane evil forces attacking man at his most vital spot, his own personality, and man's own individual ego pitted against these powers which gives intense impact and memorable power to his stories. If it were merely the shock technique of lesser authors and second-rate imitators, we could not consider Lovecraft's work as significant. His writings, however, are simply not forgotten. After the first enjoyable reading of a tale we may lay it aside to ponder its implications, but as surely as day follows night we will return to it again and again. Each time it will appear fresh and rewarding; some new facet of atmosphere will come to the fore. By now we know the denoument of the tale by heart, but that is only of the slightest importance ---it is the suspense and thrill of the cosmic chase that enthralls us. The eternal titantic grappling of the unimaginable dark forces outside with the will and intelligence of mankind.

In summing up it might not be out of place to list some of the main streams of influence which are so important in the make-up of what we have grown to realize as the typical Lovecraftian tale.

(1) The arcane influence---all the residuum of hereditary impulses and ancient fears in the background of our personalities. Our heritage of superstition and terror from pre-civilized times.

(2) The Gothic influence---the Manfred-Montoni- Byronic type of intel-

lectual protagonist who peers into forbidden places and stands alone against insuperable fears and menaces from beyond the pale of normal existence.

(3) The psychological influence---writers from Poe to Blackwood who rely on dark hints and subtle atmosphere to create terror in the mind of the reader. All of the writers of this school employ suggestion and implication in more or less successful assaults on the reader's nerves.

(4) The Dunsanian influence---not the mere stylistic imitation in Lovecraft's earlier stories (which is comparatively unimportant) but rather the more fundamental attitude of ultra-sophistication, the calm and deliberate creation of new worlds of terror and beauty in the human spirit upon the ashes of a superannuated realism.

(5) The Wellsian influence---and under this heading must come all of the reliance upon modern science to give intellectual dignity and verisimilitude. This of course continues right up through the theories of relativity and indeterminacy which make the ultimate and absolute validity of our scientific knowledge no longer an unassailable fortress.

An eclectic viewpoint which takes all of these components into consideration will be found in varying degrees of combination in practically all of Lovecraft's work. Characterization, plethora of incident, action for action's sake, women and conventional ingredients of romance are all, of course, definitely taboo. Perhaps the best illustration of all his literary faculties in beautiful interplay is in the famed "Shadow out of Time," which is also probably the finest and most concise recapitulation of his art and philosophy.

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SERVISS, Garrett Putman (1851-1929)

Edison's Conquest of Mars

Los Angeles, Cal.: Carcosa House, 1947. xxiii-186pp. 23.5 cm. $3½.

Review: The author of this book was a world-reknowned astronomer whose greatest talent was an ability to make astronomy interesting to the layman. He wrote more than a dozen successful books on the subject during his lifetime---such titles as Other Worlds, The Moon, Curiosities of the Sky, etc. His columns on astronomy in the New York Sun were perhaps the most popular of their type ever to appear in a newspaper. He also penned occasional fiction. His Moon Metal and A Columbus of Space were outstanding from the standpoint of entertainment and scientific accuracy, and survived the test of time so well that they were reprinted many times. The story that won him an honored place among science-fiction authors was the remarkable Second Deluge, which chronicled the Earth's entering a watery nebula, the flooding of the planet, and the building of a second Ark. The circumstantial scientific detail, smooth writing and, above all, the vast canvas of the work place it high on the list of outstanding fantasy novels.

Because of these facts science-fiction devotees eagerly perused all of Serviss's fiction that could be located. A much sought-for item was The Moon Maiden, whose only printing was in the May, 1915 issue of Argosy magazine. Beneath the credit-line of the author in this story was a list comprising some of his other works, including one termed "The Conquest of Mars." Shortly after Serviss's death inquiries about the authenticity of this title began to circulate. But no one had heard of it. In vain did fans scour book stores and search tirelessly through old magazine files. And as the years passed "The Conquest of Mars" gradually assumed status of a legend. Finally Garrett Serviss's widow was located in Paris, and from her was obtained the information that the novel was not

a spurious one, but had actually been published as a serial in the New York Journal some time in 1898. Fan jubilance was damped, however, when it was discovered that the Journal's own file had been destroyed by fire, and no other one could be located. At this point the search marked time for several years, during which the only news unearthed was the complete title of the novel---Edison's Conquest of Mars---and the fact that the Congressional Library's file of the Journal lacked the numbers where it appeared. Not knowing this last, and motivated by a desire to create another copy of the work (presumably the Library of Congress file of this newspaper was the only one in existence) A. Langley Searles in 1944 wrote to Washington and asked for a photostatic copy of the serial installments. Mysteriously enough, the numbers containing them were now in the files, and after some little difficulty (library employees at first refused to photostat the paper, saying it was falling to pieces through age and that sections near the binding would be illegible) he obtained a copy.

The appearance of Edison's Conquest of Mars in book form thus marks the culmination of what had virtually become a collectors' crusade. In a sense, too, it represents an achievement which reflects credit upon the tireless and progressive spirit of the average fantasy enthusiast.

To judge the worth of this volume fairly it is essential not only to know the above background but to have read H. G. Wells's famous classic The War of the Worlds. Serviss's novel is a sequel to the latter. Realizing this, and remembering that the time of the Wells story was the same---the turn of the century, when there were no airplanes, no atomic bombs, no radios, when crude applications of electricity marked the forefront of scientific achievement---readers must be prepared to extend it the same courtesy they would extend to The War of the Worlds. It is a "pseudo-history" not outdated by scientific advancement.

Edison's Conquest of Mars opens as the few remaining Martians who have survived terrestrial disease germs leave in their space car. The slow process of reconstruction begins, but reaches an impasse when astronomers warn the populace that a second invasion is on the way. It is feared that this time the Martians will come better prepared, and battered Earth is scarcely ready to meet them. With desperate effeciency the leading scientists of the world study the wrecks of the invader's machinery and plan counter-weapons. It is Thomas Edison who saves the day. Correlating his own knowledge with that newly acquired, he announces that he has invented a flying ship capable of traversing interplanetary space and a disintegrating device that can reduce matter to atoms. Both of these are superior to anything of the kind used by the Martians.

Representatives from all nations congregate in Washington. They decide to build a space-fleet of flying ships and arm them with disintegrators. Toward this end each nation contributes according to its resources, and construction is rushed forward at breakneck speed. When the task is completed it is decided to launch an attack at Mars, on the basis of the best defense being a good offense. A test flight to the moon proves Edison's inventions successful, and the fleet sets out. It arrives at the goal after several adventurous incidents, including a skirmish with the Martians on an asteroid not far from the red planet.

The rest of the book deals in detail with the earthmen's invasion of the enemy territory, and the many wonders encountered there. Though almost falling victims of last-minute treachery, they finally subdue the planet and return victoriously home.

Edison's Conquest of Mars was written as a newspaper serial. It employs a newspaper style to convey a maximum amount of action in the fewest possible words. This explains the scope of the work, the variety of incidents, the swift transitions. It also explains why its characterizations are somewhat inferior. This result is offset to some degree by using actual personalities as characters:

well-known scientists such as Kelvin, Roentgen, Edison and Serviss himself appear in the story. The writing is scarcely literary, but it has the ability of securing, building up and maintaining interest throughout. The reader does not have to force his way through the story---he is carried effortlessly along. The chapter "Vengeance is Ours," describing the flooding of Mars, is especially well-written and does not suffer from the faults of the rest of the novel. Judging from the author's other books and from this single chapter it is evident that Edison's Conquest of Mars was not only written hurriedly to cash in on the popularity of The War of the Worlds (whose serializing had just been completed) but was purposely composed in a simplified style and arranged to the pace of a thrill per installment to suit the newspaper's readers. It is not a literary classic.

Examined from a scientific viewpoint we encounter a different story. There are only three important items in the novel involving lengthy extrapolation and each of these is outlined with careful logic. The existence of "canals" on Mars is not certain even today---though we do know, of course, that there can be no liquid water in them---and it was not until comparatively recently that scientists were certain human beings could not exist on the planet's surface. In Serviss's time such assumptions were still within the realm of the possible. His disintegrator was a device that could be tuned to the "vibratory rate" of a given object. Its operation was an extrapolation of the method by which a glass can be broken through a violin note, or a bridge be made to crumble by a column of soldiers marching in unison. Finally, in view of Einstein's attempt to include all the "unknowns" of physics in a single equation, a space ship that can electrically "short circuit" gravity does not seem particularly wild even now. Other points mentioned in the novel---especially behavior of the planetary bodies and the effect of gravitational fields in outer space---are unerringly accurate. It is amazing that so little science should be outdated in half a century---an observation that speaks volumes for Garrett Serviss's abilities.

On a political scale the author visions a world united in the face of catastrophe into an early counterpart of the League of Nations. In this regard a minor criticism should be made of the unsubtle flag-waving found in the novel. The fierce patriotism of Serviss is commendable (and understandable, too, if one considers the period) but it might have been incorporated less obviously. Again, it might well have been overdone purposely to foster greater reader appeal.

One of the most important contributions to enjoyment of the story is its introduction, written by Dr. A. Langley Searles. It is well planned, entertainingly written and of high reader-interest. Starting from biographical notes on Garrett Serviss it goes on to describe and appraise his fictional works and to discuss the background of Edison's Conquest of Mars. There we learn that many of the devices and situations it uses were employed in the book for the first time. Another contribution to the book is a thorough bibliography of Serviss's published works, fictional and non-fictional, that is included; this was compiled by Elizabeth Dew Searles.

In the introduction mentioned above Dr. Searles remarks on critics who are wont to label science-fiction stories "too fantastic" and lacking in characterization:

> To this, one may answer that at times what happens can be more important than the people to whom it happens. In essence, both charges derive from laying undue stress upon psychology as the only legitimate fibre from which a fictional cloth may be woven. Undoubtedly psychology is necessary---but it can be a warp alone if a strong woof is supplied.

In the initial issue of The Arkham Sampler August Derleth (who apparently con-

siders himself a competent critic of science-fiction) reviews this book and jumps to the conclusion that Dr. Searles is expounding a case against the importance of characterization in literature, and labels the first sentence in the quotation above "a piece of jargon which is meaningless...." Such criticism is ridiculous in view of the fact that competent authorities support Dr. Searles' statement conclusively. For example, Foster-Harris's Basic Formulas of Fiction says:

> We are primarily concerned in a fiction story...with proving by illustration, by parable, that a given conflict of emotions can be solved by proper application of the appropriate moral principle. Only secondarily are we interested in creating a vehicle, a character, to carry a load. But the reader always thinks he is much more interested in a character than in a problem!

Dr. E. R. Mirrieless, associate professor of English at Stanford University, has views just as definite. I quote from her book The Story Writer:

> Not all stories call for characterization. Not even all important and lasting stories do. There are those in which it is an intrusion, a detriment...the total effect may well be reduced, not heightened, by the bringing alive of the figures concerned.

One can name dozens of stories, some accredited masterpieces, where what happens is "more important than the people to whom it happens." Frank R. Stockton's "Lady or the Tiger" is an excellent case in point. The principle has been carried to its ultimate extreme in Storm, a recent novel published in this country. Such examples obviously relegate Derleth's remarks to the status of purely personal opinions---to which he is naturally entitled, but which scarcely offer any valid ground for questioning the critical abilities of Dr. Searles, whose academic background and familiarity with the fantasy field are superior to his.

Derleth's further accusation of confusing character with psychology is airy quibbling. Can any writer create a three-dimensional character and not at the same time apply principles of psychology? Obviously he cannot. It is this very application which gives real meaning and authenticity to what people in fiction say and do. After reading vaporing of this sort one can conclude only that August Derleth either did not carefully read the introduction to Edison's Conquest of Mars or else that he is stirring up controversy in order to attract attention to The Arkham Sampler.

To conclude, a few words about the physical qualities of the Serviss novel should be said. In the main they are more than satisfactory. Although rather stiff (having been cut against the grain) the paper is of very high grade. The copious illustrations---all of full-page size---are interesting, especially in view of the fact that they are enlarged redrawings of the original illustrations that accompanied the serial appearance of the story in 1898. I cannot help feeling, however, that these have captured more of the crudity than the antique flavor of the originals. The binding is extremely neat, appropriately enough in brick-red cloth. I believe every science-fiction fan will find much to interest him in this historically important volume.

---Sam Moskowitz.

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE of Fantasy Commentator several articles of unusual interest are scheduled to appear; the authors: Paul Spencer, James W. Thomas, Richard Witter, and others. There will also be a complete bibliography of fantasy in Popular magazine. If it's out, we'll review Merritt's Black Wheel, too.

KELLER, David H. (1880-

Life Everlasting and Other Tales of Science, Fantasy and Horror

Newark, N. J.: The Avalon Co., 1948. 384pp. 19½cm. $3½.

Further information: This book is issued only in a limited edition of 1000 copies, the first 300 of which are autographed. It includes an introduction by Sam Moskowitz and a bibliography of the author's fiction. It was available at the pre-publication price of $3. (Publisher's address: PO Box 8052, Newark 8, N.J.)

Review: Dr. Keller---and to a lesser extent Mr. Moskowitz as well---seem to me unduly concerned over the distinction between the terms "writer" and "author." A writer, they feel, composes merely for profit. On the other hand, an author allegedly composes for pleasure as well, and strives "for immortality." And Dr. Keller says he has always "wanted and tried to be an author." I for one do not think either term applies. To me he is simply a story-teller---one who can invent interesting tales and is primarily concerned with telling them rather than telling them in any particular way.

Although I realize this runs counter to Dr. Keller's own statements on the matter, that is nevertheless how the stories in this book impress me. Perhaps it is a tribute to his art if his writing style does not seem studied. Yet there are times when I find his prose too bare, his characters too plain, his situations too pat. He has a tendency to mistake pedestrianism for verisimilitude. It is all very well to use words as short as possible (as Dr. Keller says he does) but many nuances of meaning can be lost through oversimplification. After a while the reader gets tired of being beaten over the head with obviousness when the development demands understatement and subtlety.

My criticism has been prompted in the main by some of his poorer works ---at least three of which I was sorry to find in Life Everlasting. The same faults are encountered less often in his better stories. But these better stories also show the other side of the picture. They show that simplicity makes for clarity. And they show that by means of simplicity characters, situations and events can be portrayed with realistic sharpness.

Dr. Keller, it seems to me, works in a very narrow creative region. Running midway through this region is the boundary between the subtly simple and outright bathos. Now he is on one side of the dividing line, now on the other. Sometimes he crosses and recrosses it several times in a given story. When he manages to keep on the right side most of the time, as in "Life Everlasting," he is highly successful. But when he veers onto the wrong side, as in "The Face in the Mirror," his efforts fall horribly flat. There are even times when he seems to teeter along on the boundary itself, and judging such work becomes an almost wholly subjective problem. "No More Tomorrows" is a story of that kind---reader reaction could depend pretty much on a person's mood and any previous bias held concerning the author's abilities.

There are two other virtues in most of Dr. Keller's stories. One is that they are well plotted. The development may now and then be sophomoric, but the basic ideas are sturdy fictional skeletons. The second, and more important, is that they deal with human beings and hinge on psychological human reactions. However fantastic his themes may be, Dr. Keller always exploits them in warmly human terms. This is one of his strongest assets. It is also one which many present-day writers of gadget-ridden science-fiction would do well to acquire.

A couple of paragraphs back I remarked that three of the stories in this book were poor. Let us deal with those first. It is easy to understand why two of them were included. "The Boneless Horror" typifies much of the tedi-

ous fantasy of its period (1929-30). But it has the distinction of suggesting that queen bee royal jelly might contain a longevity ingredient---and this suggestion was recently given factual foundation by research of the noted gerontologist Thomas S. Gardner. ("The Boneless Horror" also contains, about a quarter of the way through, a stupid arithmetical error which has somehow survived three printings uncorrected.) In its early pages "The Cerebral Library" promises much, but everything peters out into empty obviousness quickly thereafter. One might almost label it a satire on the detective story were it not written so pathetically straight. Unfortunately it is typical of the character "Taine," who, Dr. Keller correctly said, "brings the criminal to justice without fanfare of trumpets." (But rather, he neglected to add, in a manner somehow reminiscent of the melancholy wail from an alto saxophone.) I can see no reason for including "The Face in the Mirror" in this collection either. About all that can be said in its favor is that it has never been printed before---and the quality (perhaps "aroma" would be a better word) of the tale will leave no one in doubt as to why.

"Heredity" is likewise new to print in this country. It suffers from an over-wordy ending, and this is a pity, for otherwise the story would be one of the most effective variants on the vampire theme I have yet read. The plot-twist at the conclusion is as powerful as it is surprising.

While they did not strike me as being actually inferior, I could not work up any great enthusiasm for "No More Tomorrows" or "The Thirty and One." The idea behind the former is intriguing, but banal situations and dated slang keep it below the level of mediocrity. The latter has a sort of fairy-tale atmosphere that never quite jells into believability. Still, I know readers who like both of these stories well. My own indifference may reflect personal prejudice.

The remaining five entries are gems---every one of them. Three are excursions into pure horror, each a different kind. One of these, "A Piece of Linoleum," is a ghastly little episode (and the only non-fantasy in the book, by the way) which is too easily spoiled by paraphrasing for me to try my hand at that. It really packs a nasty, underhanded punch. "The Thing in the Cellar" is probably well known to all readers through its several reprintings---or should be, at any rate. The nicely calculated ending moved me as much on this (my fourth) reading as it did the first. Equally good is "The Dead Woman." The slow, careful crescendo of horror culminates with terrific impact in this story, and its simplicity of style adds greatly to the effect. "The Dead Woman" is easily one of Dr. Keller's outstanding efforts.

"Life Everlasting," the title story, is actually a short novel. It is the most important item in the book, not only because it is the best written one, but because of its sheer beauty. There are times when Dr. Keller's prose almost sings, and this is one of them. What would be the reactions of mankind to immortality? The psychological problems involved are numerous and important, and they are accurately dealt with. The denouement is unexpected but logical, and the reader's interest is firmly held to the very last sentence. This alone justifies publication of the collection.

"Unto Us a Child is Born" is written in the same vein. Here the scene is a far future when science dominates all lives for the general good, yet when people are not completely happy. Again the theme is made warmly human by the author's knowledge of psychology translated into his characters' basic emotional needs. In its own quiet and unassuming way "Unto Us a Child is Born" is on the same high level as "Life Everlasting."

In addition to stories, the volume provides a complete bibliography of the author's fiction and a long and intensely interesting introduction by Sam Moskowitz. This introduction reveals much about Dr. Keller's life and personality. It also discusses many of his literary productions---published and unpub-

lished---and analyzes discerningly the factors influencing them. I have not spoken of these in this review, however, because Mr. Moskowitz's account seemed to me too intriguing to condense. You would do better to read his remarks verbatim than to accept an abridgement from me.

Life Everlasting shows David H. Keller's work to be below the level of high literary art, but considerably above that of mere entertainment---though he is a consistently entertaining author. It provides an accurate cross-section of his writings, and thus the inclusion of a few inferior titles seems excusable. These cannot dispel the over-all feeling left with the reader, which is one of pleasure and satisfaction. The title story alone is worth the price of the collection---and combining it with a dozen other items makes the book an outright bargain. It is printed on antique stock in clear, readable, twelve-point Calson, is neatly bound in natural-finish black cloth, and has a stained, head-banded top. I can recommend it to selective collectors, Keller enthusiasts and just plain fantasy addicts alike, since to each group it offers much. I don't think anyone will like all the stories---but I do think everyone will like some of them.

---Charles Peter Brady.

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H. P. L. ON IMAGINATIVE FICTION

by
Darrell C. Richardson

The March 7, 1914 issue of All-Story Weekly is a rare and outstanding one, much sought-after by collectors. There are several reasons for this. It is the first weekly number of the magazine. Then again, it contains the first printing of Edgar Rice Burroughs' fantasy novel, The Eternal Lover, honored by a splendid cover illustration in color. However, there is still another reason why the issue has peculiar value. Tucked away in the "Letters to the Editor" section is a most unusual missive praising the imaginative school of fiction. Because of this and because of the probable identity of the writer it is reprinted below (by kind permission of the Popular Publishing Company):

Providence, Rhode Island

Editor, The All-Story Magazine.
Sir:

Having read every number of your magazine since its beginning in January, 1905, I feel in some measure privileged to write a few words of approbation and criticism concerning its contents.

In the present age of vulgar taste and sordid realism it is a relief to peruse a publication such as The All-Story, which has ever been and still remains under the influence of the imaginative school of Poe and Verne.

For such materialistic readers as your North-British correspondent, Mr. G.W.P., of Dundee, there are only too many periodicals containing "probable" stories; let The All-Story continue to hold its unique position as purveyor of literature to those whose minds cannot be confined within the narrow circle of probability, or dulled into a passive acceptance of the tedious round of things as they are.

If, in fact, man is unable to create living beings out of inorganic matter, to hypnotize the beasts of the forests to do his will, to swing from tree to tree with the apes of the African jungle, to restore to life the mummified corpses of the Pharaohs and the Incas, or to explore the atmosphere of Venus and the deserts of Mars, permit us, at least, in fancy, to witness these miracles, and to satisfy that craving for the unknown, the weird, and the impossible which exists in every active human brain.

(continued on page 216)

Taine, John, pseud. (Eric Temple Bell) (1883-

The Forbidden Garden

Reading, Pa.: Fantasy Press, 1947. 278pp. 20 cm. $3.

Review: Rejection, I understand, was the fate originally accorded this opus, and one reading is enough to establish motivation for this earlier consignment to limbo. Publishing the work in a neat edition fairly well illustrated by A. J. Donnell has not diminished its weaknesses, which are greater in number than this reader, at least, cares to find in a novel.

The plot is that of an overly complex mystery into which every conceivable---and some inconceivable---complications have been interjected. Briefly, it runs like this: Two paleobotanist-explorers, Vartan (in charge) and Shane, are hired by Brassey House, a famous seed firm, to obtain a shovelful of earth. It is a special earth, and in it Mr. Brassey hopes to be able to propagate some seeds which his insane and self-exiled brother had sent from India. Grown in ordinary soil, these seeds produce plants that blossom into startlingly new and fabulously beautiful flowers---but they produce no seed, and consequently cannot be reproduced. Reasoning that the seeds would grow properly in their native soil, India is chosen as the logical starting-point of the search for the latter. Vartan and Shane are accompanied by Miss Driscott, a trusted employee of the firm, and are joined by a group of native porters under the leadership of Ali Babi as they push up from the coast toward the Himalayas.

Early in the typical adventures which follow Shane breaks both ankles and has to be carried back to civilization in a litter. The porters then mutiny and desert the explorers as well, leaving only Vartan, Miss Driscott and Ali Babi to venture on and discover the "Forbidden Garden." This turns out to be a valley ringed about by precipitous cliffs; in it is discovered a lost race---a colony of mutants no two of which are alike---as well as hosts of strange plants. There are not only the specimens that Brassey House grew, but innumerable others. The mystery resolves itself somewhat when the three discover Brassey's brother, who in a moment of sanity explains to them why these gorgeous flowers bear "seeds of madness." Shortly after their arrival, as a last heroic gesture to preserve the world from destruction through their agency, he destroys the valley by firing an area where natural petroleum has seeped through its floor. And at the last split second Vartan, Miss Driscoll and Ali Babi are rescued by a plane just as they are to be charred to a crisp!

The immediately apparent bones of contention are the inevitable saving of the world and discovery of a hidden, populated valley in presumably uninhabited regions. In my opinion the finding of a lost civilization in a remote part of the earth was exhausted as a worthwhile plot by 1930 if not considerably before. And The Forbidden Garden is, I believe, the tenth novel in which Taine has saved the world. Though this is a rather tame figure when one considers Cummings or Hamilton, I nevertheless think his finesse in the matter warrants his being recommended to the United Nations for some sort of medal.

Aside from these points, the novel does possess qualities that merit appreciative attention. By using the same excellent devices found in Quayle's Invention and The Time Stream the author succeeds in building up suspense toward what might easily have been a crashing climax. Skillful manipulation of clues is accomplished by allowing the reader to learn an effect, but granting him but a flashing glimpse of its cause. A typical example is Taine's basing several important decisions on a five-word telegram early in the story, but letting the reader know only that it was actually sent and that the answer was "No."

Still passing out plaudits, we come to another type of writing of which Taine is a past master. No one that I know of in the field is as capable as he of painting such beautiful and realistic scenic wonders. The most striking one encountered in The Forbidden Garden is that of the giant icicles on a precipice forming part of the isolated valley's rim; these have grown to startling size in the cold hours of night, and when the morning sun's rays melt their bases they fall with a thunderous crash, imbedding themselves like glistening spears in the valley's floor a thousand feet below.

Yet as the reader finds himself in the closing chapters, and readies himself for the final crescendo that seems sure to come, he is abruptly brought up short. For the solution the author presents him to account for all the mystery is inadequate, rushed, poorly thought out. It tries unsuccessfully to explain away in twenty pages complex situations which have required over ten times that length to be presented adequately. In failing to provide a plausible resolution Taine has tragically overlooked the fact that ending a suspense-packed novel is not the same as pricking a balloon and letting its gas escape.

A more detailed study of the conclusion shows explanations which are almost childish in nature, and considerably more than the veteran fantasy reader can swallow without gagging. Hardly one of the characters, for example, turns out to be who he seems to be. There is one character who first appears as Arnbold, trusted servant of Brassey House; then he turns up as Ali Babi, the head porter; and still later it appears that he is also Jamieson, head of the Indian secret police. As if all this were not enough, it finally turns out that he is an agent for a race seeking to destroy the world. One is a little surprised that he does not turn out to be Santa Claus too. And in the last chapter nothing less than feminine intuition tells Miss Driscoll that Jamieson will be carrying a sack of spores about his waist. This is duly uncovered, and Jamieson is forgiven all and told to be a good boy from then on.

But in spite of all these faults the reader leaves the book with the feeling that he has been pleasantly entertained, and that it is good to see unpublished Taine novels finally being printed. This reviewer sincerely hopes that the remainder of these manuscripts will approach the fine standards set by Before the Dawn and The Time Stream.

---Richard Witter.

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John Buchan: a Possible Influence on Lovecraft---concluded from page 190

In "Basilissa" we discover Buchan in a pleasant but pale imitation of Kipling's superbly beautiful "Brushwood Boy." This tells of a boy who dreams of a room in which something of utmost significance to him will occur. This dream reoccurs with greater frequency and clarity as he grows older, until in Egypt he saves a girl from a powerful tribesman in the room he dreamed of; as he carries her away she reveals to him that she, too, has experienced the same vision from the earliest age.

All in all, John Buchan's Watcher at the Threshold is to be considered a banner book that can be recommended to connoisseurs and selective collectors of the unusual alike. Though at times his plots are imitative, in authoritative background and in the surging might of his rhetoric Buchan stands alone.

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Back numbers: Issues #1, 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15 of Fantasy Commentator are permanently out of print. #2, 8, 16 and 17 are available in small supply at present at the regular subscription price of 25¢ each, five for $1; please order any you wish promptly to avoid disappointment. #5, 6, 9 and 11 are temporarily unavailable, but will probably be reprinted in the near future.

TIPS ON TALES

by
Thyril L. Ladd

Norman Matson's Dr. Fogg (1929): The middle-aged professor did not know what to make of it when he discovered the huge metal cylinder half-buried in his own back yard one day. And his surprise was even greater when, upon opening the cylinder, he discovered inside a gorgeously beautiful (and quite unclothed!) young woman. The shock was too much for the professor's wife, but he set about to find clothes for the strange visitor, to learn her unknown language, and to find out where the cylinder came from. The story of how she had been travelling through space for eons, and why she left her home planet to seek the answer to a great question---and above all how her coming alters the professor's whole existence make a novel as fascinating to read as it is fantastic in theme.

George Randolph Chester's Cash Intrigue (1909): This is the story of Breed, the richest man in the world, in whose cellar vaults is stored over a billion-and-a-half dollars in cash. He plans to set himself up, eventually, as emperor of the United States; and the first step toward this coup involves cornering all of the nation's currency. By accumulating cash and constantly paying debts via checks this goal is accomplished. Then, by means which are only vaguely explained, he breaks the stock market, and eventually wins control of all railroads. Extending his powers along political channels is an easy task, and very shortly thereafter Breed's right-hand man, Philip Kelvin, wins a close race for presidency. Kelvin is by no means the puppet Breed imagines, however; he carries out his own plans, and at the appointed moment declares himself, not his employer, emperor. The shock drives Breed insane and at the same time touches off a revolution. Tightening suspense mounts throughout Chester's novel, and ends in a well-written and wild, battle-filled climax.

M. P. Shiel's Children of the Wind (1923): Both H. P. Lovecraft (in his essay on supernatural literature) and T. E. Harre (in the preface to Beware after Dark) thought highly of Shiel's artistry and accorded him high rank as a writer of fantastic fiction. This particular book is possibly less fantastic---and certainly less supernatural---than some of his others, but it has qualities that make its perusal well worth while. It tells of a white child who, though losing her parents in the wilds of Africa, nevertheless survives them; and, when grown up, becomes queen of a small nation---a nation whose very existence is legendary among other native tribes. The fact that she is heiress to a huge fortune leads an Englishman to seek her out; it also leads the next heir in line to do likewise, in order to prevent her ever claiming the inheritance. The action which arises from this plot is vividly narrated, and makes engrossing reading.

Stephen Kinder's The Sabertooth: a Romance of Put-In-Bay (1902): This obscure novel tells the adventures of an aged man who, though apparently feeble, exhibits on occasions flashes of terrific strength. It turns out that he is a caveman of greater mentality than normal, and that he was cursed with immortality in prehistoric days for eating his own children in a time of near-starvation. A terrific natural upheaval during the glacial periods caused him to be sealed up in a great cave, from which he gained release in comparatively recent times. He fought in the war of 1812, and now earns his living by smuggling opium and whiskey. In the end he is blown up in his cave by the federal agents who are on his trail. Whatever else the reader may say about it, Kinder's plot is quite fantastic, and contains a good deal of unconscious humor.

THE IMMORTAL STORM

A History of Science-Fiction Fandom

by
Sam Moskowitz

(part 11)

XXIX
The FAPA Elections of 1938

The Fantasy Amateur Press Association had worked under a temporary slate of officers until such time as the membership became large enough to warrant a general election. Donald A. Wollheim was president, and he also assumed the duties of secretary when William H. Miller, Jr. resigned that office. Daniel McPhail was vice-president, and John B. Michel official editor.

By the time the third mailing was dispatched (December, 1937) the membership totalled twenty-one. Though this was less than half the organization's intended roster of fifty, the fans included were of such prominence in the field at the time that it was decided an election could reasonably be held. The electioneering was of the mildest sort, few beyond the candidates themselves feeling much excitement---or even interest---in the outcome. Wollheim, virtually unopposed, easily retained the presidential post with fifteen votes in contrast to seven votes distributed among five other "write-in" candidates. McPhail eked out a close victory over Robert A. Madle, polling eleven ballots to the latter's ten. John V. Baltadonis easily defeated a quartet of would-be secretary-treasurers by a sixteen-to-six count. Finally, Frederick Pohl took the official editorship from Michel, twelve votes to nine.

Superficially there was little wrong with this election---save the fact that although there were only twenty-one registered members, a total of twenty-two votes had been cast for two of the offices. This, together with the fact that Wollheim had appointed three of his close friends as ballot-counters---Pohl, Wilson and Michel---caused a mild rumble from the Philadelphia faction. Temporarily it remained subdued, however, for not only was there but one tally where a single vote would have changed the result, but all evidence was in New York.

As has been previously pointed out, the FAPA was, in the early part of 1938, an open avenue which was frequently traversed by political maneuverings of the field. The organization was still a long way from being a fandom within a fandom. Thus many of the broadsides occasioned by the Wollheim-Moskowitz feud had been circulated in the mailings, which had almost become a major battleground for the two contestants and their supporters. Jack Speer, it will be remembered, had just sprung actively into the fray. And it was under these firebrand influences that the FAPA moved towards elections in June, 1938.

Not surprisingly, then, this second election was far different from the first. There was no lackadaisical attitude on the part of the members; rather, bitterness and strife predominated. Each group and faction seemed to feel that it had desperate reason to see the other defeated.

The anti-Wollheim faction was growing, and it filed as candidate for president John Baltadonis, immensely popular and one of the most prominent fans of the day. Wollheim, confronted by a constitutional provision of his own devising which did not permit a FAPA member to be elected to the same office twice in a period of five years, backed his friend Michel for the post. Olon F. Wiggins also filed.

Baltadonis issued a four-paged hektographed pamphlet entitled The FAPA Election in which he charged the administration with the following: (1) "Gross incompetency in the matter of mailings...every one of the first three mailings has been late and the last terribly so." (2) "...abrogating of the constitution they themselves wrote" by charging compulsory postage to FAPA publishers without putting the matter to a vote. (3) "...juggling the membership list and sending out ballots calculated to secure votes for the Wollheim group; 21 were on the list December 15, and...22 voted...two who joined right after the mailing were not sent ballots." (4) "...putting publications in the third mailing that had no right there." This was a reference to the constitutional requirement that all publications submitted for use in the mailings must total fifty copies; Lowndes had sent in but thirty of his magazine Strange.

This little leaflet had dynamic results. The mailing that was to have carried the election ballots was again late, but the ballots themselves went out, mailed separately by Wollheim with a history-making Open Letter. The ballot itself raised consternation in one segment of the anti-Wollheim ranks---for neatly inscribed as a candidate for president was the name of Sam Moskowitz! Moskowitz had never filed candidacy, since he had pledged all his support to Baltadonis. At a meeting of the Greater New York SFL chapter shortly thereafter Moskowitz accosted Wollheim and openly accused him of trying to split the vote by listing him as a candidate without permission. Wollheim blandly short-circuited Moskowitz's indignation by informing him that Taurasi had filed for him. Taurasi had done so merely out of friendship. And Wollheim shrugged off Moskowitz's accusations of negligence for not informing him of the matter beforehand. There was little that Moskowitz could do except write explanatory letters to Baltadonis and those who might conceivably vote for him. However, when Sykora saw his friend's name on the ballot he immediately published and sent to most of the members a campaign flyer in Moskowitz's support. These communications crossed in the mails---and confusion was the order of the day.

In Wollheim's Open Letter no small part of the blame for the mailings being tardy was put on the shoulders of Baltadonis, who was accused of being so slow in sending reimbursements for official expenditures that the mailing office was constantly "bankrupt." It was alleged that such tactics had been purposely resorted to in order to "sabotage" the organization. As further evidence of "sabotage" Madle was accused of writing for publication unfavorable remarks concerning the FAPA. The reference was to a pseudonymous "Panparade" (a burlesque of Wollheim's "Fanfarade" column) that appeared in the March-April, 1938 issue of Helios. Wollheim took especial objection to the following paragraph:

> Knowing with what great respect fans hold my opinion and sense of decency, honesty and fairness, in the forthcoming FAPA election I will take it upon myself to count the votes. You will be assured still further of my unquestionable honesty by the fact that I am one of the candidates.

Actually Moskowitz had authored the piece as part of his campaign against Wollheim, and Madle was angelically innocent of blame. With regard to the mailing office being "bankrupt," it was true that Baltadonis was frequently slow in answering his mail---but it was also true that just before this time Baltadonis had been ill, and therefore unable to attend to his secretary-treasurer's correspondence. Moreover, according to postmarks and dates on letters, missives from New York would not be mailed to Baltadonis until several days after they had been written. Thus connections deteriorated. Most important of all statements found in the Open Letter, however, was the request that ballots be returned as promptly as possible (since they had been posted somewhat later than the constitution

provided); thus there was little chance for those accused to reply to the charges made against them. Members were consequently left in a pro-Wollheim state of mind when they voted.

Running on an anti-Wollheim ticket for the FAPA vice presidency was Jack Speer. Opposing him were Lowndes and Wilson. Speer's recent defense of Moskowitz plus his present alignment with the Philadelphia faction gained for him the immediate attention of Wollheim. Although Speer often pointedly denied any blanket support of fascism, he had on occasions orally remarked (and once stated in print) that he could see good points in even such a dictatorial system of government. Wollheim and his cohorts promptly seized upon this last statement as a sufficiently good excuse to refer to him as "an avowed fascist." Quite possibly Speer's known anti-communistic attitude played a part in this as well.

Wollheim himself was opposing Madle for the office of official editor and mailing manager, and there seemed little doubt that he would win out over his younger opponent. Taurasi had filed for secretary-treasurer, and was virtually unopposed.

The late fourth mailing which followed the ballots was devoted predominately to Wollheimist campaign arguments. The charges in Baltadonis's pre-election pamphlet were answered by Wollheim in detail. He maintained that the idea of a mailing deadline was one which in practice never worked out in any amateur press group. The constitutional breach of allowing members to distribute material without paying postal charges was admitted and defended on the grounds that to do otherwise would have found the FAPA "strangled from lack of blood." As to the extra ballots cast in the earlier election Wollheim admitted that several fans had joined before the end of December and been given ballots. Jack Speer was then accused of being a fascist---a charge that others of the clique repeated with minor variations to great length, even going so far as to label Loke, his FAPA publication, "an apology for Fascism and general upholding of anti-progressive tactics and barbarism." As Speer's denials were simply used as bludgeons to reaccuse him of the same unfounded charges, he good-naturedly commenced to sign his name Jack F. (for "fascist") Speer soon after, tactics which in some measure were effective in countering his opponents' accusations.

The election results were first announced in the July 17th number of Taurasi's weekly Fantasy News (a periodical about which much will shortly be related). Michel had gained the presidency, rolling up twenty votes to eleven for his nearest competitor, Baltadonis. Lowndes became vice-president with fifteen votes, while Speer and Wilson received twelve apiece. Thirty-one votes gave Taurasi the secretary-treasurership decisively, with but ten votes scattered among three "write-in" candidates. And Wollheim overwhelmed Madle for official editor, twenty-eight to thirteen. The Wollheim faction had been elected to all offices but one---and Taurasi, then a neutral, held that. The Speer-Philadelphia group had been conclusively out-maneuvered by more experienced political workers and had suffered a drumming defeat. But they had no intention of taking it lying down. Outraged by the methods that had led to their downfall they quickly began a counter-attack that produced damaging results.

The opening gun was Madle's small FAPA periodical The Meteor. This carried "A Reply to Donald A. Wollheim" in whose first paragraph Madle labelled Wollheim "a liar". He denied authorship of the "Panparade" burlesque he had been accused of writing. He indicted Wollheim for using the "fascist club" against Speer after he had stated at the campaign's opening that "political views of the candidates have no right to be taken into consideration," and intimated that this pronouncement had been designed by Wollheim to prevent charges of being a communist levelled at him. Madle then revealed that in the penultimate election, where twenty-two votes were counted from an eligible membership of twenty-one, English

fan J. Michael Rosenblum had never voted. Further, he claimed that the one who had cast the deciding vote for vice-president was Harry Dockweiler, a friend of Wollheim's, who was not qualified to take part in the election at that time. In the same issue of The Meteor the new Texas fan Dale Hart also rallied to the cause, saying that he did not believe "it was right to send out the propaganda with the ballots, because the accused candidates weren't given a chance to reply in time...."

In the seventh issue of his magazine Helios Moskowitz accused Wollheim of deliberately placing his name on the FAPA ballot in order to split the anti-Wollheim vote.

Meanwhile Jack Speer, with the assistance of the PSFS, composed and circulated a "Petition of Reprimand." This accused Wollheim of usurping the office of secretary-treasurer Baltadonis by mailing out ballots himself. It also objected to his sending out a campaign letter with the ballot as "contrary to accepted rules of order and ethics." Frederick Pohl was reprimanded for allegedly opening ballots and reporting on the election while it was still in progress---an act that Wilson substantiated, claiming that he had been told the names of certain individuals who had voted for him. The petition also pointed out that the constitution specifically stated that all votes had to be received by the first of July to be counted---some arriving as late as July 7th being included in results of this past contest. Wollheim's stated intention of employing irregular mailing dates was likewise protested. And, on the basis of such transgressions of procedure, signatures of protest against Wollheim and Pohl were specifically protested. Many prominent fans did not hesitate to affix theirs.

Madle, Agnew and Baltadonis also wrote a pointed Open Letter to Donald A. Wollheim. But this missive, due to being rephrased by Milton A. Rothman, a friend of Wollheim, ended up as a pitifully weak note that in effect asked him to behave better next time.

The very volume of opinion against him for the first time put Wollheim on the defensive. In the August, 1938 number of his F.A.P.A. Fan he accused Baltadonis and Speer of attempting to destroy the club; terming them "rattlesnakes," he appealed to members to support him patiently until his opponents had "exhausted" their "venom." Fans in that day were too close to the situation, perhaps, to realize the importance of this tack. Today, in historical retrospect, we can readily see its significance: Wollheim for the first time in his career was involved in more squabbling than he could handle.

XXX
The Development of Michelism

The year 1938 found the United States still in the throes of a depression serious enough to weaken the faith of many---particularly the youth of the country---in the soundness of its economic system. With few jobs available, little spending money, and no prospects for a better future, it is both excusable and understandable that young people would at least examine other forms of government on the chance that something better might be found. It is also natural to expect that some of these young people would be science-fiction fans.

Perhaps John B. Michel was the first to become vocal over his researches into communism. His interest certainly led him as far as joining the Young Communist League. (Here it is essential to deviate long enough to point out that this does not necessarily mean that Michel necessarily ever became a member of, or affiliated with the party itself. The Young Communist League is an organization sponsored by the party to educate youth in the essentials of communism. From there, if desired, one might seek membership in the communist party, or, on the

other hand, decide that the system had no merit and cease further investigation of it.) It was Michel who introduced Wollheim to communism, and explained to him many of its ramifications. Later Frederick Pohl evinced interest in the American Youth Congress, held by many to be a communist front organization.

We have already read of how Michel and Wollheim, at the 1937 Philadelphia convention, had generously tried to disemminate some of their newly-acquired wisdom through fan ranks by means of the "Mutation or Death" speech. Apparently believing it would be wise to give their political ideology a new name, so as to sugar-coat the pill, they decided upon "Michelism." This, of course, was in honor of Michel, who inspired the movement. Those who supported it thus became known throughout fandom as Michelists---and Michelists were for the most part located compactly in New York City and its environs. Those who agreed with or supported only a fraction of Michelism's tenets were likewise loosely---and incorrectly---referred to as Michelists. Prominent under this heading were Robert W. Lowndes, David A. Kyle, Richard Wilson, Jack Gillespie, Jack Rubinson (nom de plume: Jack Robins), Cyril Kornbluth (later writing fiction under the name S. D. Gottesman) and others who will later be mentioned. (It should be carefully noted that association with Michel and Wollheim under the banner of Michelism did not necessarily make these fans communistically inclined, though undoubtedly some had more than a speaking knowledge of the subject; yet just as certainly at least a few went along with the movement just for the sake of excitement or because interested friends did.)

The Michelist's bible was the fiery "Mutation or Death," which exhorted fans to snap out of their doldrums and use their superior mental attributes for bringing about "progress." This oft-repeated and -quoted speech was printed in a neat little red-covered pamphlet under the auspices of the Committee for the Political Advancement of Science Fiction, a title adopted by the Michelists as being descriptive of their activities. This pamphlet was designed to be sold for five cents, but more often than not was given away to anyone who requested a copy as well as being distributed through the FAPA mailings.

In the December, 1937 issue of Novae Terrae (the official organ of the British Science Fiction Association) Wollheim's article "What Purpose, Science-Fiction?" was featured. This article embodied reasoning much akin to that in Michel's "Mutation or Death" speech, but couched in less pyrotechnic terms. The original premise that science-fiction would inspire its readers to scientific achievement was false, Wollheim contended, maintaining that those youths "who were primarily interested in science probably gave up reading science-fiction after their first experimental glance at such stories." The "dreamers" were the ones who continued to read the stories, and their penchant was literary and artistic pursuit, not science. (It might be mentioned in passing that these views had been expressed by Wollheim previously, when he popularized the belief that the Gernsback idea of science-fiction being educational was a delusion.) Wollheim's argument was actually in accord with the facts up until that time---but he neglected to give the adolescent science-fiction fan time to grow up. It was unreasonable to suppose that science-fiction would induce many already vocationally-settled adults to adopt a scientific profession overnight, and it was equally unreasonable to expect the scant eleven years of science-fiction's existence in magazine form to prove or disprove the "Gernsback delusion." Time has proven Wollheim to have been much in error. As he predicted, science-fiction produced a great number of writers and artists---but it produced scientists as well. Dr. Thomas S. Gardner, well known gerontologist whose recent researches on longevity factors in queen bee royal jelly have been widely publicized, admits to having been stimulated to a career in science through reading fantastic fiction. Is it unreasonable to assume that others, not as well known, may have similarly been

inspired to their careers? Avid science-fiction fans today include mathematicians, doctors, psychiatrists, chemists, physicists, engineers, faculty members of college and university science departments; some such---David H. Keller, Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov and Eric Temple Bell ("John Taine"), to name a few---are writers as well as fans; and such prominent scientists as Drs. Muller and Oppenheimer, of Nobel prize and atomic research fame, have been tabbed using quotations from current science-fiction magazines. Current evidence seems greatly in favor of the premise that this type of literature did (and does) attract scientific men as readers as well as actually aid in producing them.

England in 1938 had begun the gradual shift toward the left that ultimately resulted in the victory of the Labor party over Winston Churchill and his conservative government shortly after the close of World War II. This trend could be found in the opinions of young English fans, some of which saw print in Novae Terrae. Among these was Eric C. Williams' article "Are You a True Science-Fictionist?" in the November, 1937 issue, which stated: "If there is anything worth going out for it is the introduction of sociology in science-fiction...." In the same number Albert Griffiths' article "The Future" declared dramatically that if fans put aside "Utopian dreams" and examined the world of practicability a world beyond their wildest imaginings might be attained.

Upon reading such words Donald Wollheim probably felt them to be stirrings of a credo similar to Michelism but stated in more cautious terms. He felt too, it would seem, that this British periodical did not represent merely fertile ground, but a crop soon ready to be harvested; so, in one of the most daring, self-indicting and honest articles of his career, Wollheim pulled the cloak away from the body of Michelism and revealed it in completely positive terms as a directed instrument for recruiting fans to the communist movement. "Commentary on the November Novae Terrae" appeared in the January, 1938 issue of that magazine. In it Wollheim laid down his basic definitions of Michelism preceded by statements explaining why he believed that no existing government could possibly be overthrown without the use of force of some kind, but adding that he did not advocate the use of such force until

> ...the present system has lost control and chaos is setting in, or when it begins to throw aside its shell of "democracy" and institute fascist crystallization of the old, then (and not before) these practical idealists united in almost military order will be the ONLY FORCE LEFT which will be able to save civilization from barbarism.... The only such force today, the most powerful force alive for the World State and the only organization that will ever achieve this result is the Communist International.

He asked fans to do him the decency to investigate communism for themselves. He pointed out that in New York a group of fans called Michelists were already working toward the enlightened end. Terming Michelism "the theory of science-fiction Action," Wollheim further defined the movement as follows:

> MICHELISM is the belief that science-fiction followers should actively work for the realization of the scientific socialist world-state as the only genuine justification for their activities and existence.
>
> MICHELISM believes that science-fiction is a force; a force acting through the medium of speculative and prophetic fiction on the minds of idealist youth; that logical science-fiction inevitably points to the necessity for socialism, the advance of science, and the world-state; and that

these aims, created by science-fictional idealizing, can best be reached through adherence to the program of the Communist International.

Wollheim concluded his article with "SALUD, Comrades!"

In America Michelists' statements pursuant to their program were of far less outspoken character, though the inferences were quite clear. In addition to such CPASF booklets already described there was published (under other sponsorship) The World Gone Mad, a tract that prejudicedly summarized world conditions and ended by giving one the choice between "communism" or "chaos." The article "What Is Michelism?" by Robert W. Lowndes (printed in the May, 1938 Science Fiction Fan) diagnosed the movement as "no more than a state of mind, a way of thinking that all alert, intelligent and progressive-minded fans must come to eventually, just as a progressive study of mathematics leads from simple arithmetic through algebra, geometry, trigonometry, etc." Lowndes also said that "Michelists look upon the world without...colored glasses, but with the memory of ...dreams, and the realization gained from stf. that these dreams are not impossible." These remarks, far removed from Wollheim's positive, conclusive statements in Novae Terrae, were probably inspired by better judgement, as few fans of 1937-8 would openly espouse communism.

Jack Speer, with the damning Novae Terrae article at hand, composed "A Fairly Complete Case Against Michelism," which was published in the May, 1938 Science Fiction Collector. Speer stated that he believed everything about the movement to be wrong except the intentions of its perpetrators, which impressed him as being sincere. The Novae Terrae avowal of communism was referred to with surprising restraint, and used mostly to support a logical proof that many of the basic tenets of communism were false. He ended with a plea that fans reject Michelism because of "the unnecessity of revolution; the destructive communist methods; the unworthiness of Russian Communism itself."

The first (April, 1938) issue of The Science Fiction Advance, as has already been noted, was distributed at the Newark convention of that year. Sponsored by the CPASF, it continued to appear, being devoted to the presentation of socially conscious articles connected with science-fiction (a connection that was frequently very tenuous indeed) as well as that of news about Michelism's progress. New recruits were found in the greater New York area; outside of it few were to be had. Among those that were acquired, however, was the promising young fan artist James M. Rogers, whose writings in this period led Jack Speer to nickname him "Oklahoma's gift to the Communist party." Forrest Ackerman, a prominent name in the field at the time, gave Michelism his tacit support; he had joined the Socialist party, a fact which Wollheim reported in his "Fanfarade" column with the remark that that group had at the time "greater revolutionary tendencies" than the communists.

Some fans supported a few of Michelism's tenets only. A good part of these were of course those whose interests lay in socialistic fields. Thus the Philadelphian Milton A. Rothman lent his qualified support. Some anti-Michelists were more disconcerting than the creed's supporters---witness Bernard E. Seufert of Rochester, N. Y., who, in his Asteroid for June, 1938, remarked that he would dearly have liked to attend the Newark convention: "I would have visited New York's little colony of Germans, Yorkville---I would have sipped a few drinks with some of the fellows---I would have Michel explain Michelism more fully---I would have had an argument with Wollheim as I am a fascist." Thankfully, there were not many like this!

Not everyone in Los Angeles acquiesced to Ackerman's tacit support of Michelism. T. Bruce Yerke, Imagi-Nation's first editor, published in the April, 1938 issue of that periodical his article "A Reply to 'Michelism'." Yerke felt

that Wollheim had contradicted himself in the Novae Terrae article by opposing the principles of a "peace pledge" folder previously distributed with that magazine and then claiming that Michelism stood for "peace, unity and freedom." Yerke felt that such general aims were all very well, but that not only were science-fiction fans too scant in number to do much about them, but that it was not the destiny of science-fiction to accomplish political reforms anyway. He advised Michelists to look elsewhere.

Such an article may well have been exactly what the Michelists wanted, since it provided further opportunity to restate their case in replying. In the next (May) issue of the magazine Wollheim's rebuttal, titled "In Defense of Michelism," appeared. Wollheim contended that it was enough for science-fiction fans to do something---however small---to bring about world unity. He minimized contradiction of the "peace pledge" folder, which he alleged to be both "isolationist" and "purely negative" in character. Yerke and Speer were then cautioned against espousing "benevolent dictatorship," whose benevolence Wollheim emphatically denied in toto.

Directly across the page from this rebuttal was "A New Attack on Michelism" by "Erick Freyor," which demanded "what in the name of the Necronomicon science-fiction had to do with Michelism." The writer's earthy philosophy was expounded and applied to fans who insisted on "being a God in a pigsty."

By this time arguments pro and con had begun to flood the editorial sanctum of Imagination!. Nearly all fans were interested in the question, and most wanted to get their two cents on it into print. But before debate was terminated in the July, 1938 number much more had been said. Among the longer articles was Wollheim's "In Defense of Progress," countering the Erick Freyor piece cited above, and the reply to it, "Debunking of Progress." In the latter Shroyer stated that he could not "view with alarm" Wollheim's Michelistic ultimatum that the world was at the crossroads, maintaining that the world was perpetually at a crossroads, and further that communism and progress were not compatible.

Tactics used by Michelists forced upon their opponents---particularly the younger set---a sort of literary guerilla warfare as a means of coping with more politically adept antagonists. This at first took the form of decided anti-Michelist views in letters to correspondents. Continually provoked, some resorted to other---often childish---devices. Two budding young Philadelphia artists, John V. Baltadonis and Jack Agnew, made a practice of drawing exceedingly unflattering pictures of Wollheim and his cohorts on the envelopes of letters mailed to fans, not forgetting to use them on letters to Wollheim himself. Since Wollheim's features readily lent themselves to caricaturization, this instigated not only laughter directed at him, but to some degree at Michelism as well. And it is possible that such low devices had psychological effect on the man himself. Numerous unsigned drawings, some of which were quite pornographic, were passed about from hand to hand during this period.

Eventually the form of expression---in reasonably disinfected form---came out into the open with the solicitation and publishing by Moskowitz of a legitimate political cartoon in the May-June, 1938 Helios. The damaging potentialities of this full-page lampoon (which Baltadonis had drawn in colors) were many: it simplified the issue in favor of the anti-Michelists; it aroused fandom at large to laugh at their opponents; it appealed to the emotions rather than to the intellect; and it utilized satire as an effective weapon.

(It should be remarked parenthetically at this point that anti-Michelists had employed satire earlier as well. In the Helios "As Others See Us" column Moskowitz had bitingly referred to his opponents' alcoholic partialities, and a regular feature of the magazine had been humorous parodies of items their magazines printed. Chester Fein had also written satires on the subject, of which

one---titled "The Life of Wollheim"---was too barbed for even a fan editor to print. It passed from one to another for over two years encountering no one foolhardy enough to publish it.)

When Wollheim used Moskowitz's lack of support and enthusiasm for Michelism as an excuse for attacking him (as outlined in chapter XXV) he also made it inevitable that in any prolonged battle Moskowitz would shift the attack from Wollheim to Michelism itself. Wollheim did not fear this, however, feeling that once his opponent began an attempt to disprove its tenets he could be brought to heel through utilization of reason. Wollheim doubtless felt that he could produce more arguments in favor of the movement than Moskowitz could conceivably marshall against it. But the nature of Moskowitz's counter-action (partially inspired by the counsel of William Sykora) proved as unexpected as it was effective.

For Moskowitz metamorphosed from a person with few and vague political views into a candidate for the world's premier eighteen-year-old red-baiter. He seized the red herring by the tail and whenever and wherever Michelism popped up swatted it with a vigor that left an odor permeating the vicinity. Under no circumstance would he even consider discussion of the movement. His view was that it was a political ideology and therefore had no place in science-fiction whatsoever; that even to discuss it was to forward its tenets. Thus, in replying to Wollheim's complaint anent his poor reporting of the "Mutation or Death" speech, Moskowitz branded both the speech and its author as communistic. When Imagination! banned Michelistic material Moskowitz wrote the editor jubilantly, saying that "there is no difference between Michelism and communism.... Michel is a communist and makes no bones over the fact." He also advised the communists to use "their own journals." But the item that caused the Michelists to lose their patience was "That's the Way It Goes," an article published in the August, 1938 Science Fiction Fan; in this Moskowitz had this to say:

> SCIENCE FICTION'S SKELETON IN THE CLOSET was the retitled Communist Party's Agitators in Science Fiction. This club headed by Wollheim and stooges received orders from the heads of the Communist party to convert the fan magazines into a field of propaganda. If communists can obtain control of the free press of this country they can easily obtain their objectives. Wollheim's job was to obtain control, if possible, by fair means or foul, of the science-fiction magazines, twist their liberal policies to fit their propaganda, and again, if possible, of the World's Science Fiction Convention to be used as a means of furthering communist propaganda. Communists' gaining control of fandom is not as fantastic as it sounds if the inroads of Michelism are any indication....

Wollheim's plan of long-range action to combat this "indiscretion" will be dealt with in a later chapter for the sake of more effective continuity. He replied to the charges immediately, however, in his "Fanfarade" column of The Science Fiction Fan (September, 1938). He termed all of them "fiction," the "chief of which was that made up out of whole cloth about the Communist Party and its 'orders' to me! Needless to say if the strength of that great American organization was behind me, I'd have several first rate printed fantasy publications going and the fan field would have developed to greater heights than dreamed of."

Another important article appearing at this time was a reply to Speer's "Fairly Complete Case Against Michelism" and appeared in the August-September, 1938 Science Fiction Collector; it was titled "A Better Case Against Michelism," and was written by Robert W. Lowndes. All one had to do to be labelled a Michelist by the fan press, complained Lowndes, was to do something to further the

progress of the world. Concerning the Michelists he further remarked:

> I may toy with the idea that eventually, with knowledge, they will turn to Communism, but that does not alter the fact. If it is a fact that Communism, as I believe, is the way out, then this belief or conscious ignoring of it will not alter the fact; if, as you think, it is not true, then my belief will not change it. . . . I speak as a Michelist whose Michelism takes the form of Communism...not...merely as a Michelist. ...call me a red Michelist if you like, but the adjective, while applicable to me, is not necessarily applicable to all Michelists.

Lowndes went on to list several mistakes which he felt had been made in advancing the creed: Naming the movement Michelism, since the average fan would associate the name Michel with communism; the attempt of the "red Michelists" to make this a definite road to a clear-cut goal; too intense propaganda; the failure to "fraternize" rather than "organize" such Michelists as the New York group knew. "Thus we (at least I) bid farewell to the term 'Michelism'," Lowndes concluded, saying that he would no longer argue the subject over the keys of his typewriter. Many readers misconstrued this to mean that Michelism was being abandoned---overlooking the fact that the term, not the movement itself, had been dropped. The fan world was to hear much, much more of Michelism.

In later historical gauging of anti-Michelists' actions it is vitally important to remember that as the feud progressed communism became more and more obnoxious to them. They did not wish to associate or be catalogued with people who extolled this political ideology. This eventually made rapprochement impossible, and was a strong factor in their wanting to hold meetings and conventions and to publish magazines without coming in contact with their opponents.

It should also be noted that Wollheim, Michel, Lowndes and others later announced in the fan press that they were dropping advocacy of communism and were investigating technocracy. Eventually dropping technocracy, they disclaimed any political connections whatsoever.

Whether or not the reader accepts or rejects communism as it was promulgated by the Michelists, it must be stated that many of their observations as to the condition of the world in 1937-38 were highly accurate. From the first they maintained that the revolution in Spain was the beginning of a great struggle between the larger forces of democracy and fascism; that the world teetered on the brink of the most disastrous war in history; that citizens should face the facts. Michel's exhortation "Awake! The future is upon us!" was as prophetic as it was dramatic. Perhaps this accurate appraisal resulted in a sense of impending doom which in turn may have brought about a feeling of desperation that would justify to the Michelists their adoption of an end-justifies-the-means philosophy which outraged fans and created a powerful opposition. In any event, the open advocacy of communism more than nullified, as far as fans were concerned, whatever logic Michelism utilized.

(to be continued)

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H. P. L. On Imaginative Fiction---continued from page 203

Particular professors and sober Scotchmen may denounce as childish the desire for imaginative fiction; nay, I am not sure but that such a desire is childish, and rightly so, for are not many of man's noblest attributes but the remnants of his younger nature? He who can retain in his older years the untainted mind, the lively imagination, and the artless curiosity of his infancy, is rather blessed than cursed; such men as these are our authors, scientists and inventors.

At or near the head of your list of writers Edgar Rice Burroughs undoubtedly stands. I have read very few recent novels by others wherein is displayed an equal ingenuity in plot, and verisimilitude in treatment. His only fault seems to be a tendency toward scientific inaccuracy and slight inconsistencies.

For example, in that admirable story, "Tarzan of the Apes," we meet Sabor, the tiger, far from his native India, and we behold the hero, before he has learned the relation between vocal sounds and written letters, writing out his name, Tarzan, which he has known only from the lips of his hairy associates, as well as the names of Kerchak, Tantor, Numa, and Terkoz, all of which he could not possibly have seen written.

Also, in "The Gods of Mars," Mr. Burroughs refers to the year of the red planet as having 687 Martian days. This is, of course, absurd, for while Mars revolves about the sun in 687 terrestrial days, its own day or period of rotation is almost forty minutes longer than ours, thus giving to Mars a year which contains but 668 2/3 Martian solar days. I note with regret that this error has been repeated in "Warlord of Mars."

William Patterson White, in writing "Sands o' Life," has shown himself to be an author of the very first order. The very spirit of the old Spanish Main pervades the pages of this remarkable novel. It is worthy of permanent publication as a book.

In the domain of the weird and bizarre, Lee Robinet has furnished us a masterpiece by writing "The Second Man." The atmosphere created and sustained throughout the story can be the work only of a gifted and polished artist. Very effective is the author's careful neglect to tell the exact location of his second Eden.

I strongly hope that you have added Perley Pore Sheehan permanently to your staff, for in him may be recognized an extremely powerful writer. I have seen Mr. Sheehan's work elsewhere, and was especially captivated by a grim short story of his entitled "His Ancestor's Head."

William Tillinghast Eldridge set such a standard for himself in "The Forest Reaper" that it seems almost a pity for him to be the author of "The Tormentor" and "Cowards All."

William Loren Curtiss tells a homely yet exciting sort of tale which exerts upon the reader a curious fascination. "Shanty House" seems to me the best of the two he has contributed to The All-Story.

Donald Francis McGrew is one of the "red-blooded" school of writers; he describes the Philippine Islands and the army there with an ease indicative of long residence or military service on the scene of his literary productions.

I hardly need mention the author of "A Columbus of Space" further than to say that I have read every published work of Garrett P. Serviss, own most of them, and await his future writings with eagerness. When a noted astronomer composes an astronomical novel, we need not fear such things as years of 687 Martian days upon the planet Mars.

As to your short stories, necessarily second in importance to the novels and serials, it may be said that some of them rise much above the middle level, while few of them fall beneath it. The merry crew of humorous writers, such as T. Bell, Jack Brant, Frank Condon, and Donald A. Kahn, are, though light and sometimes a trifle silly, nevertheless distinctly amusing. Kahn is especially clever in drawing the characters of callow college youths.

I hesitate to criticise adversely such an excellent magazine as this, but since my censure falls upon so small a part of it, I think I may express myself openly without giving offense.

I fear that a faint shadow from the black cloud of vileness now darkening our literature has lately fallen upon a few pages of The All-Story.

"The Souls of Men," by Martha M. Stanley, was a distinctly disagreeable tale, but "Pilgrims in Love," by De Lysle Ferree Cass, is contemptibly disgusting, unspeakably nauseating. Mr. G.W.S., of Chicago, has written that Cass "diplo-

matically handles a very difficult subject---Oriental love."

We do not care for subjects so near allied to vulgarity, however "diplomatically" they may be "handled." Of such "Oriental love" we may speak in the words of the lazy but ingenious schoolboy, who when asked by his tutor to describe the reign of Caligula, replied, "that the less said about it the better." We prefer a more idealized Orient to read about; let us have "nature to advantage drest," as in the beautiful romance of "Prince Imbecile," by C. MacLean Savage, or "The Invisible Empire," by Stephen Chalmers.

Speaking of the last novel, is not the title somewhat misleading? In the United States the name "Invisible Empire" is forever associated with that noble but much maligned band of Southerners who protected their homes against the diabolical freed blacks and Northern adventurers in the years of misgovernment just after the Civil War---the dreaded Ku-Klax-Klan.

The broad editorial policy of The All-Story in making the magazine not merely a local American publication, but a bond of common interest between the United Kingdom, the United States and the various British colonies, cannot too heartily be commended.

Blood is thicker than water; we are all Englishmen, and need just such a leveler of political barriers as this to remind us of our common origin. Let the London reader reflect, that in Boston, Toronto, Cape Town, Calcutta, Melbourne, Auckland, and nearly everywhere else, his racial kindred are perusing the same stirring stories that delight him.

America may have withdrawn from the British government, but thanks to such magazines as The All-Story, it must ever remain an integral and important part of the great universal empire of British thought and literature.

I cannot praise The All-Story Magazine by comparing it with others, since it stands alone in its class, but I think I have made it clear that I hold this publication in the highest esteem, and derive much pleasure from its pages. What I have said in criticism of some parts of it I have said only with friendly intent, believing that the humble opinions of one more reader may prove not unacceptable to you.

But ere I grow more tedious still, let me close this already protracted epistle, and, with the best wishes for the future of The All-Story, subscribe myself as

Your obedient servant,

H. P. L.

It would seem that we have probably "discovered" a little-known piece of writing by a great master of the supernatural who is well known to lovers of the weird tale. It gives us a glimpse of him as a "fan." And it was such letters as his that encouraged the Munsey chain to continue printing these so-called "different" stories, and probably led to the eventual founding of Weird Tales magazine nine years later.

As Howard Phillips Lovecraft wrote the above letter, I wonder if he ever imagined that one day his own ability as an author would out-rank by far the very men he was praising?

---oOo---

This-'n'-That---continued from page 186

Goudge, Elizabeth: The Little White Horse (Coward-McCann, $2½). Fairy magic.

Kerby, Susan: The Roaring Dove (Dodd, Mead, $3). A comedy about an imaginary utopian civilization.

Lamb, Harold: Garden to the Eastward (Doubleday, $2¾). Borderline novel of exploration in Kurdistan that locates a lost Babylonian city.

Langley, Dorothy: Mr. Bremble's Buttons (Simon & Schuster, $2¾). A whimsical, often humorous allegory about God.

Lawson, Robert: Mr. Twigg's Mistake (Little, Brown, $2½). Vitamin X & satire.

(concluded on page 220)

SOME LOVECRAFT SIDELIGHTS

by
F. Lee Baldwin

(Editor's note: This article originally appeared in Fantasy Magazine for April, 1935, and is reprinted here with permission of its author. It has been slightly revised to eliminate too familiar facts and accent those not well known.--A.L.S.)

Howard Lovecraft was born in Providence, Rhode Island, about a mile east of 66 College Street, his last home. He began to read at four, Grimm's Fairy Tales and The Arabian Nights being among the first volumes he seized upon. Later he came across books about Greek and Roman mythology, which proved still more fascinating. He first tried writing at six, and his earliest story was written at seven---about a cave of robbers---called "The Noble Eavesdropper." At eight he began to take an interest in science---first chemistry, then geography, astronomy, and other subjects, but his first love for mythology and mystery never diminished.

At eighteen he became dissatisfied with all of his fiction and destroyed most of the tales he had written. His time was used exclusively for essays, verse and criticism, and he did not write another tale for nine years. In 1914 he joined the United Amateur Press Association; his first tale to appear anywhere was "The Alchemist" in The United Amateur during 1916. (This story was written in 1908.) The next was "The Beast in the Cave," written in 1905 and appearing in W. Paul Cook's Vagrant in 1917. In the same year he wrote "The Tomb" and "Dagon"; in 1918, "Polaris"; and in 1919 "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," "The Doom that Came to Sarnath," "The White Ship" and "The Statement of Randolph Carter."

Several of his stories have interesting backgrounds. "The Lurking Fear" was published during 1922 in Home Brew as a four-part serial; it was illustrated by Clark Ashton Smith, whom Lovecraft had met through amateur journalism. "The Horror at Red Hook" was written in New York, which provided much local color for the tale. "He" was based on its old Greenwich Village section. Like "The Horror at Red Hook" it expresses the author's detestation of the metropolis. "The Shunned House," which was written in Brooklyn, is about a house in Benefit Street, Providence; in reality, the place has no sinister connection. Weird Tales twice rejected the tale before finally publishing it. The same magazine also rejected "Cool Air," which was printed in a short-lived Philadelphia periodical, Tales of Magic and Mystery. "The Rats in the Walls" was first submitted to Argosy in 1923 but was turned down as being "too horrible." It proved popular enough for Weird Tales to print twice, however!

Lovecraft's favorite authors---aside from the Graeco-Roman classics and the English poets and essayists of the eighteenth century---were Poe, Blackwood, Dunsany, Machen, M. R. James and Walter de la Mare. Of the pulp writers he preferred A.Merritt, E. Hoffmann Price, C. L. Moore, Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith and Frank Belknap Long, Jr. Apart from fantasy, he liked realism in fiction---Balzac, de Maupassant, Zola, Proust, etc.; he believed the French better adapted than we to the reflection of life as a whole. Nearly all Victorian literature he disliked. He believed that such material in the 1930's that "escaped freakishness" had more promise than most of that immediately preceding it, and regarded ultra-modernism mainly as a blind alley. Conservatism in style appealed to him, and he thought modern prose had a tendency to be inartistic and slipshod.

In music---disavowing all genuine classical taste---he unashamedly preferred Victor Herbert, and also liked the old colored "cake walk" songs. Landscapes were his favorite subjects in painting. In architecture he favored the Georgian and classic types, though feeling strongly the charm of Gothic. His li-

brary, only the supernatural section of which was ever catalogued, contained over 2000 volumes, and included a complete set of Weird Tales.

He preferred two meals a day, on a flexible schedule. He was very fond of cheese, chocolate and ice cream, but abhorred all sea food; he didn't care for tobacco, and claimed never to have tasted intoxicating liquor. His great fondness for cats and conversation is well known. Letter-writing held the place of the latter to quite an extent; he had over fifty regular correspondents and about two dozen more as long-term "occasionals." Some were of twenty years' standing.

In many of H. P. Lovecraft's tales the cities of Arkham and Kingsport are much in evidence. These, although of course imaginary in name, represented his somewhat modified reflections of Salem and Marblehead, Massachusetts. The map of Arkham (in Marginalia) he prepared was chiefly to avoid slips of locations and landmarks, and was kept at hand for possible reference when writing stories.

Ideas for stories came from almost everywhere---dreams, pictures, a happening on the street, another story---anything. The idea for Frank B. Long Jr.'s tale "The Horror from the Hills" occurred while he and Lovecraft were looking at a reproduction of an elephant-god statuette lately added to Long's collection. Lovecraft exclaimed: "What do you suppose would cause a Chinaman to fall screaming on the floor in front of that statue's original in the Louvre?" That sentence was the spark that led Long to write the tale.

The length of time taken by Lovecraft to write a story depended largely on the difficulty of the theme. "The Whisperer in Darkness" required about a fortnight, "The Dreams in the Witch-House" took a little less than a week. A story of average length was usually finished in about three days.

The idea for "Cassius" was given to Henry S. Whitehead by Lovecraft, and Whitehead asked him to collaborate on it. But he did not, as his way of developing a short story differed widely from his friend's. The idea itself came from seeing an actual case of the undeveloped-twin anomaly in New York. As Lovecraft himself put it: "The man in question had a little anthropoid excrescence growing out of his abdomen that looked hellishly gruesome when uncovered. Clothed, he looked like any ordinary 'pot-bellied' individual. He looked so essentially refined and high-grade that I wondered at his willingness to be exploited as a freak, and speculated as to what he would do if a stroke of luck removed him from the need of such an ignominious occupation. The first thing he would do, I argued, would be to have the excrescence cut off---and then and there the idea of the story came. This was in 1924 or 1925. The odd and amazing thing is this: Years afterward---after I had given the idea to Whitehead and was awaiting the appearance of 'Cassius'---I chanced to mention the matter to my old friend Arthur Leeds of New York, who has had extensive dealings with freaks and other amusement enterprises. Fancy my surprise when he told me that he knows the man well, and that the latter is a person of much education and intelligence. More---that he is interested in everything weird, and (believe it or not---it's the actual truth) that he is especially fond of my work in Weird Tales! Leeds was going to introduce me to him; but something prevented, so the meeting never came off. It certainly would have seemed odd to meet one of my plot-germs in the flesh . . . the flesh of two bodies, or a body and a half, at that!"

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This-'n'-That---continued from page 216

Malcolm-Smith, George: The Grass Is Always Greener (Doubleday, $2½). Metempsychosis with a touch of Thorne Smith.

Menen, Aubrey: The Prevalence of Witches (Chatto& Windus, 9/6). Indian witchcraft, satirically veneered.

Ouspensky, P.D.: Strange Life of Ivan Osokin (Holme, $2¾). A man is granted the opportunity to relive his youth, but behaves just as before. ---A.L.S.

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