FANTASY COMMENTATOR

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

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THIS-'N'-THAT

As soon as the current crop of fantasy books diminishes in volume, we shall return to our older, informal method of listing them; for the present, however, it is necessary to use the double-columned format and abbreviated descriptions that were used in the last issue, as it provides more titles per page....

Adams, Samuel Hopkins: Plunder (Random House, $3). Capitol Hill in 1950.

Anderson, Florence B.: The Black Sail (Crown, $3). A novel of Greek mythology, with magic mystical rites. Good.

Conklin, Groff, ed.: A Treasury of Science-Fiction (Crown, $3). A fine short story collection. We recommend it.

Derleth, August, ed.: Strange Ports of Call (Pellagrini & Cudahy, $3½). This s-f anthology (20 titles) is even better.

Fessier, Michael: Cloyis (Dial, $2). An over-educated parrot provides a ribald commentary on human beings. Borderline.

Gibran, Kahil: Nymphs of the Valley (Knopf, $2½). 3 "fictional parables," one of which is a fantasy. Dull; overpriced.

Hartley, L. P.: The Travelling Grave and other stories (Arkham, $3). Twelve excellent shorts, some prev. unpublished.

Heinlein, R.A.: Beyond This Horizon (Fantasy Press, $3). Acceptable s-f novel.

Kellino, Pamela: Del Palma (Dutton, $2½) Mrs. James Mason's version of the possession theme---and not bad, either. In England it's A Lady Possessed.

Mannes, Marya: Message from a Stranger (Viking, $2½). A well-planned and -written novel of life after death.

Merritt, A. & Bok, Hannes: The Black Wheel (New Collectors', $3). This novel will be reviewed in the next issue.

Mitchell, Ronald: Dan Owen and the Angel Joe (Harper, $2½). Adult fairy tale.

Owen, Walter: More Things in Heaven (Dakers, 10/6). An ancient curse and an Egyptian sect of priests in the world of today. Reminiscent of She.

Pargeter, Edith: By This Strange Fire (Reynal & Hitchcock, $3). Bridging of time; back to the 17th century in the manner of Before I Go Hence. Good.

Phibbs, Richard: Buried in the Country (Allen & Wingate, 7/6). Folk lore.

Pinckney, Josephine: Great Mischief (Viking, $3). A dreaming druggist in 1890 Charleston becomes a sorcerer. Amusing.

Pratt, Theodore: Mr. Thurtle's Trolley (Duell, Sloane & Pierce, $2½). About a strange, fantastic journey. Very good.

Priestly, J. B.: Jenny Villiers (Heinemann, 10/6). Very minor intrusion of the Berkeley Square theme. Borderline.

Reynolds, J. M.: The Private Life of Henry Perkins (Crowell, $2). A queer dream life is inspired by the influence of a strange foreign coin. Well done.

Richards, R.P.J.: The Blonde Goddess (Ken Pax, 10/-). Occult time-travelling.

Shiel, M.P.: The Best Short Stories of M. P. Shiel (Gollancz, 10/6). Worthwhile.

Smith, E.E.: Triplanetary (Fantasy Press, $3). So-so space opera.

Staniland, Meaburn: Back to the Future (Vane, 8/6). Satirical tale of the future.

Stone, Weldon: Devil Take a Whittler (Rinehart, $2½). A folk tale of the Ozarks.

Stonier, G. W.: The Memoirs of a Ghost (Grey Walls, 8/6). Life after death.

Strunsky, Simeon: Two Came to Town (Dutton, $3). Two of America's founding fathers visit New York to see how the country is getting on. Entertaining.

Tallant, Robert: Mrs. Candy and Saturday Night (Doubleday, $2½). The ghost of a woman's dead husband comes back to help her trap another man. Delightful!

Thorndike, Russell: The Master of the Macabre (Rich & Cowan, 8/6). Ghost stories, a little on the gory side.

Van Vogt, A.E.: The Book of Ptath (Fantasy Press, $3). A rather inferior novel of a 1944 man in 200,000,000 A. D.

Van Vogt, A.E.: The World of A (Simon & Schuster, $2½). Revision has improved this work---but it still remains merely pleasant entertainment, no classic.

Van Vogt, A.E. & Hull, E.M.: Out of the Unknown (Fantasy Publishing Co., $2½). Six pleasant fantasy shorts.

Venning, Hugh: The End (Desmond & Stapledon, $3). The end of the world.

Walker, Jerry: Mission Accomplished: a novel of the year 1950 (Cosmos, $2½).

MUSIC IN THE WILDERNESS

THE UNPUBLISHED NOVELS OF DAVID H. KELLER

by
Paul Spencer

Widely and favorably known though he is as a writer of weird and scientific fiction, Dr. Keller has yet in his possession a number of novels which have never seen print. Some information on these may be found in his article "Unborn Babies" (in the "Philcon" issue of Variant); having read several of these stories, I feel that more detailed information will be of interest to Keller fans.

During the Nineteen-twenties Keller wrote over five thousand manuscript pages of fiction. None was published at the time, and apparently Keller himself made little attempt to market it. He was learning to write, learning by the laborious process of actually writing; his work of the period---most of it done under the pseudonym of "Henry Cecil"---seems to be entirely a labor of love. The stories were written once, then without revision handsomely bound and placed on the good doctor's bookshelves.

Inevitably, these stories lack their author's later finesse. Some contain curious stylistic eccentricities---experiments abandoned as Keller developed his present style of short, cogent sentences. Nevertheless, despite their shortcomings, such of these stories as I have read are all interesting, with Keller's innate skill much in evidence. I believe some are well worth publishing.

Perhaps the most powerful of these novels is The Fighting Woman. Like most of the rest it is not a fantasy. There is no formal plot; the story is simply the saga of a tremendous character---Dorothy Scherer, later Mrs. Calvin Heisler. Beginning during the Civil War, it carries this powerful figure through decades of strenuous experience, up to the 1920's and the brink of the grave. Dorothy is a determined woman, resolved to escape the fate which kept her mother a slave to her father and made her a drudge without joy or hope. She ardently longs for a business career, to gain wealth and thus escape the clutches of men, whom she hates as tyrants. However, to save the honor of the family she is forced to marry a suitor she despises, and she lives out a loveless life with him---never resigned to her position of housewife, yet never escaping from it. The husband is made a highly sympathetic figure, at first genuinely in love with Dorothy, then puzzled and hurt and finally resigned as he discovers she hates him.

Dorothy's love for her first child, a daughter, blinds her to her second, the boy Paul. At the death of the daughter, however, she turns to her son, giving him the love she has refused to the rest of the world. Her ideal is to live alone with her son as a successful businesswoman. She opposes his marriage; then, after the death of her husband, wild with desire for Paul, she murders his wife. Paul discovers her guilt---but, feeling the wretchedness and despair that lay behind the maniacal act, he keeps silent. In the end Dorothy ends her days as the successful businesswoman she longed to be, loveless and alone.

The Fighting Woman, as you can see, is not a pleasant tale. It is a fascinating one, however, and has flashes of delightfully dry humor. From start to finish it is woven of the stuff of life. There is in it a good deal of presumably authentic local color, a vivid picture of the stiff-necked, sternly pious, thrifty Pennsylvania Dutch; and a wealth of circumstantial detail which makes the historical periods dealt with stand out in sharp clarity. The leading characters are well depicted, and in spite of its lack of plot and suspense the story carries you along resistlessly from start to finish. There are moments of powerful drama, but mostly the work is---like life itself---a series of minor incidents which, each insignificant alone, gradually build up a structure of gran-

ite strength and dark grandeur.

This is, of course, a first draft; revision is called for to build up certain insufficiently realized points and to smooth out stylistic crudities here and there. Yet the weaknesses are all minor, and a small amount of tidying up would put the novel into first-class shape. Thus corrected, it would be a marketable product. Certainly it deserves the effort needed to give it a chance for publication.

Like The Fighting Woman, Wanderers in Spain is largely autobiographical. Keller appears in the former as Paul Heisler; in the latter he is an unnamed country doctor. This story seems to have been written hastily; the early portions in particular show little invention, and are sadly lacking in narrative skill. Later episodes, however, reveal the hand of the master.

The novel is a short one, dealing with the high-spots in a country doctor's love-life, from childhood to middle-age. One of these comprises the bulk of the work, which reveals little information as to the doctor's medical experiences or on any other facet of his life. The story is told in a strange fashion, almost verging on fantasy. People encountered there have no names, but are called by descriptive titles such as "The Boy," "The Mater Dolorosa," and so on. The action is narrated almost in the manner of a fable, and might be conceived of as taking place anywhere or at any time. This and a certain rarified beauty in the style and imagery give the work a strange, unearthly quality. As with The Fighting Woman, power is gained in slow progression; after a slow, rather amateurish start the story grows marvellously in originality, imagination and dramatic effect. Some scenes breathe delicate, poetic loveliness; others have that simple, stark dramatic quality which seems to be unique with Keller.

It takes some effort to relate the fable-creatures of Wanderers in Spain to specific, actual people; indeed, I have never read anything quite like this fairy-tale treatment of real life. But I enjoyed it very much. Whether it would be enjoyed also by anyone not personally acquainted with the author or interested in his writings is something else again. Certainly as it stands the story is hopeless from a publication standpoint, being hardly more than a crude, uneven rough-sketch for a novel with an abrupt and inadequately motivated ending. Keller himself seems to consider it a purely personal document never intended to see print.

Typical of Dr. Keller's perhaps insufficiently appreciated versatility is the contrast between the delicate loveliness of Wanderers in Spain and the dark mood of Deepening Shadows. This latter novel is a nightmarish extravaganza of sexual perversion. (It has recently been revised, and is presumably on the market for publication.) Its main characters are Lilith and Guenevere, two lesbians; and the men whom, through a not-too-convincing coincidence, they marry---Ford, a valet who is in love with a painting of a beautiful blonde, and his employer, Montague James, a fashion-plate whose sexual aberrancy takes the form of a passion for neckties. Keller stirs the unholy mixture of these warped characters and produces a dreadful but fascinating story that mounts swiftly to a catastrophic finale. It is interesting to note that it took him more than a decade to conceive the present ending---the first draft, dated 1927, breaks off abruptly without a formal close.

The novel is uneven in merit, and the plot rests on some highly improbable coincidences; yet it is full of striking and very original scenes. James making love to his neckties is one memorable episode; there is the rape of Guenevere, and its aftermath; a charming, humorous episode dealing with gossip about James's marriage; and other chapters of impressive skill. Most admirable of all, perhaps---though to be expected of a psychiatrist---is the handling of the perverts' psychology. These weird characters become strangely believable and (with the exception of the powerfully delineated hellion Guenevere) almost like-

able. Nevertheless it must be admitted, I think, that the theme of The Deepening Shadows is not perfectly adapted to Keller's talents; but with certain reservations, he makes of it a very striking and fascinating novel.

For the author in a lighter mood we turn to The Adorable Fool---which provides a splendid big dose of the Keller brand of humor. It is a story of one Jacob Hubler, a middle-aged genealogist with a passion for raising violets, who goes to Alsace to trace down a branch of his family. While engaged in this pursuit he meets a young woman who impresses him, because of her disingenuous questions, as being quite possibly a moron---but certainly a most charming person. This young lady, the typical Keller type of irresistible schemer, goes to rather extravagant lengths to lure the gullible, unsuspecting Hubler into her net. The story is told by Hubler in the first person, and Keller has a wonderful time exposing his almost childish simplicity and vanity through his own words. The character is made laughably absurd, yet is always kept sympathetic.

In one or two scenes, however, Hubler shows a contempt for the Negro race which detracted a good deal from my enjoyment of those particular episodes. Another fault I found was that the double surprise-twist at the end became obvious from a very early point in the story. In other respects, however, The Adorable Fool is enormously entertaining, and I found myself fairly chortling with glee over many especially delightful episodes. Perhaps the whole thing is basically trivial---but in any case it's wonderful fun.

The Lady Decides is one of several stories reflecting Keller's idealization of Spain. The hero of this pleasant novel is a youth who goes to Spain with the romantic idea of being a troubadour, wandering the dusty roads with his lute, singing, and searching for a Sleeping Princess to win. The Sleeping Princess turns up in the person of one Dona Angelica Gunsaulis; she takes a fancy to the idealistic youth---as Keller's women so often do---ensnares him while he thinks he is winning her on his own. Meantime, Angelica's friend Beatrice Casanova has also met the would-be troubadour. She says to him:

> "And, when you are old, and somewhat bent from your work and worry, and you know that the Sleeping Princess has once again fallen into a slumber that not even your lips can waken her from, and the world grows cold from the wind sweeping down from the Pyrenees, then---"
>
> "What then?" I whispered.
>
> "Then come back and see me, for I will be waiting here in this same moonlit garden, and I have decided."
>
> "What have you decided?"
>
> "I have decided what I have decided, and now goodbye, for I am tired and I cannot have you with me longer."

So our hero goes on his way, and he marries the Sleeping Princess; but his lute falls into disuse, and he sings no more songs. In the end, having aged considerably and lost much of his idealism, he returns to Dona Beatrice, and learns what she has decided. It is a parable which will be familiar to Keller readers---one of human life as he sees it, told with charm and skill.

Though not as brilliant as some of Keller's other efforts, The Lady Decides is enjoyable and entertaining. Especially noteworthy are some passages in a kind of verbal montage, akin to stream-of-consciousness yet different---an almost unpunctuated series of sense-impressions which Keller handles very skillfully. This technique seems excellently adapted for transitions depicting the passage of time, and also for episodes of high emotional content, such as the very powerful childbirth scene. There is a slight fantasy element in the story, too: a little brown-clad man keeps turning up at critical moments, and seems to be a personification of mortality. There is also some rather lovely euphemistic writing about

death, in terms of the fabled land of Avalon---which may be considered fantasy or not, as the reader prefers. But for the most part the story is a mundane romance laid in Spain---and a very charming one it is.

Now we come to the title most likely to interest the majority of fantasy fans: Life Is What You Make It. Despite the soap-opera sound (Keller agrees this could be improved by retitling) this novel is replete with delicately lovely fancies, which rise miraculously out of the stuff of real life. Chiefly, it is a medieval romance; but there is a strong element of fantasy as well, centering around the Great God Pan and his offspring, human and otherwise. Some of the material was later used in Keller's exquisite short story, "The Golden Bough."

The central character is the Princess Mercedes of Spain. For reasons of polity, she is brought up by foster parents in ignorance of her royal birth. Having been born (in a most beautiful first chapter) on a magic bed ornamented with a dragon, she bears "dragon-blood," which guards its possessors against fear. However, she is fed on the milk of a blue goat---a race of animals allied to the mischievous god Pan---and this introduces a wild strain in her. Thus her life becomes a struggle between these two opposing forces. She takes one of Pan's human children as a lover; but she marries a common blacksmith. Through use of the mistletoe (the magical Golden Bough) she adventures in dreams with her more-than-human lover, and actually bears a child marked with the blood of Pan. The story is full of exciting episodes---battles, a fight with a dragon, moments of taut suspense---and passages of exquisitely beautiful writing.

Life Is What You Make It makes splendid reading. As a felicitous blend of medieval romance and fantasy, some of its passages are equal in beauty of language and thought to anything Keller has done. And, as suggested above, it all rests on a basis of real human experience, and its inner meaning is applicable to all times and places. Properly revised, and with a more appropriate title, it would be well worthy of publication. Perhaps its delicately imaginative nature makes it unfit for the general public; but certainly it deserves at least a small edition. Fantasy book publishers would do well to contact Dr. Keller about this.

In addition to the works described there are other unpublished novels, such as Shadows and Reality, The Dream Journey and The Gentle Pirate. The Abyss and The Eternal Conflict have not as yet appeared, but have been purchased.

The most recent of Keller's novels is The Homunculus, a humorous science-fiction story. This I have not read, but Keller has described it to me at some length. It seems to be a sort of extravaganza, blended of satire and sentiment. It has to do with a doctor and his wife, who are childless and getting on in years. The doctor finds the formula by which Paracelsus created synthetic life; and he sets about making an artificial baby. The repercussions of the experiment are terrific---and terrifically funny. Especially noteworthy, I judge, is a quoted newspaper article---a satire on Keller's own satire, in the form of a tongue-in-cheek yarn about a pneumatic woman made of rubber. Keller's recital of this story-within-a-story had me helpless with almost hysterical glee. If the remainder lives up to that section, then this history of Bumble's Bottle Babies must be delightful indeed. Yet I gather that the novel also has its serious side and inner meanings. I was told, too, of a walloping surprise ending.

While reading these unpublished novels I was struck by several recurring themes. In the first place, the autobiographical element is very strong, even in stories which could not possibly have been taken from Keller's experience. It was most obvious in The Fighting Woman and Wanderers in Spain, but all of the others contained elements plainly derived from Keller's own life.

Furthermore, certain philosophic ideas occur again and again. One is that free will is an illusion; when we are most convinced that we are shaping our destinies, outer forces are really at work shaping them for us. There is also a preoccupation with the relationship between the creative artist and society.

Another repeated theme is the conflict between the sexes; still another, the crippling and disillusioning qualities of experience and age. Perhaps all the stories we have described are simply different expressions of these same basic ideas.

These unpublished works add to the evidence abundant in The Devil and the Doctor, The Sign of the Burning Hart and several of the entries in Life Everlasting that shows David H. Keller as a sincere and genuine literary artist.

---oOo---

KARIG, Walter

Zotz!

New York: Rinehart & Co., 1947. xiv-268pp. 20 cm. $2½.

Review: To the Professor of Semitic Languages at St. Jude's Theological Seminary (of all people!) comes a strange, evil-eye-like power to paralyze or kill. All Dr. John Jones has to do is level a toe or forefinger, and at the same time utter the proper mystic word. He acquires this ability spectacularly enough by following a centuries-old ritual, and then blunders around through over two hundred pages trying to use it. Only in the last chapter and a brief epilogue does he combine it with much common sense.

By this maybe Mr. Karig wanted to show to what extent realization of a great gift depends on imagination. Or maybe he thought college professors needed a bit of burlesquing. Again, himself a Navy captain in the last war, maybe he felt Washington bureaucracy should be lambasted a few more times. (There is even a hint of some fumbling symbolism about the United States and the atom bomb. This last is so feeble I never would have mentioned it if the book-jacket hadn't done so---but I'm willing to forget about this if Rinehart's blurb-writer will apologize for broaching the matter in the first place.)

Anyway, Mr. Karig is no howling success in any of these topics. It would take a good deal more psychological insight and writing ability than he apparently possesses to rework the first of them. As for college professors, they are too colorless a lot to interest the average reader. Also, you'd expect that a satirical panning of bureaucrats would seem trite by now---but it is this part of Zotz!, queerly enough, that impresses you most. Some of the subtle touches are really humorous, and many broader strokes very good, too. I still chuckle at the thought of the National Board of Scientific Advertance and Perlustration (fittingly dubbed SAP for short) which "looks into all sorts of inventions the military don't think they can use, or don't understand, but still may be of value to the war effort," and how it rescues from oblivion "the star-shaped toilet seats originally offered the navy so a man wouldn't be thrown off in rough weather." I suppose such material continues to appeal because most of us have had some sort of contact---distressing or uproarious---with like incidents.

In any event, the bulk of Walter Karig's slickly-written novel deals with satire like this, and Dr. Jones actually does very little zotzing at all except on a few insects, mice, squirrels and once a mad dog. Just enough to keep in practice, you might say---which is lucky, for he quits his seminary job and ends up, successful and happy, as the sole owner, operator and general handyman of the Star Exterminating Company.

I can't honestly call Zotz! a very good work, but on the other hand it isn't a very bad one, either. It has its flaws (principally an overall superficiality) and its good points (the chief of which is the author's generally entertaining style). The two strike a balance that leaves the novel on the same level as most other fantasies being published these days---easy, pleasant reading but not particularly memorable. ---Charles Peter Brady.

OCCULT AUTHENTICITY IN BULWER-LYTTON'S NOVELS

by

James Warren Thomas

An author dealing with the occult or the supernatural has two courses open to him with respect to his material. He may fabricate his occult elements out of whole cloth, or he may use authentic and traditional devices.

Both of these alternatives admit of degrees in their use. One of them is seldom employed unalloyed with the other. Authenticity is often strengthened (or weakened) by invention, and vice versa. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, however, is one author who, in the opinion of the present writer, adhered with admirable strictness to the use of "straight" occult elements. This self-imposed limitation to authenticity is well illustrated by his two weird novels, Zanoni and A Strange Story.

It is obvious that the author who wishes to use "true" occultism in his fictions must be familiar with his material. Bulwer-Lytton was well equipped in this respect. He had a mystical and inquiring mind. It is not certain just when he began his studies of magic, but it is probable that he first grew interested about 1825---when he was twenty-two years of age. There is a record of his having jokingly cast someone's horoscope about that time.

That he did study occult lore is quite certain, for he wrote numerous letters on the subject. These letters would seem to indicate that he had something more than a half-belief in the validity of mystic phenomena. At the least they show that he was not a complete skeptic.

His grandson has said that he was not "a spiritualist and a believer in the supernatural." But unhappily for his own case the grandson then proceeds to quote from letters which may be taken to indicate that Bulwer-Lytton was a "believer" to a certain extent. For example, to his friend John Forster he writes:

> I do believe in the substance of what used to be called Magic, that is, I believe that there are persons of a peculiar temperament who can effect very extraordinary things not accounted for by any existent philosophy. (1)

In a letter to his son he says:

> I have been interested in the spirit manifestations. They are astounding but the wonder is that they go so far and no farther.... There is no trick, but I doubt much whether all be more than some strange clairvoyance passing from one human brain to another, or if spirits, something analogous to fairies or genii.... Shakespeare has come to me, and gave me most thrilling advice as to the future and other predictions. Afterwards he came again and flatly contradicted himself; yet I asked him to prove that he was a good spirit sent by God, by telling me the closest secret I have, and he gave it instantly! (2)

Later he writes:

> ...eno' proves that there are wonderful phenomena in our being all unknown to existing philosophy. . . . . But all is dark. I keep a book of my communications and researches--- it will be curious. (3)

These passages reveal a man with his guard down, a man who is making it difficult for any biographer to depict him as a hard-headed and practical skeptic. They reveal a credulous man---the adjective being used without its latter day derogatory connotation. This obvious credulity undoubtedly influenced Bulwer as a writer, and caused him to use authentic details in Zanoni and A Strange Story. Even his grandson admits that his magic was "more than author's copy to give readers a thrill."

Perhaps the most conservative and accurate estimate of the role that the occult played in Bulwer's writings is in the following:

> He certainly did not study magic for the sake of writing about it; still less did he write about it, without having studied it, merely for the purpose of making his readers' flesh creep. (4)

Let us now turn to a consideration of the authentic occult elements in Zanoni, keeping the possible sincerity of the author's own beliefs in mind.

The story concerns two Rosicrucians, Majnour and Zanoni, who possess the secret of immortality. They have this gift upon the understanding that they forever keep aloof from the world and from human sympathy. There are two other main characters, Clarence Glyndon and Viola Pisani. Glyndon is a student under Majnour, but he fails to become an adept. Zanoni falls in love with Viola, thus breaking his vow of aloofness, and he perishes in order to save her from the guillotine.

The first thing to note is that this story deals with Rosicrucians. Bulwer-Lytton belonged to this ancient fraternity. His grandson says: "He was himself a member of the Society of Rosicrucians and Grand Patron of the order." (5) Bulwer wrote to Hargrave Jennings, author of a book on Rosicrucianism:

> There are reasons why I cannot enter into the subject of the "Rosicrucian Brotherhood," a Society still existing, but not under any name by which it can be recognized by those without its pale. [Then, speaking of some Rosicrucian pretenders:] I sent them the sign of the "Initiate"---not one of them could construe it. (6)

The tale told about the conception of the story is consistent with Bulwer's own mysticism:

> In 1835 his reading had included some mediaeval treatises upon astrology and the so-called "occult sciences"; and while his mind was occupied with these studies, the character of Majnour and the main outlines of the story of Zanoni were inspired by a dream. (7)

From this dream he wrote and published a sketch called Zicci, which he later expanded into Zanoni. The complete book may have been inspired by a dream but there are reasons for believing that it was the fruit of research. The date, 1835, quoted above, is significant. Bulwer-Lytton went to Paris in December of that year, and it was there that he read the "mediaeval treatises." Orval Graves mentions some facts that are pertinent here. He states that the original manuscript of The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage is in the Bibliotheque de L'Arsenal, Paris. In speaking of the S. L. MacGregor Mathers translation of this manuscript he says:

> Mathers mentions in the introduction (page xvi) of his work that Bulwer-Lytton knew of and had access to this curious cabalistic and magical manuscript in Paris. He says that Lytton's books, "Zanoni" and "The Strange Story," [sic]

famous novels on magic, have chapters which are identical with the directions given in The Book of Sacred Magic. (8)

Let us turn again to actual elements in Zanoni with the purpose of connecting certain of them with The Book of Sacred Magic and others with various general occult sources. Not having access to this latter work, we must consult Mr. Graves once more. He describes a section of it as follows:

> The aspirant (that is, the student who desires to become an adept) must go into a six months' retreat according to certain directions, or at least live in the country where he will be able to be alone most of the time for six months. His residence...must have a small room which can be converted into a sanctum.
>
> No living animal or person is to have access to this sanctum but the student. The seeker for strange powers performs various disciplines in this six-month retreat by a gradual intensification of his actions every two months.
>
> ...by the last two months he is "inflamed" with invocations. It is during this time that most aspirants become discouraged and a thousand and one seductions attempt to lure him from completing the course he has chosen. If he persists, the "Dark Night of the Soul" will gradually pass and then a new and marvelous "Dawn" of consciousness will be the result. Finally the last period culminates in an elaborate ceremony wherein the candidate invokes his Guardian Angel, Adonai, or Higher Self. (8)

We shall now consider the pertinent parts of this description. The six months' retreat into the country is faithfully followed in Zanoni. Mejnour rents a castle in the mountains of Italy to which he and his pupil Glyndon retire. The inhabitants of the region are paid to keep away from this abode so that the pupil and master may have solitude.

Mejnour has a "sanctum" which Glyndon is forbidden to enter until he is fully prepared. Glyndon has various "disciplines" to undergo. He must study, says Mejnour, and drive all worldly ties from his consciousness.

Finally the climax of Glyndon's studies approaches. Mejnour goes away in order that his pupil may overcome the "Dark Night of the Soul" alone. Glyndon is sorely tried. Doubts assail him. "What!" he cries, "More drudgery---more abstinence! Youth without love and pleasure!" His "thousand and one seductions" come in the form of attraction to the gay revels of the peasantry about the castle and of a dark-eyed Italian charmer. He is also tempted to enter the sanctum, which is forbidden to him until Mejnour's return.

He succumbs to this latter, and unprepared as he is goes into the forbidden room. He makes an invocation and conjures up many vague shapes. Then comes the horror against which he has been warned---"The Dweller of the Threshold," the danger which all aspirants must pass without fear. The incompletely initiated Glyndon faints in terror.

He is later dismissed by Mejnour as an unworthy pupil. Since he failed the ordeal he is now cursed with an incomplete "Dawn of Consciousness," a partial ability to see beyond the veil. Instead of the friendly spirits he would see if he had successfully passed his tests, he is doomed to be haunted by the horrid "Dweller." Says Mejnour:

> "Thou hast conjured the spectre; of all the tribes of the space, no foe is so malignant to man---and thou hast lifted the veil from thy gaze! I cannot restore to thee the

happy dimness of thy vision," (9)

The similarity of the unhappy discipleship of Glyndon to Mr. Graves' description of The Book of Sacred Magic is strikingly obvious.

The "Adonai" or "Higher Self" mentioned is also present here. Zanoni, who is an adept and thus has the power of invocation, calls on "Adon-ai" on numerous occasions. The word itself is Hebrew for "Lord" and it leads us to another authentic allusion made by Bulwer-Lytton. Intruding into the novel in his own person, the author says:

> Though not to us of an ancient and hoary world is vouchsafed the NAME which, so say the earliest oracles of the earth, "rushes into the infinite worlds," yet it is ours to trace the reviving truths.... (10)

This, taken with the fact that "The Cabala" and "Cabalists" are frequently referred to in Zanoni, reveals another of Bulwer's authentic source books. This "NAME," the secret name of the Deity, figures largely in the Cabala. S. L. MacGregor Mathers says:

> The true pronunciation is a most secret arcanum, and is a secret of secrets. "He who can rightly pronounce it causeth heaven and earth to tremble, for it is the name which rusheth through the universe. Therefore when a devout Jew comes upon it in reading the Scripture...he substitutes for it the name Adonai, ADNI, Lord. (11)

The "infinite worlds" referred to by Bulwer are the multiple worlds of Cabalistic lore. It was probably into those worlds that Zanoni could see, and from which "Adon-ai" came when invoked. However, the matter is much too complicated to be gone into here.

In his chapter headings Bulwer quotes from a number of magical treatises and occult authors. Here is one from Les Clavicules de Rabbi Salomon:

> Les intelligences Celestes se font voir, et se communiquent plus volontiers, dans le silence, et dans le tranquillite de la solitude. On aura donc une petite chambre ou un cabinet secret.... (12)

Here again we have the insistence on solitude for the neophyte and the adept; and again the private "sanctum." Bulwer writes of Zanoni:

> Wherever his abode, he selected one room remote from the rest of the house.... This room...was never entered save by Zanoni himself. (12)

There are numerous quotations from and mentions of such notables as Albertus Magnus, Tritemius, Paracelsus, Averroes, Cornelius Agrippa, and Hermes Trismegistus. However, there is no need to go into these in detail. All of these authentic occult allusions and elements are used by Bulwer to add verisimilitude to the atmosphere of weirdness and terror in Zanoni. He does not enlarge upon them to any great degree, preferring to let his horrors remain intangible.

Bulwer-Lytton's second novel of the supernatural, A Strange Story, was also conceived in a dream. Concerning it, the author wrote, "I fancy this will be my best work of imagination...I fancy it deals with mysteries within and without wholly untouched, as yet, by poets...."

Tastes have changed since this novel was written, however. Today we find the tale too cluttered up with occult props to be thoroughly enjoyable. E. A. Baker says: "Nor do pages upon pages of emotive reasoning, the vague 'metaphysics,' and the sham physical science, help the illusion, at any rate now." (13)

Baker here refers to the odd but authentic fragments of strange erudition which are scattered through the pages of the novel. A partial list of these elements includes mesmerism, animal magnetism, somnambulistic clairvoyance, trance, witches' Sabbats, witches' ointment, the Scin Laeca (or "shining corpse") of Scandinavian legend, phrenology, astrology, negro "Obi" and Obeah charms, astral bodies and crystal-gazing. Also mentioned are some of the occult authorities which have been noted in Zanoni---Van Helmont, Paracelsus, Ptolemy, Lilly et al.

These items are all brought up in the long and boring pages of "emotive reasoning" that Baker objects to. However, they do serve to create a chilled and oppressive atmosphere of brooding terror which hangs over the entire story. But our main concern is not with those tag-ends of odd learning. There are two passages in the book more worthy of consideration.

Incantations are an important part of magical procedure. Bulwer, in A Strange Story, produced two incantation scenes which are remarkable both for their authenticity and for their literary power. In the first scene, the "astral body" of Margrave, the "soul-less magician" who is seeking the Elixir of Life, puts Fenwick, the hero, into a trance. In this state Fenwick is forced to undertake a magical incantation or invocation. He is given a wand and a lump of "bituminous substance." With the bitumen he traces a circle nine feet in diameter on the floor, and inscribes a pentacle, or "Solomon's Seal," within it. Fenwick and the astral body stand in the center of the circle, the former holding a "steel wand." The circle is set on fire and then the astral body whispers the words of the incantation into Fenwick's ear for him to repeat. These are in an "unknown language." The incantation is repeated three times. Strange shadows gather outside the circle. Dogs howl as if at the presence of unseen evil. However, before any demons or spirits are evoked Fenwick breaks from the spell and rushes out of the circle.

The second incantation scene involves Margrave in person; Ayesha, a sorceress in love with Margrave; and Fenwick. Margrave has found the secret of the elixir and is about to compound some of the vital fluid. A circle is burnt on the ground with "naptha or some similar inflammable." Two pentacles are inscribed within the circle. Ten lamps are placed on its circumference, one on each apex of the pentacles. All three participants stand in the enchanted area thus formed. Fenwick replenishes the lamps with mystic oil as they grow dim; Ayesha tends a fire over which is the cauldron wherein Margrave makes the elixir.

Margrave warns Fenwick to beware "that not a motion of the arm, not an inch of the foot passes the verge of the ring." As the ceremony proceeds, weird sights are seen without the edge of the charmed circle. Fenwick cries:

> "Look---look! Those terrible eyes! Legions on legions! And hark! that tramp of numberless feet; they are not seen, but the hollows of earth echo the sound of their march."

Ayesha says:

> "See! two of the lamps have died out!---see the black of the gap in the ring! Guard that breach---there the demons will enter."

The ceremony ends in disaster as a "gigantic Foot" strides through the gap. These two scenes are full of authentic magical lore. With logic unassailable, let us consider the first scene first. The "steel wand" which Fenwick uses is a most necessary item in the magician's equipment. It is made of iron or steel because all demons and hostile spirits have an antipathy toward ferrous substances and can be controlled by them. The pentacle inscribed within a circle is another authentic step in the conjuring process. In this case it is one of the most elementary forms, for we read in the Heptameron, or, Magical Elements of Peter D'Abano, Philosopher, that "the form of circles is not always the same; but useth to be changed, according to the order of the spirits that are to be called, their

places, daies, and hours." (14) Briefly, the purpose of the circle is to protect the magician from whatever horrors he may call up, "for," says D'Abano, "they are certain fortresses to defend the operators safe from evil Spirits."

The invocation in "an unknown language" undoubtedly refers to gibberish by which, say most magical texts, various beings may be made to appear. Here is a sample incantation, the Citatio Mephistophilis, from a curious apochryphal work:

> Messias, Adonaij, Werforus, Xathor, Yxewe, Soraweijis, Yxaron, Weghargh, Zijhalor, Weghaij Wesorou Xoxijwe, Zywohwawetho, Ragthoswotho, Zebaoth, Adonaij.... (15)

In the present writer's opinion, if Fenwick or anyone else possessed enough energy to repeat three times a passage such as this, something would be bound to occur ---even if it were only the swallowing of an upper plate!

In the second incantation scene, a more elaborate magic circle is used ---presumably because of the great importance of the undertaking. The first thing to note is that there are three persons in the circle. This connects Bulwer with another occult authority. In one chapter of A Strange Story he quotes from Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie. This book "insists on the necessity of observing 'Le Ternaire' in the number of persons who are credulous enough to assist in an enchanter's experiments." (16) Although Bulwer does not mention it, the Dogme et Rituel was written by a French contemporary of his with whom he was acquainted. This was Alphonse Louis Constant, or, as he styled himself, Eliphaz Levi Zahed, "the last great adept." The significance of "Le Ternaire" is that, according to the best authorities, it is advisable for the magician undertaking an experiment to have two companions in the charmed circle with him, thus making a group of three. In this case, the group consists of Margrave, Ayesha and Fenwick.

As has been before stated, the circle is for the protection of the operators. In the second incantation scene this principle is well illustrated. Margrave warns Fenwick against stepping outside the circle. Strange sights are seen and strange sounds heard beyond the charmed perimeter. Let us consult and compare with Peter D'Abano again:

> There will appear infinite Visions and Phantasms, beating of Organs and all kinds of musical instruments, which is done by the Spirits, that with the Terror that might force the Companions [i.e., the two persons completing "Le Ternaire"] to go out of the Circle, because they can do nothing against the Master. After this you shall see an infinite Company of Archers, with a great multitude of horrible beasts, which will so compose themselves as if they would devour the fellows. But be not afraid. (17)

The authenticity of the occult elements in Zanoni and A Strange Story is obvious. While the literary quality of the two works is not within the scope of the present discussion, it may be said that the effectiveness of Bulwer-Lytton's writing as a means of raising the hackles pales beside that of his source material. Right now the present writer feels almost inclined to echo the sentiments of the old Cornish prayer which asks for protection against "ghoulies and ghosties, long-leggity beasties, and things that go boomp i' the night."

NOTES

(1) The Earl of Lytton, The Life of Edward Bulwer, London, 1913, vol. II, p. 47
(2) ibid., p. 43 (3) ibid., p. 44 (4) ibid., p. 41
(5) ibid., p. 41 (6) ibid., p. 42 (7) ibid., p. 32
(8) Orval Graves, "On Books of Magic," Unknown Worlds, October 1941, p. 121
(9) Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Zanoni, New York, 1901, p.306

(10) ibid., p. 160
(11) S. L. MacGregor Mathers, Kabbala Denudata, The Kabbalah Unveiled, translated from the Latin of Knorr Von Rosenroth, London, 1887, p. 30
(12) Edward Bulwer-Lytton, op. cit., p. 103-4
(13) E.A.Baker, The History of the English Novel, London, 1936, vol. 7, p. 345
(14) William Britten (?), Art Magic, New York, 1876, p. 360
(15) The Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses, New York, 1889, p. 89
(16) Edward Bulwer-Lytton, A Strange Story, New York, 1883, p. 259
(17) William Britten, op. cit., p. 367

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DID LOVECRAFT MISS THIS?

by
Thyril L. Ladd

A search through H. P. Lovecraft's essay on supernatural literature and through his "Commonplace Book" fails to reveal that he had any knowledge of The Thing from the Lake (1921), by Eleanor M. Ingram. It seems impossible that Lovecraft would not have given emphatic attention to this novel, had he been aware of it. In considerable reading of the genre, this writer has found no book which is so closely akin, in both theme and execution, to Howard Lovecraft's own work.

The Thing from the Lake is effectively written, and in no portion of its 315 pages does the suspense lessen---indeed, the horror mounts in intensity as chapter follows chapter. The reader can almost feel himself the horrid cold that presages the coming of this unhuman thing which has entered the earth from some dreadful Other World.

From the time Roger Locke buys the old Michell farm mystery is intertwined with terror. Two hundred years before, when Puritans inhabited the region, Desire Michell had studied black magic---ancient tomes surreptitiously acquired by her cleric father. Abandoned on her wedding-day by her lace-ruffled gentleman lover, she seeks revenge. Power is her need, and she asks aid from beyond that barrier which holds back from our planet the nameless, slimy intelligences dwelling Outside. She summons an unspeakable evil entity---and, power obtained, watches stony-hearted while a waxen image crumples on her hearth. As it melts away, the agonized lover sinks down and dies. But alas!---that which has been called up cannot be dismissed. Though the pentagram is drawn, the nine lamps lighted, the Thing breaks through the circle that was to provide protection, and Desire Michell herself dies....

Thus, for more than two centuries the Thing has remained silent amon old ruins at the bottom of a swamp-ringed lake. But from there, when Roger Locke comes to live at the old house near by, it draws itself, attempting to seize his life and steal his soul.

To Locke, in the dead of night, comes a mysterious girl, who will not permit him to make a light and see her; she begs him to flee the place before it is too late. For herself---also named Desire Michell, after the foul witch who summoned the destroyer---she can see no future but confinement in a convent, for the women of her line have brought only disaster and death to those they loved.

But Locke determines to remain and face whatever danger comes. And it is not long before he is matching his will with an unhuman, wicked intelligence. At one time, made motionless by his enemy's power, he finds himself standing before a narrow breach in the gray wall that for countless eons has kept denizens from Beyond at bay. The issue is thus joined, and rarely has any story presented so grim a battle between a human being and the entities that wait just without

the fatal portal. Victory does eventually come to Locke---but only after the struggle has drawn him into the valley of death itself.

That is the theme; and its presentation, as I have already said, is often positively Lovecraftean. I do not know who Eleanor Ingram is---or was---nor have I ever read any other book by her. But there is no question about her being a powerful writer in the field of the supernatural. Her descriptions echo the horror and dreadfulness of their context. When she speaks of the monster's fetid breath and the odor of decay which accompanies its coming, the reader can almost smell those noxious emanations. As we know, Lovecraft had these descriptive powers; and so, in no small measure, does this authoress.

Probably my point would best be illustrated by quotations from the book itself. These amply show how deeply steeped it is in the supernatural. For example:

> But gradually I became aware of a hideous odor of mould and mildew, of must and damp decay that loaded the air with disgust....

Or:

> Like the antennae of some monstrous insect brushing about my body, I felt Its evil desires wavering about my mental self...searching where It might seize.

And this:

> Not a ripple stirred along that weird beach, or a ray changed the fixed gray twilight...the Thing was at the breach, couched in the great cleft that split the Barrier, darkness without darkness. ...from It emanated deathly cold ...the Thing did not pass. There in the breach It ravened for me, thrust Itself toward me, pressed against the thin veil of separation.... It raised itself, gigantic in formlessness more dreadful than any shape. Its whispered threats broke against me like an evil surf....

There are other passages that might be cited, ospecially in the tense conclusion to the work, where the suspense spirals upward to a powerful climax. In any event, no reader or collector of the outré should fail to read this tale. And students of Lovecraft, especially, should give it their prime attention. The Thing from the Lake is clearly an important contribution to the field, and it would be difficult to name a more entertaining one.

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TIPS ON TALES

by
Winston F. Dawson

William Le Queux's Zoraida: a Romance of the Harem and the Great Sahara (1895): The fantasy element in this story is largely built up around "the Crescent of Glorious Wonders," once the crown of an Arab ruler, Askia, who has so impressed his thoughts upon it that they are conveyed to Cecil Holcombe a thousand years later. Holcombe is thus enabled to find Askia's hidden treasure, and so provide the means for rescuing Zoraida from the power of a notorious modern Arab bandit. The action races back and forth across the mystic interior of Africa which Verne described so well in Five Weeks in a Balloon. Here is romance, high adventure and the French equivalent of Indian fighting blended with enough of the fantastic to make it a valued volume on any collector's shelf. It is well written, and the author successfully maintains an atmosphere of suspense throughout.

Thomas A. Janvier's Aztec Treasure House (1890): Centuries ago a great king of the Aztecs discovered a nearly inaccessible valley in Mexico. Forseeing that a day of doom for his people might some day come, he established in this valley a reserve of warriors and treasure to be available for such an hour of peril. Down through the centuries the descendants of these warriors lived a Spartan life---waiting for the call that never came. Professor Thomas Palgrave, an archeologist, discovers a secret record of the valley while studying modern Mexican Indians. With two American adventurers, a Mexican priest, a Mexican youth named Pablo and last (but not least) Pablo's donkey El Sabio, the wise one, Palgrave sets out to discover the hidden valley. Over trackless deserts and forbidding mountains the little party makes its way. Finally the valley itself is reached. The arrival of outsiders brings to the surface rivalries between opposing factions of the isolated natives that theretofore have merely smouldered; civil war, with desperate and heroic conflict, then results. Surprisingly enough there is no love story in this novel---but it's got just about everything else. Some of its best chapters, moreover, compare very favorably with those in King Solomon's Mines.

Arthur Machen's Green Round (1938): To me, this is a Machen tale that goes off on the wrong track. The story begins in an English bathing resort where an observer sees buildings and activities which are later proved non-existent---at least in our familiar three-dimensional world. But instead of developing this idea, the author introduces his typical lonely, ageing student and brings him to the resort. Attention then reverts to the effect "The Green Round" has on Hillyer, the student, whose object is to meet people and to break away from his lonely life in the great city of London. Hillyer does not see these strange buildings or activities. In fact he doesn't see anything out of the ordinary at all. His new acquaintances observe that a misshapen dwarf has become his companion, and Hillyer's attempt to enter into the society of the resort ends in a retreat to London.... Nobody can describe the vastness and loneliness of a great city like Machen, and when a poltergeist is added--- Well, if you like Machen's work at all you'll enjoy this novel, too; but personally, I still wish The Green Round had been developed differently.

Catulle Mendès' Number 56 (1928): This volume contains two novelettes and two short stories. The title tale warrants little of our attention, since it is no more than a first-class mystery, but the other three entries definitely come under the heading of fantasy. "Luscignole" is a tale after the manner of Green Mansions. If the beauty and cruelty of Hudson's masterpiece fascinated you then by all means read "Luscignole," for it makes a worthy companion. "The Cough" is a good average occult effort---not outstandingly bad or good. "A Wayside Village," however, is tops. The author presents it as a "history" which some superhuman will has prevented him from writing for twenty-three years. He proceeds, under difficulties, to describe how he and a party of cultured companions, while walking near Munich one night, discover a miniature village. How they are seized first with uncontrollable laughter and then with fear as they are warned off makes a story---beg pardon, a "history," Villiers de l'Isle Adam being one of the witnesses---which will hold your interest and linger long in your memory.

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE of Fantasy Commentator there will certainly appear two of the items promised last time for this number: the bibliography of fantasy in Popular magazine and Richard Witter's article. The last-minute inclusion of Dr. Keller's interesting article resulted in their being crowded out of this issue. Entries by Onderdonk, Ladd and Wetzel will be presented then as well.... All this illustrates why we don't make a practice of forecasting future issues often---all too frequently such prophecies never materialize!

SHADOWS OVER LOVECRAFT

by
David H. Keller, M.D.

During the last of February and the first half of March, 1937, a gentleman of the old school lay in a bed at the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital of Providence, Rhode Island, and daily wrote his last weird tale. This story, written solely for his own pleasure and the information of his physician, has not been published, but there can be no doubt as to its plot and style. Like so many of his other compositions, it must have been told in the first person singular, and narrated the story of a hero struggling against one of the great and constantly threatening enemies of the human race. Against this enemy, which has existed for ages, modern science has battled without too great success. For centuries physicians have known about these malignant gods from the universal nowhere. To them syphilis, cancer, leprosy, tuberculosis and pneumonia are as much feared as any fancied demons called Cthulhu, Yuggoth or Yog-Sothoth.

This conflict of man against terrible and unconquerable powers of darkness was a favorite motif in Lovecraft's stories. The elder gods, prisoned in the earth, under the oceans, on remote planets, were battling constantly for the freedom which would enable them to destroy humanity. Occasionally some of them, for a short time, crossed the barrier, but were always driven back and, for a time, rendered harmless. The hero of such tales was frequently destroyed, while the narrator became so mentally shattered by his participation in the horror that he either contemplated suicide or became helplessly psychotic.

This man not only wrote, but lived, his last tale in a pattern very familiar to him. It was simply one more conflict between a man and one of the elder gods in which the man was defeated---destined by fate to fight on hopelessly, doomed from the beginning to certain failure. In this last battle no courageous state police routed the foe with dynamite, no providential typhoon temporarily sealed the ocean home of the enemy. There was no one to destroy it with great carboys of acid, or carefully close, with stone and cement, the opening from which it had escaped.

While writing this last story he must have felt the utter futility of the struggle. He was very much alone. If any of his intimate friends visited him then, they have never spoken of it. There is no record that he obtained consolation and strength from any minister of a God supposedly friendly to mankind. His doctor visited him; the nurses cared for him. Otherwise he spent his last days, as he had spent much of his life, very much alone.

Sheer physical disability, without loss of the keen mentality that had been, through all his life, such a prominent part of his personality, forced him to stop writing. He came to the end of the story and wrote Finis, without complaint, and, perhaps, without regret. Without understanding why Fate had made him what he was, he was determined to do the best he could with what he had. He could have said, as did William Ernest Henley, during his last days:

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced or cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Thus ended the literary career of Howard Phillips Lovecraft.

There are certain facets of his personality that deserve comment. Preeminently he was a gentle soul. There is no evidence that he ever spoke or wrote unkindly to anyone. He was fond of calling himself a gentleman, and his entire

life proved him such a one that even Lord Chesterfield would have been pleased. While shunning formal society to a marked degree, he gave of himself freely, without thought of personal gain, to all who called on him for help.

His various biographies---all short, and, at times, lacking in vital details---show him to have been a man who never admitted defeat. Handicapped as he was by family circumstances and life-long disabilities, he rarely if ever complained. He continued fighting against heavy odds for the attainment of a life-long goal: that of becoming a force in literature. The fact that his ability was not fully recognized until after his death is nothing new in the history of great authors. Those famous lines can aptly be quoted, "Seven cities claimed poor Homer dead, through which the living Homer begged his bread." Thoreau's first edition of Walden remained unsold while he supported himself by making and selling lead pencils, or depended on the charity of friends. Poe's greatness was unrecognized, except in France, for years after he died an alcoholic pauper in Baltimore. Melville's Moby Dick attracted little attention during his lifetime, but years later it was acclaimed a great saga of man's battle against his destiny.

The realization that much of the world did not appreciate his stories probably made no impression on him. He wrote for the pleasure of writing because of a super-active creative mind. Undoubtedly he was pleased when he sold a story and saw it printed, but he willingly lived on fifteen cents a day for food, devoting long hours to correspondence, ghost-writing and revising stories others had written. Had he composed fewer letters, spent fewer hours on revisions and ghost-writing he would have had more time to produce and sell his own stories.

A desire to write was his primary objective; the thought of sale was an entirely secondary consideration. While in high school he hektographed a small magazine, The Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy. In 1914 he became a member of the United Amateur Press Association, and from that time contributed generously to such publications as The United Amateur, The Vagrant, Science-Fantasy Correspondent and Marvel Tales. It was not until he was thirty-two years old that his story was published professionally. This was a horror serial, "Herbert West: Reanimator," and appeared in 1922 in Home Brew magazine.

In 1923 he became one of the authors who contributed to the newly-formed Weird Tales, which, under the able editorship of Farnsworth Wright, rapidly gained eminence in the pulp field. Lovecraft's contribution to its fame is shown by the fact that of the fifty-two titles listed in the bibliography in HPL: a Memoir, forty-six were first published in Weird Tales. However, it must be noted that of this total number, sixteen did not appear there until after his death in 1937. Five of these sixteen were reprinted from smaller or amateur publications. Thus from 1922 until his death in 1937 Lovecraft had but thirty-four stories professionally printed---an average of a little more than two a year. Had this been his only source of income he would indeed have been a very poor man.

Some of the thirty-six sonnets titled "Fungi from Yuggoth" also first appeared in Weird Tales, though many of them were originally donated to such fan magazines as The Fantasy Fan during the period 1931-37, and some did not see print till as late as 1945. Besides stories and poems, Lovecraft wrote essays, among which are "Heritage or Modernisms" and "Some Causes of Self-Immolation." His very complete "Guide to Charleston, South Carolina" first was in letter form. Thousands of letters comprise the rest of his literary work; he was a tireless correspondent. For nearly twelve years he wrote one friend weekly, letters from one to thirty pages in length, each page covered with almost microscopic words written in longhand. All this was a labor of love to a man he never met, who was a boy of fourteen when the first letter was written. These letters, thousands in number, simply flowed from his pen. There could have been no time for thoughtful composition or hour-consuming revision. When these letters are finally published they will reveal, far more than his stories, his real creative ability.

Early in life he became interested in literature. At the age of four he was reading Grimm, at five The Arabian Nights, and when six absorbing Greek and Roman mythology. His first horror story was written at the age of seven, influenced by Dante's Inferno and Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, both illustrated by Doré. In later years many of his somber descriptions of landscapes give the impression that he was also acquainted with Doré's illustrations for Cervantes' Don Quixote. Not content with reading these books he often acted them, thus becoming the hero of the tale. Beyond question the time came when, as narrator, he felt that he personally experienced the horrors he so vividly and carefully described.

From early childhood he manifested the same desire to live in the past that was evidenced in much of his mature conduct. Rather than play baseball with other boys he would in solitude erect altars on the banks of the Seekonk River, and there offer sacrifices to the Greek and Roman gods. In his autobiography he wrote "I had a happy childhood"; but he says later in the same work (Some Notes on a Nonentity), "Among my few playmates I was very unpopular, since I would insist on playing out events in history, or acting according to consistent plots. Thus repelled by humans I sought refuge and companionship in books." If he was a happy child it was only because no adult trained him to be a normal one and instead gave him full liberty to follow his own fantastic, antisocial inclinations.

His educational history is interesting. When eight years of age, his mother took him from public school, considering him too frail to continue mingling with masses of other children. Private tutors instructed him till he was fourteen years old. From 1904 to 1908 he attended the Hope High School. Some unnamed illness prevented the fulfillment of his wish to enter Brown University. It is probable that this illness was induced, or at least aggravated, by the same over-solicitous mother-love which played such an important part in Lovecraft's earlier life.

In spite of never receiving a formal, cultural university education, he acquired, surprisingly early in life, a fund of knowledge derived almost entirely from reading real literature. He absorbed the works of Dunsany, Machen, Poe, Blackwood, Chambers and de la Mare. The reading of these masters of the weird was an important influence on the development of his style. In addition, he became well acquainted with the traditions and early history of New England, especially as these pertained to the psychological traits of both Puritan and agnostic. His retentive memory enabled him to make all this acquired knowledge instantly available. Although surrounded by books, his real and most valuable library remained, carefully card-indexed, in his memory.

While he must have written letters without revision and probably sent them without rereading, his method of story-writing was entirely different, according to his own outline in the essay "Notes on the Writing of Weird Fiction." Seeking for perfection, he wrote and rewrote the same story many times, and, even at the end, was never satisfied with the results. The fact that he enjoyed this did not make it any less laborious. This constant effort to find the exact way to tell a story with the use of precise phrases and proper vocabulary is certainly indicative of a personality which he could not escape from, and deserves further consideration.

Definitely Lovecraft was a profound neurasthenic; but it is unnecessary to cite his love of solitude, antisocial tendencies, the constant desire to avoid the present by living in the past and the dietary peculiarities to make such a diagnosis. His style and manner of writing are definitely those of a psycho-neurotic. His stories did not flow like his letters but were slowly and carefully built, with constant changes, seeking to obtain the correct form and the exact word. In his effort to include everything he considered vital, the final tale gives the impression that he was never certain either of beginning or ending. He comes to what seems to be a logical ending and then writes on and on in an unnec-

~~weary~~ and uncalled-for anticlimax. In his longer stories this is particularly obvious in "The Shadow over Innsmouth."

Lovecraft has been named one of the great writers of the horror story. He certainly felt the terror of the situations he created, and tried to communicate this fear to the reader by making use of a vocabulary that is unique in its multitude of what can best be described as dark words. Despite his effort to create a mood, he leaves little to the reader's imagination. Such criticism may be resented by his admirers, and even considered iconoclastic, but as an illustration study this one paragraph from "The Lurking Fear":

> Shrieking, slithering torrential shadows of red viscous madness chasing one another through endless ensanguined corridors of purple fulgurous sky...formless phantasms and kaleidoscopic mutations of a ghoulish, remembered scene. Forests of monstrous overnourished oaks with serpent roots twisting and sucking unnamable juices from an earth verminous with millions of cannible devils; mound-like tentacles groping from underground nuclei of polypous perversion....insane lightning over malignant ivied walls and demon arcades choked with fungous vegetation.

There are exactly seventy-three words in this paragraph, and forty-six of them can be classed as dark words. In his stories vegetation, landscapes, buildings and characters alike are lavishly described in similar vocabulary. Ultimately the reader becomes surfeited with such carefully described horror-scenes and situations, and becomes physically exhausted instead of morbidly thrilled or depressed.

Heredity is an important factor in many Lovecraft stories, and is always of a degenerative type. His families deteriorate both mentally and physically, become shiftless paupers, and, in at least two stories, develop cannibalism. Whatever taint the original ancestors had becomes greatly magnified in a very few generations. Nowhere does the human race give promise of reaching toward the stars. There is always family decadence. In several of these stories the taint is produced by intermarriage with the elder gods, and the offspring resemble their celestial ancestors in body and personality. In such descriptions Lovecraft gives many excellent case histories which are duplicated in actual life in the records of any psychiatrist, especially in studies of patients bearing the stigma of hereditary syphilis.

This fear of heredity is apparent in the fact that Lovecraft, late in life, married a woman ten years older than himself. Obviously there never was any intent or desire on his part to procreate a child. It was as though he said, "This is the end of the curse!" In marrying a widow with a mature daughter he may have hoped that he would vicariously have a child and grandchildren, but there is nothing to indicate that such hopes came to fruition. Yet the hope of immortality through descendants is obvious, for he was fond of signing his letters "Yr. Obt. Grandsire," and "Grandpa H.P." He had genuine affection for many of the young men he met and corresponded with and looked upon them as his sons. He may have often wondered what life would have been like had his house been filled with children and grandchildren, and fate permitted him to write a "Children's Hour."

The main action of his tales occurs during the dark hours of night. If the tale runs into the daytime the sky is usually overcast or the ground drenched by streaming rain. Since the beginning of time mankind has dreaded the dark hours when witches ride through the black night to attend the Sabbath and devils lurk behind every tree awaiting a chance to mutilate and kill the body and steal the soul of their victim. In using night scenes for most of the story action Lovecraft followed the most ancient and universal pattern of human thought. How-

ever, he not only wrote of the darkness but lived in it and loved it. Only at night did he take his long, solitary walks, and if he wrote during the day it was usually by artificial light with shades drawn to exclude all sunshine.

A distinctive feature of his writing which so far has not attracted attention (and therefore has not been given any particular significance) is the fact that there are few, if any, references to his narrators or heroes eating. His villains eat, but he does not deem it necessary to describe in any way the nourishment of his decent characters. In this he differs from other authors, some of whom---like Dickens---fill pages with accounts of hearty meals, beef steaks and kidney pies. To him eating was merely a physiological function necessary to prolong life. The only exception was his fondness for cheese, candy and ice cream. He detested sea food. Indeed, a psychoanalytical study could readily be made from his dietary peculiarities. The important point is that as he took no special interest in food, few if any of his good characters did either. In The Lurker at the Threshold there are references to eating and the preparation of meals, but these were written by Derleth and not Lovecraft. In The Shadow over Innsmouth the narrator mentions a meal in a cheap restaurant, a typical Lovecraft meal: "a bowl of tomato soup and crackers was enough for me." That could never have been written by an author accustomed to three hearty meals a day.

As far as the record shows, Lovecraft was a total abstainer. Therefore there are no references to alcohol in his tales. Even under the greatest stress his narrators never resort to liquor to release their nervous tension. One of his characters is deliberately made drunk to loosen his tongue, but old Zadok Allen is the only drunkard that I have found in a Lovecraft story.

Living as he did, thinking as he did, he found little in life to laugh at. Occasionally he wrote with tongue in cheek, as when he produced "Ibid," or that remarkable version of old melodrama, "Sweet Ermingarde." These writings are whimsical, clever and show craftsmanship in the use of different styles, but they do not seem to be provocative of much laughter. They represent an insignificant portion of his collected writings. Nor do the various imitative, Victorian verses of humor particularly increase the sum total of humor there. Lovecraft may have smiled at times, and there is one statement made to the effect that he laughed on one occasion; but there is nothing to show that he often indulged in hearty, side-splitting mirth. Deliberately he lived the part of an old gentleman as described by Lord Chesterfield in his Sciences and Maxims: "Loud laughter is the mirth of the mob, who are only pleased with silly things.... A man of parts and fashion is therefore only seen to smile, but never heard to laugh."

Though women dominated his entire life he never understood them, and therefore never wrote of them. Uninterested in sex because of his neurasthenia, shyness and strong belief in heredity, he lived a life as devoid of feminine interest as that of St. Anthony. If he were ever tormented by such dreams as Gustave Flaubert said that saint suffered, he never mentioned it in conversation or correspondence. Thus there is a definite absence of femininity in all of Lovecraft's tales. Rarely, except when it is necessary to continue a family and its curse, are females mentioned. Women being absent, there is also a complete omission of sex or love interest. "Medusa'a Coil" is an exception---but this story was only revised, not written, by Lovecraft. His antipathy to the female, especially when pictured almost or entirely in the nude, is emphasized by the testimony of friends that he carefully tore off and destroyed magazine covers thus decorated. He wanted the sales appeal to lie in the stories, not the pictures.

Lovecraft compensated for the absence of wicked females by presenting as choice a collection of evil-minded males as can be found in weird literature. It is interesting that so gentle and kindly a man could deliberately create such demons, supernatural and human characters and endow them with such a diversity of

cruel and sadistic manifestations. His gods from Beyond never seemed to be without many ardent worshippers, and these earthly followers indulged freely in torture, mutilation and murder. In at least two stories ("The Lurking Fear" and "The Rats in the Walls") cannibalism is stressed.

His admirers, and they are many, say that Lovecraft, in his special field, was a literary genius. Certainly he excelled in the horror story. If we examine the medical histories of other authors and poets elevated to the hall of fame, we find that many suffered from some form of toxemia. Such a poison, irrespective of its source, contributed towards their productivity. Stevenson, a tubercular invalid, could write only when at the height of his fever. DeQuincey and other noted Englishmen took opium. Poe, Burns and London were alcoholics, as are some well known writers now living. Nietzsche, Beardsley and Gautier were syphilitics and died paretics, as did Guy de Maupassant. It is evident that if a man has creative ability, these varied toxins in some way make it possible for him to so write that he is called a genius.

It seems necessary, therefore, to consider such factors in the development of Lovecraft's genius as a writer of the horror story. The main facts of his life are but partly documented, and there are large segments that can never be studied from the modico-scientific viewpoint they deserve. However, as with prehistoric animals, the entire structure can be surmised from a few remaining bones.

Lovecraft's father was born in 1853. The date of his marriage to Sarah Susan Phillips is not available, but their only son was born in 1890, when the father was thirty-seven years old and the mother thirty-three. Shortly after the birth of this child the father became psychotic; and when Howard was three years old, Albert A. Baker was appointed his guardian because of the father's mental incompetency. The father died in 1898, and little is known concerning his final years. It is even uncertain where he died and thus no hospital records are available. All that is definitely known is that in the death certificate demise was attributed to "an advanced stage of paresis." At that time the relation between paresis and syphilis was not clearly understood. It was not until some years later that the spirochete pallada was discovered. We now know that it takes from fifteen to twenty years for a syphilitic to develop paresis. Lovecraft Sr. was not a paretic when he married and procreated a son, but at that time he was definitely syphilitic, in the communicable stage of that disease.

Sarah Lovecraft was a confirmed neurasthenic. We do not know whether she had any knowledge or even suspicion of the cause of her illness. There is, however, ample evidence that she feared the hereditary influence of her husband's mental condition on her son and was obsessed with the idea that he was destined to a life of invalidism; that he could grow to manhood only by the most intense protection. Several of the essays collected in Marginalia show her constant anxiety clearly. It is certain that this fear was constantly being communicated to the son, not only by the mother but also by his two aunts and by those who taught and cared for him, such as Miss Ella Sweeney. All this insistent solicitude and all the overwhelming anxiety concerning his health could not help but make a profound impression on the little child. Just when or how he learned that this maternal fear was created by the circumstances surrounding his father's illness and death is not known, but the constant references in Lovecraft's stories to the unfortunate influences of heredity show positively that he had some idea of the relationship between his father's illness and his own invalidism.

This problem of heredity became more acute in 1919, when the mother entered a hospital for the psychotic. There her physician, Dr. F. J. Farnell, made the interesting statement that her disorder "had been evidenced for fifteen years;" that, in all probability, "abnormality had existed for at least twenty-five years"

---which definitely places the beginning of her recognized mental illness five years before her husband's death. The same physician notes his belief that mother and son combined to form an Oedipus complex.

With the definite knowledge that his mother was psychotic and was considered to have been so since he was three years old, Lovecraft had additional reason to be interested in problems of heredity. Both of his parents had probably been psychotic before he was born! Irrespective of what he thought of this sudden realization, he continued the same kindly, uncomplaining gentleman he had been. After his mother's hospitalization he frequently visited her, but never entered the buildings or saw her in her room, and absolutely avoided any contact with the other patients. The author who wrote in greatest detail about the mental abnormalities of the human race could not face them in actual life. In May, 1921 it became necessary to operate on Sarah Lovecraft. The gall-bladder surgery resulted in her death on May 24, 1921, a little over two years after her hospitalization. During her final illness she was visited by her sister, Mrs. Lillian Clark, but there is no record that her son saw her in this period. Torn between conflicting emotions---one an intense love for his mother, the other a dread of seeing the changes produced in her by the operation---he deliberately remained away from her bedside. He could not force himself to suffer further mental anguish.

Thus was Howard Lovecraft released from a part of the influence this Oedipus complex had on him. However, his aunts at once assumed his care. With the exception of the months spent in New York and a few short trips, he lived with one or the other of them until his death. Probably a subconscious attempt to escape from this vicarious complex was one of the reasons for his marriage to Mrs. Sonia Greene of Brooklyn. This marriage is a type familiar in the case histories of men involved in an Oedipus complex following the death of the mother. In marriage, always with an older woman, they seek a mother-substitute.

It is difficult for anyone save a psychiatrist to determine why Lovecraft married Mrs. Greene, but it is not hard to understand why she married him. Receiving an adequate income in a mercantile establishment, she was at the same time an amateur writer. Lovecraft had helped revise her manuscripts, and she may have felt that with his assistance she could become a professional author. Just prior to his arrival in the metropolis she issued the first number of an amateur periodical The Rainbow, filling it withpoems, pictures and articles by and about Howard Lovecraft and his friends. She believed, and correctly so, that he gave promise of becoming a successful author and a celebrity---if whip and spur were applied so that he would write more stories and fewer letters.

Considering all the factors involved, the marriage was doomed to failure. Lovecraft wrote a few frank but kind lines concerning this period of his life. In refraining from bitter criticism he demonstrated fully that he was a gentleman, and lived up to his own statement, "A gentleman always makes himself at home no matter where he happens to be."

His experience in New York was not a happy one. Fond of solitude, dreading crowds, constantly feeling the pressure of poverty, it is no wonder that he brooded over some form of escape. Fortunately he did not use the vial of poison which Samuel Loveman says he always carried. His mental condition worried such a true friend as Frank Belknap Long, who wrote, "Howard became increasingly miserable and I feared he might go off the deep end."

Fortunately he returned to his beloved Providence to live with his aunt, Mrs. Lillian Clark. And when she died in 1932 he occupied an apartment with the other aunt, Mrs. Annie Gamwell. Now at last he had a semblance of liberty, and spent some of his time travelling. He was poor still, and continued to budget only fifteen cents a day for food, thus enabling him to save dollars for postage

that enabled him to continue his beloved correspondence. These written contacts were a substitute for the personal associations which he more and more avoided, except with a select few. He continued to love cats, any kind of cat, and preferred a diet of cheese and ice cream. He became "gaunt and pale." It is evident that he was beginning to show the early symptoms of the final shadow, cancer, which caused him to pass into the unknown on March 15, 1937.

Prior to Freud, psychiatrists were content to record the history and symptomology of their patients. Freud introduced the word why into psychiatry. Therefore it is pertinent to ask the question: Why did Lovecraft become one of the great writers of the horror story?

There were shadows over Lovecraft, shadows from which he could not escape. There is medical evidence to show that these shadows were all caused by one large cloud which resulted in much of his life being spent in twilight and often the blackest night.

Now there are certain axioms in medical science. Three of these are: (1) Cerebral insults, in men forty or younger, are almost always the result of syphilis. (2) The wife of a syphilitic is a syphilitic. (3) The child of a paretic is a syphilitic.

Winfield Scott Lovecraft was born in 1853. The date of his marriage to Sarah Susan Phillips, while indefinite, was certainly before 1889, as their son was born in 1890. Winfield Lovecraft was evidently not markedly psychotic when he married sometime before the age of thirty-six, but he was hospitalized four years later, and died at the age of forty-five. Beyond the death certificate we have no medical testimony concerning his illness and its cause. But his son unknowingly contributed very vital information which throws light on the problem.

In 1915, Maurice W. Moe, a member of the United Amateur Press Association, asked Lovecraft to write an autobiography. In this autobiography we find the following statement:

> In 1903 my father was seized with a complete paralytic stroke, due to insomnia and an overstrained nervous system, which took him to the hospital for the remaining five years of his life. He was never thereafter conscious and my image of him is vague.

As Howard Lovecraft was but three when his father was hospitalized and eight when he died, he could have obtained such information only from members of the family. They told him merely enough to satisfy his curiosity; but from that little a psychiatrist can obtain a partial picture of the father's last ten years of life. For an uncertain time he had insomnia and an overstrained nervous system. Lovecraft was in error in saying that these were the cause of the illness; they were, instead, simply clear symptoms of a condition already existing. Then he had "a complete paralytic stroke," and was placed in a hospital. In other words, there was a period of some years when he was deteriorating mentally, and this period of mild psychosis terminated in a cerebral insult. "He was never thereafter conscious." Lovecraft's use of this adjective is interesting. Certainly he did not mean that his father was in a state of complete stupor or coma for five years. What he did mean was that he was not oriented or aware of his surroundings---which corresponds perfectly with Webster's definition of the word conscious: "mentally awake, psychically active or acute...." Lovecraft's phrase gives a perfect description of the mental condition of a paretic in the last stages. The evidence is admittedly incomplete, neurological and serological factors are absent, but from the available data it can nevertheless be stated: Winfield Scott Lovecraft was positively a syphilitic for years before marriage.

It therefore follows that his wife was a syphilitic also, even though

in an attenuated form, as shown by her ability to bear a living child. It has been positively stated that she was abnormal mentally from the time this child was three years old, and that this had been evidenced for fifteen years before her hospitalization, which occurred two years before her death. While the hospital failed to give a true psychiatric diagnosis of her mental illness, it seems necessary only to refer to axiom two, as stated above.

Finally, if both Lovecraft Sr. and wife were syphilitic, then the son was a case of hereditary syphilis. It was in a still more attenuated form, for otherwise he would never have been born, or born, survived; but syphilis was nonetheless present if we consider axiom three. Winfield Townley Scott, in his excellent biographical essay "His Own Most Fantastic Creation," shows that this question of hereditary syphilis has been considered and discarded by Lovecraftians. "There is no indication at all that his son inherited his father's disease," he writes. This is the opinion of a layman. The neuro-psychiatrist, familiar with syphilis of the central nervous system, is forced to differ with him.

Lovecraft seems seldom to have mentioned his father. It is probable that he and his illness were seldom spoken of by the family. His aunt's husband, Dr. Franklyn C. Clark, was a man of no small education. To him Lovecraft may have talked about his father, but the physician may have deliberately concealed the facts to shield the sensibilities of his nephew.

Whatever Lovecraft knew or guessed about this shadow he carefully kept to himself. Naturally it was a subject no gentleman would care to talk or write about. At the same time he was a scientist, as his interest in astronomy shows. In later years, as a scientist, especially after the mental illness and the hospitalization of his mother, he must have considered the relation of his own illness to that of his parents.

Consciously or subconsciously, the thought of heredity must always have been present. He thoroughly believed in it and his stories are filled with references to it. His descriptions of mental and physical deteriorations of families and the individual members of those families show many of the symptoms of hereditary syphilis. His stories seem to convey the impression that he was always covered by the shadow of a threatening psychosis. Reading his stories told in the first person, and remembering that he loved to consider himself the chief character in any drama, we are forced to conclude that while writing these stories he was, as the narrator, actually living them and experiencing all the horror of the situations he so carefully described. And these stories, we should bear in mind, usually concluded with the narrator either becoming insane or considering suicide, driven to such extremeties by the horrors from the Beyond, and unable to endure even the memory of witnessed events after the actual danger had passed. There was a constant repetition of this theme song---the terror of heredity, the mental and physical degeneration, the hopelessness of struggle, the ultimate, unavoidable end. Lovecraft not only wrote this song again and again but he lived it, under a shadow from which he could not escape.

That he had such a fear finally became evident to his friends. They began to have the same fears regarding him. This they show by referring to the vial of poison Lovecraft carried with him, by writing that he was morbidly depressed. "Howard became increasingly miserable; I feared he might go off the deep end." Fortunately he died, as far as the evidence shows, from cancer and Bright's disease, and retained to the end of his life the keen intelligence he was so noted for.

Such, then, were the shadows over Lovecraft.

Had his parentage been different, his childhood and adolescence those of the usual boy, his health normal, his mother as wise as she was loving; had he eaten three hearty meals a day, become a soldier, or fallen in love and married early in life, had children, joined the Rotary Club and occasionally become in-

toxicated, he might not have become a master writer of the horror tale. But with his heritage, his share in the Oedipus complex, his poverty and meager living and the early development of an introverted personality he could write nothing else.

It is greatly to his credit that he lived and died a brave, kindly, uncomplaining gentleman. I fancy I can envision his reception into the heaven of St. John. There he would be given a spacious house with venetian blinds shielding all the windows for "there is no night there," and it would take him some time to become accustomed to the constant sunshine. In one room would be deep-freeze units filled with every variety of ice cream. Cats would roam through the house. The largest room would be a library, the shelves packed with complete editions of all noted writers of the weird, including the fabulous Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. His first assignment would be to write a travel book on Hell, and when this, illustrated by Doré, was published, it would be so terrible that Dante, reading it, would grow green with envy. In spare time he would compose horror stories, perfectly plotted, with proper vocabulary and exquisite style. Occasionally he would read these to carefully selected groups of weird tale fans.

I am sure he would be happy in such a life.
Eventually he might wish to open the venetian blinds.

Underwood,
Stroudsburg, Pa.,
April, 1948

Acknowledgement: In the preparation of the above article I have made full use of H.P.L.: a Memoir and the short biographical articles in Marginalia, Rhode Island on Lovecraft and The Arkham Sampler. Without the information found there, this work could never have been written. I wish to thank August Derleth and Donald Wandrei for their permission to quote verbatim one paragraph from "The Lurking Fear." And finally I wish to express my appreciation to August Derleth for his many letters to me which have been of the greatest help in arriving at an understanding of Lovecraft.

---oOo---

THE ELDER RUNES

by
Joseph Schaumberger

When once I tried with ancient lore
To test those half-forgotten runes,
From darkened skies rained shattered moons
That flanks of lowering mountains tore;
And music from a distant shore
Drove men insane with elfin tunes.
Great cities sank 'neath drifting dunes
And shadow-beings roamed once more.

And as the continents split wide
Again was shown the elder power.
So perished man in all his pride,
Swept headlong in that whirlwind hour.
I watched all from beyond the sky---
And laughed to see a planet die.

THE IMMORTAL STORM

A HISTORY OF SCIENCE-FICTION FANDOM

by
Sam Moskowitz

(part 12)

XXXI
The Greater New York Science Fiction League

Under Hugo Gernsback's aegis the Science Fiction League had been a vigorous, forward-driving organization that went out of its way to encourage creation and growth of local chapters and their activities. The column devoted to the organization in Wonder Stories up to the very end of the Gernsback regime had increased in size and importance. When Standard Publications purchased and rechristened the magazine, and solicited a grade of fiction that would appeal to a lower mental average than that catered to by the former owner, it apparently regarded the league as an annoying appendage to its business bargain. For reasons of prestige and good will the firm could scarcely drop the organization---but on the other hand no planned campaign to encourage expansion would be initiated.

The six-months' interregnum in 1936 preceding change of the magazine's ownership had in itself dealt a fatal blow to the weaker chapters in the Science Fiction League. Still, the more stable units, such as those in Los Angeles and Philadelphia, clung tenaciously to their league affiliations since these offered them their only means of advertising activities and recruiting new members. For the very same reason occasional new groups continued to arise and request charters despite the near-moribund state of the parent organization.

The long and fantastically chamber-of-commerce-like minutes of the Los Angeles chapter and the more infrequent and respectable Philadelphia SFL reports were additional incentive for fans to found new locals. Most of these were abortive attempts, however. There was a Maryland Intra-City Chapter launched by Willis Conover. A Yonkers Chapter was announced by O. Davidson, but that, too, ignominiously expired. Oliver E. Saari began a Minneapolis Chapter of the league, and reported an apparently successful initial meeting with the well-known fantasy authors Donald Wandrei and Carl Jacobi in attendance; but this first official communication from them was also the last. A Columbus, Ohio group headed by John Van Rooyan got no further than a good try, nor did J. Chapman Miske's Cleveland unit.

The league was also helpless to cope with such ruses as that of Frederick Pohl, who in December, 1936 applied for and received a charter for a chapter in Brooklyn, N. Y. This included on its roster such names as Elton V. Andrews, Henry De Costa and Allen Zweig---all of which were pseudonyms of Pohl himself. Two of the members, Walter Kubilus and Harry Dockweiler, were live fans, but it is extremely doubtful if they were guilty of anything more official than paying Pohl an occasional friendly visit. Pohl successfully continued his hoax, sending reports of the club's "progress" to headquarters at irregular intervals for several years, and even announcing a change in name to "The Greater New York Chapter" in order to "embrace more territory."

The Science Fiction League column in the August, 1937 issue of Thrilling Wonder Stories announced that James V. Taurasi had formed a chapter in Flushing, N. Y. Taurasi announced that a July meeting had been held with Robert G. Thompson, Richard Wilson and Abraham Oshinsky in attendance. The club appeared thus to be following the lead of Frederick Pohl's---for actually only Taurasi and

Thompson were present, and no regular meeting had been held at all!

The appearance of such new fans as Taurasi, Wilson, Thompson and Gillespie in the New York area made it almost inevitable that a lasting science-fiction club would eventually be formed there. This indeed proved to be the case. In October, 1937 Sykora, Thompson, Wilson and Mario Racic, Jr. assembled at the home of Director Taurasi and joined the Queens chapter of the SFL. The second meeting, held November 7th, saw the planning of a hektographed club organ titled Jeddara (the Martian word for "queen" in Edgar Rice Burroughs' novels). The first issue was bound in with Taurasi's Cosmic Tales Quarterly, but two later numbers, also hektographed, were distributed independantly. At the same meeting the club decided to send a delegate to visit the newly formed Washington Heights SFL, informing them of the Queens group and the presence of other fans in the New York area. One of the results of this visit, made by Richard Wilson, was to recruit to the Queens banner three important names from the Washington Heights club: Cyril Kornbluth, Chester Fein and David Charney.

The Queens chapter worked up an interesting correspondence with John W. Campbell, Jr., newly-appointed editor of Astounding Stories, who adopted a friendly attitude toward visits from members to his office and was kept informed of their progress. Another correspondent of the club was Thomas S. Gardner, well known in those days for his contributions to Wonder Stories, who evinced the desire eventually to meet the membership. (Both of these events proved later to be quite important.) The chapter's January, 1938 meeting was attended by Moskowitz, who found the members congenial and who offered them suggestions and help. It was at this time that he definitely resolved to work with Sykora toward holding the First National Science Fiction Convention in Newark that year.

Superficially the Queens SFL appeared to be an innocuous type of organization, bumbling happily along a slightly juvenile course and professing no world-shaking ideals or purposes. It did have a by-law, though, which stated that a recruit could not join if objected to by two members. The presence of Sykora thus made it almost certain that Wollheim and his followers would have difficulty becoming members. But motivated either by chance or by excellent sources of information, Wollheim and three of his friends---Michel, Goudket and Pohl---attended the March, 1938 meeting at which Sykora was not present. When they asked to join there was no one to cast a vote against them or rally others to do so, since no member there had ever had any serious altercation with them. The only thing standing in their way was a league ruling that no individual could belong to two chapters at the same time. To circumvent this, Pohl resigned from his Greater New York chapter, and his pen-name Elton V. Andrews ascended to its chairmanship.

And so it happened that Sykora returned to the April meeting a greatly saddened fan. His only chance of undoing these past events lay in the interpretation of a club by-law which read: "All proposed members must receive a unanimous vote of the society in order to enter." Did this mean all members in the chapter---or merely all those present at the voting? This question was brought onto the floor, and the club voted for the latter interpretation. At the same meeting it passed another ruling, one of much later significance to itself and to Sykora in particular: "A member, after three consecutive absences, may be informed that, unless he appears at the next meeting, or gives a good reason for not doing so, be automatically dropped from the rolls."

The Queens chapter expanded gradually in size, so that at the time of the May, 1938 meeting it had thirteen active members. Many of these felt that further growth would best be promoted by retitling the chapter so as to encourage interest of fans in the entire city of New York rather than simply those living in the borough of Queens. By a majority vote the name was then changed to the

Greater New York chapter of the Science Fiction League, and an official charter was duly obtained for the new name. This change apparently was well-advised, for the June 5, 1938 meeting, the first under this new policy, was the most successful to date. Sixteen fans were present, including the newly-acquired trio from the Washington Heights chapter. Two amateur artists, John Giunta and Daniel C. Burford, were added to the roster, as was the old-timer Jack Rubinson. The third issue of Jeddara was distributed. Plans were made to cooperate with Herbert Goudket in producing Scienti-Photo, a fan magazine composed largely of photographs. A regular talk was delivered by William Sykora, and the group seemed well on its way toward continued growth and achievement.

However, though they were not publicized, ominous undertones of dissension existed---and it was not long before these came to the surface. The group of Michelists and Michelist sympathizers continued to build up strength. One of them, Frederick Pohl, proposed at a meeting that the chapter send a delegate to the leftist American Youth Congress and/or support it with a contribution of ten cents per member. Director Taurasi, always an easy-going fellow amenable to reason, balked completely at this, refusing to allow a vote on the motion on the grounds that it was political and therefore had no place on the agenda of a science-fiction organization. Accusing him of dictatorship, Michelists began impeachment proceedings against Taurasi. These were to culminate at the June meeting, but the banner attendance and presence of new members made the whole affair appear unseemly, so the matter was discreetly dropped. However, it is significant to note that Michelist-sympathizer Richard Wilson, secretary of the club during this period, included no mention of the incident whatsoever in the official minutes, which your historian has read.

Taurasi had never been partisan in previous fan dissensions, and consequently had never joined or aligned himself with any clique. But now, forced on the defensive and finding himself alone, he appealed to Sam Moskowitz to visit the chapter and give him moral support. Thus Moskowitz, accompanied by another Newark fan, Alex Osheroff, was present at the club's meeting in July. At the appropriate time he expressed the desire of Osheroff and himself to join as regular dues-paying members. The question as to whether he could attend regularly was then submitted, and both replied in the affirmative. Since they were residents of another state, however, it would be necessary to amend club by-laws in order to permit the two to join. A motion permitting out-of-state fans to become members provided they attended regularly was then passed by a majority of the fans present. But when the membership of Moskowitz and Osheroff was balloted on, four "no" votes were cast. Moskowitz was startled by this turn of events. He rose and stated that in his opinion the banning from membership in the only local club in the area of an active, interested fan was disgraceful. Further, he said, any prejudice a few fans might have against him need not also have been directed against Osheroff. Pohl then pointedly reminded Moskowitz that he was not a member of the group, and that if he insisted on giving vent to his opinions he would have to leave. (At this point it should also be noted that the complete minutes of this July meeting had been removed from the records secretary Wilson passed on to his successor, and to date have not been recovered.)

With such controversial factions present, it was obvious that the club could not hope to present a united front much longer. And when Moskowitz presented opinions to this effect in an article published in The Science-Fiction Fan Wollheim promptly seized upon them as evidence proving him guilty of subversive action in regard to that organization.

Because of the volume of his opposition, Sykora absented himself from the chapter meetings for some time. Michelists at this point seized upon a by-law stating that a member could be expelled for non-attendance and non-payment of

dues for three or more meetings, and insisted upon his expulsion. Taurasi refused to consider such action on the grounds that chapter by-laws plainly stated that a member to be expelled must be present to defend himself. The Michelists considered this inapplicable, and Taurasi sidetracked a showdown on the point by insisting that it first be proved conclusively that Sykora had absented himself from three or more consecutive meetings. Concrete proof was lacking, for secretary Wilson did not regularly include in the minutes names of all those attending meetings. Taurasi then refused to recognize any expulsion proceedings.

Nothing daunted, the Michelists next began impeachment action against Taurasi. Before these could culminate Taurasi resigned the directorship. The meeting continued without him, and Sykora was expelled from the chapter. Taurasi announced his refusal to remain in the chapter, and stated that the cellar of his home, theretofore used as its meeting place, would no longer be available. He further wrote Leo Margolies, director of the Science Fiction League, explaining the situation. Margolies likewise received reports from Michelist members of the club. The letter he wrote in reply to Taurasi is important enough to quote from extensively. It was dated September 14, 1938, and read as follows:

> I was greatly distressed by your report concerning recent meetings of the GNYSFL. I am familiar with the differences of opinions between Messrs. Sykora and Wollheim and have made several efforts to reconcile them. But evidently their acrimonious relations have gone too far this time.
>
> It is impossible for Thrilling Wonder Stories to ascertain which group is in the right, mainly because of the colored versions that come to our attention from the principals concerned. Regardless, after serious consideration, we have decided to dissolve the Greater New York Chapter. As far as our magazine is concerned, as of this date, the Greater New York Chapter does not exist.
>
> While this is quite a drastic action, we have discussed the matter in great detail right here in the office, and we suggest a rather favorable alternative for your group.
>
> Briefly, here's the plan: Let Mr. Sykora form his own branch of the SFL---that is, after he secures at least ten members. Let him be careful in organizing his chapter, as to whom he includes for membership. There is no reason why New York City can't have several individual chapters, each headed by an enthusiastic follower of science fiction, each composed of a group of individuals whose interests and relations are both mutual and compatible.
>
> Similarly, we suggest that Mr. Wollheim round up his own chapter with ten followers; let him be careful that his members are all friendly, that no internal dissension will rise again to destroy the organization.

And thus perished the Greater New York chapter of the Science Fiction League, and not unnaturally neither faction was satisfied with the turn events had taken. In retrospect, however, we can see that it was inevitable. Equally inevitable was an even more important corollary to the break-up. By their own deliberate actions the Michelists had not only made a new enemy, but had caused him to join forces with two old ones. And the combination of Sykora's long experience, Moskowitz's widespread contacts and penchant for article-writing, and Taurasi's publishing abilities was a formidable one indeed. This triumvirate not only outlasted Michelism itself, but lived to wield great power in future fandom.

XXXII
Fantasy News and New Fandom

Until late June, 1938, Richard Wilson's Science Fiction News-Letter was the only weekly fan journal in the field. Begun December 4, 1937, it encountered no competition whatsoever for a full seven months. Though its very existence marked the beginning of the end for extensive inter-fan correspondence, it was by no means unreservedly popular. In the first place, its hektographed columns were all too often too lightly printed to be read easily. Again, there was its price---five cents for a single letter-sized sheet; for the same sum, other magazines provided up to ten times as much reading-matter as the News-Letter. Further, the News-Letter failed to serve the needs of fandom at the time. To discern trends of the period from a file of this journal would be impossible---despite the fact that it called itself a "news-letter." The bulk of its space was devoted to reviews of movies, plays and books, radio notes, fantasy cartoon data and similar minor irrelevancies---all the more inexcusable when one reflects on the history being made in the field at the time and the fact that the average fan hungered for information about it.

Wilson's periodical specialized in trivial anecdotes instead of meaty news stories. We have already learned how it treated the first national convention: reviewing with commendable completeness every journal distributed there, but failing to impart to its clientele a single sentence about the affair itself. Naturally this left the News-Letter open to criticism and competition. Surprisingly enough, the latter appeared first.

On June 26, 1938 Taurasi brought out the first issue of Fantasy News. The initial purpose of this new weekly was to fill out unexpired subscriptions to Taurasi's Cosmic Tales, the title which Robert G. Thompson had inherited and found himself incapable of continuing. The grammar and spelling in Fantasy News were atrocious, and it, too, was only a single sheet of two pages. But it was mimeographed---and we have already noted that this, in a hektographing era, was provocative of respect. Further, Fantasy News sold at three numbers for a dime. It was set up in approved newspaper style with headlines, and its special departments were clearly separated from actual news. It even boasted an editorial staff whose members were individually responsible for radio, cinema and fan magazine reviews. Such specialization made for a better paper.

Fantasy News' initial modest success irritated Richard Wilson. From the first he reprinted in the News-Letter's "Snicker Department" the worst grammatical and spelling errors he could excerpt from Taurasi's sheet. Then a more damaging phase of his antipathy began. Taurasi was using a mimeograph machine borrowed from the then-defunct Phantasy Legion by permission of David Kyle. Wilson convinced Kyle that the machine could be put to better use on his more literate Science Fiction News-Letter, and one day the two descended upon Flushing Flats and emancipated it from the weekly slavery imposed by Taurasi. In a single stroke Wilson felt he had eliminated his competition.

In desperation, Taurasi contacted Sykora and begged permission to use his mimeograph. Sykora was willing; and so Taurasi and Mario Racic (an important behind-the-scenes worker in fandom) continued to pay Sunday visits to Sykora's house and Fantasy News continued to appear.

It will be remembered that at the Newark convention in May much maneuvering and counter-maneuvering marked the choice of a committee to take charge of the 1939 world convention. Sykora had been authorized by attendees to appoint a group, and he maintained that their majority abrogated the authority of a previous committee named for the same purpose at the New York convention of February, 1937. Friends of Wollheim---chairman of the old committee---prepared and circu-

lated at the Newark convention a petition protesting this, as we have previously stated (chapter XXVIII). Wollheim himself refused to recognize the new committee or to relinquish his chairmanship in the old one. This action received support when the Michelist-dominated Greater New York SFL chapter, at its July meeting, passed a motion accepting responsibility for being the handling committee of the 1939 convention. Two active, competing committees now existed.

Sykora called a meeting of his group, which was composed of Moskowitz, Goudket, Fein and Kubilus. Only Moskowitz appeared. Since the weather was inclement, a second set of invitations for a later date were mailed. Again only Moskowitz responded, and without a quorom the committee obviously could not hope to function. Why did the others fail to appear? Lacking definite information, we can only speculate that since all three had or had acquired friendly inclinations towards Michelism, they may have stayed away purposely to please Wollheim.

Meanwhile the Michelists had shown their petition to the science-fiction magazine editors Margolies and Campbell, who decided to make an attempt at reconciling both factions, since a successful science-fiction convention would aid their own interests. Early in July, therefore, Campbell, Margolies, Sykora and Wollheim met in solemn conclave in a New York restaurant. Margolies acted as interrogator, alternately questioning Sykora and Wollheim to ascertain just what their ideas and opinions were. It soon became evident that it would be impossible to reconcile their diametrically opposed views. That left but one alternative: a choice must be made between the two, predicated upon evidence as to which showed better ability to present a successful convention.

Wollheim named the Committee for the Political Advancement of Science-Fiction as the logical group to sponsor the convention, and cited its support by the Greater New York SFL chapter. Sykora had nothing comparable to call upon, and it appeared that the nod would go to Wollheim. And as a last resort he attempted to turn the odds by a bluff. Pooh-poohing the strength of Wollheim's supporters, he declared (with a nonchalant wave of his hand) that in a few months' time he could produce an organization twice as powerful as the CPASF. As capable a publishing executive as Leo Margolies could not be duped by such a show of mock bravado, however. If Sykora could produce something concrete, he said, he would be willing to reconsider; but in the absence of anything more substantial than boasts, he would string along at least temporarily with Wollheim. Picking up the check, he led the group from the restaurant. Campbell had taken little active part in the proceedings, but his silence plainly indicated that he seconded his fellow editor's stand.

When he entered the discussion, Wollheim probably felt that the cards were stacked against him, that the discussion was preordained to be in Sykora's favor. But as it proceeded, he was easily able to make the better impression in the face of his opponent's weak logic. After leaving the restaurant he accosted Sykora on a near-by corner and offered his hand. But Sykora disdained it, feeling that to shake hands would be to admit his own crushing defeat.

To Sykora this conference was a final set-back in an interminably galling feud that had begun over a year before. Only at the Newark convention had he gained a temporary victory; elsewhere he had always emerged the loser. Always he had played a lone game, enlisting the help of others---Madle, Goudket, Taurasi, Moskowitz and others---on occasion, but never informing them of the underlying strategy of his campaigns.

Not surprisingly, Moskowitz had been most bewildered at the dynamic developments at and following what he expected naively to be an orderly convention with no dominating motif save the advancement of science-fiction. Sykora had not taken him into his confidence, and the dislike of Wollheim by both had never resulted in any mutually planned operations against him. But when the two next met,

Sykora finally unburdened himself to Moskowitz---a bit guardedly, yet with reasonable honesty---of the political maneuverings during the recent convention and of the result of the recent conference with the editors (of which last Moskowitz had not even heard). He was not asking for help, he said, since only displaying to Margolies and Campbell a large, well-knit organization willing and able to put on the convention would be effective---and he knew well there was no prospect of whipping into shape any such group within a month or two.

Far from being discouraged by the prospects, Moskowitz became self-assured, jubilant and cocky. A month seemed to him ample time in which to produce a sizable organization. In fact, the organization itself was no problem at all. Instead, he wondered whether the necessary club publication could be mimeographed or if he would have to depend on his own worn-out hektograph outfit, and whether his spending money of a dollar a week could do the work of the five needed by the organization. Sykora, feeling ready to go along for a laugh, made it plain to the neophyte that he would go as high as ten. That being the case, Moskowitz gave his money-back guarantee that he would produce the world's largest science-fiction organization within a month. But to do so he would need the help of Taurasi's Fantasy News, and he asked that a meeting of the three be arranged.

This meeting was held on July 17, 1938 at Sykora's home. A more self-assured, domineering and conceited youngster than Sam Moskowitz was that Sunday has rarely been seen in fandom. He was barely out of high school, and had but a few weeks past attained the pontifical elevation of eighteen years---yet he systematically vetoed and overrode every suggestion of Sykora and Taurasi, insisting that the new club would be run his way or not at all. Sykora, for example, wanted a strong science motif dominant, as in the old ISA. He was told that if the official magazine published one science article in three issues he could consider himself lucky. Taurasi felt that the club organ should use fiction. He was bluntly informed that nothing but articles and columns on science-fiction would be used---that there would never be any fiction there. Sykora wanted the club to use the name of the ISA again, while Taurasi favored that of the abortive American Fantasy Association, which had been stillborn two weeks before. Moskowitz unceremoniously replied that the club was to be called New Fandom (a name he had gleaned from a recent series of articles by Jack Speer, "Annals of New Fandom") and he positively refused to consider any compromise. He believed, perhaps correctly, that the word "new" bespoke the freshness of a clean slate, another start, and would attract fans to membership. Despite strong objections, he insisted that the magazine also be titled New Fandom, and further that it be mimeographed and have silk-screen covers like the old International Observer.

Both Sykora and Taurasi were at the nadir of their fan careers, and had no bargaining points. Moskowitz, on the other hand, had the backing of not only the Philadelphia faction (second most influential in fandom at the time) but of the many fan publishers dependent on his manuscript bureau as well. Consequently he had his own way completely. Sykora went along because there was nothing else for him to do, but Taurasi displayed more enthusiasm when Moskowitz told him, as an incidental aside, that Fantasy News would have to be made the leading newspaper of fandom in both popularity and circulation. It was his intention, said Moskowitz, to perform the tasks of creating New Fandom and energizing Fantasy News concurrently. Probably the only thing more irritating than a braggart is a braggart who proves his point. This Moskowitz proceeded to do in as unusual a series of coincidences and political jockeyings as fandom had ever seen.

The basis of Moskowitz's self-confidence was a letter from Raymond Van Houten, director of the Science Fiction Advancement Association, dated April 22, 1938. In this Van Houten offered to turn over the organization to Moskowitz in its entirety, since he---Van Houten---was no longer able of carrying it. Here

fate played a hand. Before Moskowitz could write his acceptance of the dormant SFAA, Fantasy News published Van Houten's resignation from the organization, and the news of his appointment of Roy A. Squires as temporary managing secretary. It now appeared that he would have to deal with Squires, an old-time fan residing in Glendale, California. But gambling on the promise that Squires might not want the job, Moskowitz promptly wrote Van Houten, requesting the organization and outlining his plan to have it form the nucleus of a powerful, new group whose purpose would be presenting a science-fiction convention the next year.

On August 6th Van Houten replied as follows:

> Your plans to take over the S.F.A.A. are just what I've been looking for. I wanted to sponsor the 1939 convention but I didn't have the funds. You are hereby appointed Manager-Secretary; I will remain Chairman of the Board of Trustees in an advisory capacity. The Mg.-Sec. runs the show, trustees notwithstanding. Will forward membership lists and other data later. Suffice it to say that the organization is in your hands.

Two days later he dispatched a follow-up letter, restating the same terms more fully, but adding the reservations that the names of the club and of the official organ must be maintained. The latter clause called for immediate ironing out, for under no circumstances was Moskowitz willing to depart from his preconceived plans as already outlined. He therefore arranged a meeting for August 14th, to be attended by Van Houten, Sykora and himself, for the express purpose of bringing Van Houten around to his view. But before speaking of this further, we must backtrack for a few moments to develop other threads of the narrative.

The first official announcement of New Fandom appeared in the August 7th number of Fantasy News. Under Moskowitz's byline the following modest statement appeared:

> Watch for science-fiction's greatest organization! New Fandom! To form a new base for fan activities missing since the death of Fantasy Magazine. Backed by Sam Moskowitz and Will Sykora this is a sure-fire organization that will START with fifty members. Official organ out in a month..... Details in future issues of Fantasy News.

And beneath this announcement was a small, apparently unrelated news note to the effect that The Science Fiction Critic was delayed because of publisher Claire P. Beck's visit to his brother Clyde in Reno.

During the week of August 7, 1938, a strapping, red-headed young man, over six foot tall, knocked at the door of Moskowitz's Newark home and announced his name: Claire Beck. It developed that he had tired of fruit-picking in Lakeport, California, and had decided to visit his brother in San Francisco (not Reno, as Fantasy News erroneously reported). After leaving there he travelled east, pausing en route to visit Clark Ashton Smith, R. H. Barlow, C. L. Moore and others, and arriving nineteen days later at the home of William Miller, Jr., one of his old-time correspondents, in East Orange, New Jersey. As Miller had dropped out of fandom at that time, Beck was able to spend two full weeks at his home without fandom learning he was in the East.

Beck paid Moskowitz a second visit a few days later, and asked if he could be put up for the night, since he was unable to stay longer with Miller. As this was impossible, Moskowitz suggested that he speak to Richard Wilson, who in the past had been able to accomodate visiting fans.

When the Michelists got wind of his arrival in Richmond Hill there was much excitement, for Beck's hitch-hiking feat was the first of its type by a fa-

mous fan, and represented the actual accomplishment of what many fans had dreamed of doing but had never dared to try---namely, travelling about the country, visiting well-known fans and fantasy authors, with lack of finances no serious handicap. Jubilantly, Richard Wilson mapped plans to scoop his competitor with the most sensational news story of the year. In fandom, Beck's hitchhiking trip had a news-value comparable to that of Lindbergh's flight in the world press.

On the evening of August 13, 1938, Wilson (accompanied by Beck) visited Taurasi to gloat over his supposed scoop. He was stunned to learn that not only had Taurasi received the news from Moskowitz earlier in the week, but with it sufficient copy to fill four pages. In addition to the feature story there were associational items and an editorial by Moskowitz on the significance of the event. Further, these pages had been mimeographed, assembled and mailed.

Wilson attempted to belittle his competitor's account by having Beck point out a few minor errors in it, and publishing these in his News-Letter for August 20th. But the prestige of the Science Fiction News-Letter was so badly shaken by the combined scoop and doubling in size of Fantasy News that it never recovered. Never again able to challenge its competitor, it dwindled on for almost eight months and then suspended publication.

On August 14th, as scheduled, Van Houten, Taurasi, Sykora and Moskowitz met at the latter's home to iron out the SFAA-New Fandom merger. After some discussion, Van Houten agreed to have the personality of his organization completely dominated by the newer group. Moskowitz gained his point by pointing out that the SFAA had the reputation of a "do-nothing" group, that it was essentially dictatorial in make-up, and that the best way of overcoming such faults would be to start anew with a clean slate. Arrangements were then made for Van Houten to play an important part in initiating success for New Fandom. He was first to write an editorial outlining the beneficial effects of the merger on SFAA members, and to type half of the stencils for the official magazine regularly. These negotiations had scarcely been completed when the doorbell rang.

On the threshold was Claire Beck, and behind him could be seen faces of the opposition---Wilson, Michel and Pohl. The visitors entered, and the two factions sat in comparative silence and discomfiture glaring at each other across the big living-room table. The incident was later described by Van Houten (then a neutral to the dispute) in the August 20, 1938 issue of his carbon-copied magazine of commentary Van Houten Says as follows:

> ...I was very much amused when I was present at a meeting between (or among) Will Sykora, Sam Moskowitz, John B. Michel, Richard Wilson, and a fellow whose name I forget.... Quietude was rampant, to say the least. And the Hon. C. P. Beck was there, with a puzzled look flitting across his red-topped face every now and then. There seems to be a magnitudinous amount of bad blood someplace. Maybe I've been missing something.

The published reactions of neutrals Beck and Van Houten were clear indications as to the extent of deterioration of relations between both factions. The two groups were silent, each knowing that to broach unsubtly the bones of contention might precipitate an immediate scene.

Had Sykora, Moskowitz and Taurasi been themselves unbiased, they might have paused to consider the reason for the Michelists' visit. It could, after all, have had a conciliatory motivation. But the Triumvirate had quickly reached the point where they regarded every Michelist action as aimed, directly or indirectly, at their own interests. Even a friendly Michelist move they promptly would construe to be designed to harm them. They were utterly convinced of their

being victims of injustices. And, since the Michelists never bothered to explain their actions, in print or otherwise, the Triumvirate's attitude is easy to understand.

Despite the Michelists' silence, and despite the fact that as competent a historian as Jack Speer considered their actions at the time "wholly indefensible," it behooves us for the sake of accurate perspective to examine their motives. When Wilson moved to deprive Taurasi of his mimeograph he may have been morally wrong, but not technically so. He was a member of the Phantasy Legion as well as Taurasi, and certainly had as much right to the machine. Today, one wonders why the two made no compromise: certainly both could have used it without friction. When the Michelists impeached Taurasi, they were technically correct in their procedure, and he should have allowed a majority to make a decision. Similarly, Wollheim, in arguing for the chairmanship of the committee to sponsor the 1939 convention, had a legitimate point. If the Greater New York SFL members voted against letting Osheroff and Moskowitz join the chapter, it was Sykora's own sponsorship of the by-law making it possible that put that by-law in the club books; and he had sponsored it with the conjectural possibility of invoking it to exclude the Michelists. Obviously, then, the Michelists could justify their actions on technical grounds. And equally obviously the Triumvirate was pushing its case on the grounds of moral and unwritten laws, the rules which in human society frequently outweigh in importance those actually in print.

On August 21st Moskowitz received two letters that filled him with dire forebodings. One, from Beck, asked that a meeting be arranged for the next afternoon to discuss a matter of extreme importance. The other, from Van Houten, revealed what the matter was. On August 15th Beck had visited Van Houten, and had told him that he disliked seeing the SFAA die out in name; citing a sentimental attachment to the organization of long standing (Beck had been an early member when Bloomer had held sway, and had once before almost acquired leadership of the club) he asked Van Houten to turn the SFAA over to him. Van Houten then stated that he approved of such a plan, and requested Moskowitz to turn the Managing-Secretaryship back to Beck.

Moskowitz replied to neither letter, and did not go to meet Beck at the time and place suggested. Beck then wrote once more, announcing:

> I am now Managing-Secretary of the SFAA, and when I get back from New England I will get the membership and subscription list.... Meanwhile I expect New Fandom to be launched and started, and I am sure that you can manage it....

Beck further wrote that Moskowitz could use the SFAA mailing list, and that he need not feel obligated to fill out membership; thus the arrangement would be advantageous to him.

However, it was evident that without the SFAA, New Fandom could not be launched in a month's time, and that the bid of Sykora's convention committee would therefore be lost. Moreover, Moskowitz firmly believed that the Michelists had deliberately influenced Beck to persuade Van Houten to renege his previous decision to merge the SFAA with New Fandom. Psychologically he was incapable of deducing anything else from the facts he had. As a corollary, Beck became his enemy. And having settled this in his mind, Moskowitz took swift steps to succor his dream of New Fandom. (to be continued)

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BACK NUMBERS: At present we have a very limited stock of the following issues of Fantasy Commentator: #2, 16, 17, 18. Price: 25¢ each, five for $1. If you are interested in any of these, please order now, while the supply lasts.

FANTASY IN ROMANCE MAGAZINE

compiled by William H. Evans

Romance started in November, 1919 as a companion magazine to Adventure, initially with the same editor and authors. It lasted only twelve issues.

Nov. 1919 (vol. 1, no. 1): "Women's Rights" by H. C. Bailey (8pp)
Cave story, versus modern suffrage.

June 1920 (vol. 2, no. 2): "Chinese Magic" by Algernon Blackwood (11pp)
A beautifully written story of hallucinations.

Oct. 1920 (vol. 2, no. 6): "The Image of Seraphra" by James Branch Cabell (7pp)
A tale of Poictesme and Dom Manuel. For all Cabell fans---and others.

---oOo---

GOTTLIEB, Hinko (1886-

The Key to the Great Gate

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1947. 178pp. 18 cm. $2½.

Review: In these days, when fans search diligently for their favorite sop and publishers crawl over each other in frantic effort to bring their [illegible]m fame and fortune, it seems incredible that any fantasy book could be published without one squib being written in announcement, praise or derision. To the best of your reviewer's knowledge, however, such has been the case with the volume at hand. All the more incredible is the fact that the book is an eminently presentable work, although sharing, it must be said, those ills and disabilities common to the genre.

The entire action of the novel takes place within a six-by-twelve cell in a Viennese prison, to which the leading characters have been consigned by the Nazis. Three are ordinary men; but the fourth is Dov Tarnapolski, a Jewish scientist who has discovered and is able to control the fundamental nature of space as postulated by post-Einsteinian mathematicians.

How our protagonists live in comparative elegance, replete with radio, grand piano, salami, cheese and chicken, and even a seven-room house with grounds all within the cramped space of their little cell---and to the apoplectic discomfiture of their Nazi jailors---is a tale which amuses and diverts the reader. The theme goes deeper than that, but only enough so that the moralistic physic under the sugared exterior may be absorbed in small doses.

The author was born in Croatia, grew up in Zagreb, and now lives in Palestine. He had personal experience with the seamy side of German occupation, having been imprisoned by the Gestapo when Jugoslavia succumbed. Later he was active with the Jugo partisans. These authentic experiences are a strong framework upon which the fabric of the story hangs.

The novel as well as the author has an interesting history. The original manuscript was written during a short interlude of escape and freedom, and was somehow preserved until Mr. Gottlieb joined the partisans. At that time it was cached in a cave, discovered by the Germans, and destroyed. A year later in Italy it was reconstructed in the original Serbo-Croat language, and completed in Palestine. It was then translated into German. From this version it was Englished into the edition at hand by Fred Bolman and Ruth Morris, and decorated with lively illustrations by Sam Fischer.

Hinko Gottlieb, who has been a journalist, a playwright, an editor and a lawyer, lost fortune, sons and even country in World War II. His book, while by no stretch of the imagination a paragon of literary endeavor, reveals a hardy, unbowed nature, still reaching forward, still striving to attain that morsel of dignity which is man's crowning acquisition.

---Raymond Van Houten.

THUMBING THE MUNSEY FILES

with William H. Evans

(Editor's note: It is with great pleasure that we welcome back Mr. Evans' column which will summarize plots and literary values of the fantasy fiction printed in the Munsey magazines. He will begin with All Story, and carry on chronologically through each installment. ---A.L.S.)

All Story

1905

Jan. "When Time Slipped a Cog" by W. Bert Foster (5 parts: 25,20,22,10,11pp): Melville Day suddenly realizes that a whole year is missing from his life. Things are mixed up for him, as he finds himself married to a woman he doesn't know, etc. Eventually he recovers his memory, and all is straightened out. So-so.

"The Great Sleep Tanks" by Margaret Prescott Montague (9pp): The story is laid in 1920-22, when a trust has arisen that by use of a gadget stores up all the sleep in the country, selling it only in small capsules. Finally a couple of men destroy the tanks containing the "condensed sleep," putting the whole country in slumber for days. The authoress' tongue-in-cheek attitude is very good throughout.

"The Ghost at Box 13" by Howard R. Garis (4pp): Policeman Burke is killed just as he is pulling patrol box 13. From then on the box either doesn't work or sends in calls when no one is near it. The ghost is finally laid---and turns out to be a grounded power line. Average.

Mar. "The Harmony of Death" by C. Whittier Tate (6pp): Disappointed in love, a violinist writes a wedding march that kills his (ex-) bride, and then himself. So-so.

Apr. "A Kansas Tornado Trust" by T. Z. Chiswick (5pp): Horatio Binney invents a device (its principles are unstated) that detects the approach of tornadoes. He rents it to midwestern towns at moderate fees. Next he finds out how such storms can be controlled, and attempts to use the knowledge for blackmail; but his control backfires, and he falls victim to a storm of his own making. Semi-humorous, and of passable quality.

May "The Moon Metal" by Garrett P. Serviss (35pp): This classic bears rereading even today. The tale tells of a mysterious Dr. Syx, who perfects a process forbringing a new metal from the moon. This metal is at first supposed to be mined on Earth, and most of the action is devoted to how its secret source is revealed. It is intensely interesting throughout. This appeared in book form (Harper, 1900), and was also serialized some years ago in several Middle States newspapers.

June "A Dip in the Fourth Dimension" by F. J. Knight-Adkin (6pp): An early use of the theme Bob Olson made famous in Amazing Stories. This example is no more than fair, however.

"A Visitation of Voices" by George Halifax (6pp) is so off-trail a story that it is difficult to review. A strange voice affects certain people strangely, making them good. I found it unusual and well above average.

"The Wet Weather Vendors" by T. Z. Chiswick (5pp): A sequel to "A Kansas Tornado Trust," this time about a rain-making machine that is a hoax.

July "The Thread of Chance" by C. Whittier Tate (4pp): A ghost puts a young man back on the straight road when he is about to commit suicide.

"His Honor's Psychic Experiment" by Mary Roberts Rinehart (4pp): Telekinetics on a street-car---the conductor steps out, the judge concentrates and the conductor disappears! Interesting despite a mundane solution.

BOOKS FOR SALE:

The following titles are duplicates which have been accumulating in my collection for some time. All are guaranteed to be fantastic in nature---some supernatural, some science-fiction, some pure fantasy. For rapid disposal I am pricing them at figures of 5-10¢ more than I paid for them---with one obvious exception. All orders postpaid. Stamps of small denomenation (1-2-3¢) accepted for amounts under $5. All books are in good condition unless otherwise specified.

DEATH RATTLE by Hanns Gobsch. Boston, 1932. First ed. $ .50
CAN SUCH THINGS BE? by Ambrose Bierce. N.Y., no date. .50
IN THE MIDST OF LIFE by Ambrose Bierce. N.Y., 1927. .50
ALICE IN BLUNDERLAND by John K. Bangs. N.Y., 1907. First ed. .25
BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25th CENTURY big little book. 1933. Paper. .25
THIS MORTAL COIL by Cynthia Asquith. 1947. First ed. d/w 1.90
AND THE DARKNESS FALLS ed. by Boris Karloff First ed. 600pp. .95
THE BEST OF SCIENCE FICTION ed. by Conklin. mint, d/w. 800pp. 1.90
THE GOLDEN GOSPEL: A LEGEND by Gabriel Scott. N.Y., 1928. 1.50
First edition of a scarce and delightful fantasy. d/w
MAN OVERBOARD! by F.Marion Crawford. London, 1903. 1st, illus. .35
A FAIRY LEAPT UPON MY KNEE by Bea Howe. N.Y., 1928. First ed. .35
THE SIGN AT SIX by S. Edw. White. London, no date. Illus. .50
ditto: another copy: Indianapolis, 1912. First ed. Illus. .50
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