FANTASY COMMENTATOR

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

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editor and publisher

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This is the twenty-seventh number of *Fantasy Commentator*, an amateur, non-profit periodical devoted to articles, reviews and verse in the area of science-fiction and fantasy, published at irregular intervals. All opinions expressed herein are the individual contributors' own, and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor or of the staff as a whole. Manuscripts dealing with any phase of fantasy literature are welcome. Accepted material is subject to minimal editorial revision if necessary. Unless correspondents request otherwise, letters of general interest may be excerpted for "Open House." Please address all correspondence to the editor at 7 East 235th Street, Bronx, N. Y. 10470.

This 'n' That

The wide discrepancy between the date of this issue and the date of its copyright is not an error, and warrants explanation. My records show that most of the material you find here was assembled for publication in the late Fall of 1952. Stencilling it was begun that December, eight pages being finished by the end of the year. As immediate professional duties intruded, work on the number was suspended——and never thereafter resumed.

Why? I have reviewed my records and correspondence and cudgelled my memory, and I am still not certain. My best guess is that a combination of reasons, primarily economic and professional, rather than any one single thing, was responsible. I had not long ago (1948) bought a house, and soon found that hiring others to take care of its upkeep and repair, as well as the improvements I visualized, was beyond my means. Further, the only way to insure quality workmanship (even then) was to watch over whoever was hired while he worked; and if I were going to spend time doing that, I might as well perform the jobs myself. So that is what I had begun to do.

My files confirm the expected result: after 1949 my correspondence fell off sharply, even with Ladd and Onderdonk, with whom I had exchanged letters indefatigably for several years. And there had already been a two-year break in the production of *Commentator* (1949-51), with subsequent issues appearing at six-month instead of quarterly intervals.

I was then a college teacher, and normally had summers off. These should have provided ample time for such work, and for pursuing hobbies too; but salaries were very low then, and I usually spent half of each summer doing extra teaching for the added income——money readily saved and gained, but time lost. Meanwhile, professional responsibilities increased. In 1953 I began supervising the research of more graduate students; in 1955 I accepted a lucrative opportunity for commercial consulting; and my regular teaching assignments began to include advanced courses that required considerable time to prepare. I found myself working regularly most Saturdays and Sundays. I had other hobbies besides publishing *Fantasy Commentator*, too: I still collected science-fiction and tried to read a modicum of it; since 1942 I had been interested in music and phonograph record collecting; and starting about 1952 I had become interested in wines. Pursuit of this last was both intellectual and pragmatic; I began to find that half a bottle of table wine with dinner was not only an interesting and appropriate beverage to accompany food, but provided a welcome and needed means of unwinding after a day's work. This was physically and psychologically beneficial——but it also rendered the post-prandial evening hours unfit for any task as demanding as cutting stencils and justifying right-hand margins of the copy as one went along, the method I habitually used in producing this magazine. (More free time lost.)

From here on, other factors intruded. Pay and working conditions at the college where I taught did not improve, and in 1955 the chairmanship of my department devolved upon an older professor who was a graduate of the institution, and so loyal to it that he had reputedly never asked for a promotion or a raise in his entire life there. What, then, could his underlings hope for? Almost all of the younger faculty (including myself) left, even though many held tenured positions. I was fortunately able to obtain an appointment at a higher rank in another college nearby, but it was necessary to work hard for several years to reëstablish myself there. (Tenure is not something you can usually carry from one institution to another; once lost, it has to be earned all over again.) There were personal factors interspersed as well: my mother died in 1956, my father in 1958; the fact that such happenings were not unexpected did not make them less traumatic.

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SCIENCE, SALESMAN FOR SCIENCE - FICTION

Sam Moskowitz

In these days, when science-fiction is enjoying so great a resurgence of popularity that old writers cannot fill pages of books and magazines in the field as fast as they appear, and when new contributors are not being developed swiftly enough to fill the gap, the old cry for less science in the science-fiction story is again being heard. This cry does not emanate from readers, ironically enough, but from the writers themselves.

The professional science - fiction writer sees about him a large number of fantasy magazines which publish reprints mainly because they cannot buy sufficient good new material. He feels that if he were not encumbered by the necessity of conceiving new ideas, gimmicks and gadgets, of checking superficially on the accuracy of his science and of keeping the story theoretically logical——if, in other words, he could simply write a fast-action adventure tale with a fantastic background, he could write more rapidly, sell more stories, and make more money.

This shallow logic reminds me of a time when I was watching a Ballentine Beer driver and his helper drag empty cases of beer bottles out of a tavern cellar. The day was hot and the helper paused a moment, wiped his brow with the back of his hand and said, "I'll sure be glad when they put all beer in cans so I won't have to drag these damned empties around!" "Big deal!" I remarked. "Then your driver won't need any helper. He'll be able to do all the work himself and you'll be out of a job!"

The reason science - fiction writers are unable to keep up with today's demand is because the writing of acceptable science-fiction requires a special knowledge which the average writer doesn't possess. Reduce science - fiction to a simple formula of fast-action adventure and romance against a fantastic background, and you have made it possible for any competent hack to work the field; and the specialist who sweats over his science and accurate background detail will find himself competing with several thousand professionals instead of only several dozen. He'd have to be a pretty hard-headed egotist to believe he could write a fast-action story better than *all* those boys!

The publisher of a science-fiction magazine who thinks he can achieve a greater circulation by cutting the science in his stories to the bare bone should consider a few salient facts. First of all, the science element in most stories today is already only a fraction of what it was years ago. It has been reduced because many gimmicks such as space ships, atomic energy, the principles of rocket propulsion, conditions in interstellar space, and so on, have been explained in detail so often that they are now thoroughly domesticated. Nowadays when an author states that men in 2000 A. D. have space ships, his readers for the most part accept the postulate without expecting an explanation of how the ships were built or details about their operation. However, let us not forget that as recently as two decades ago the average reader was not so trusting. "Space ships, eh?" he would say. "Well, you'll have to show me!" And the writer would usually do just that, often presenting practically a working blueprint of the vessel to gain acceptance before he could get on with the story. Repetition of such explanations

and the rapid progress of science have brought the present-day reader to the point where he believes in such logical extrapolations and doesn't have to be sold on them any more. That, incidentally, is the reason why most of the better yarns before 1935 were novels; you needed plenty of wordage to describe in detail every invention in your story and every theory you championed. Since then it has been progressively easier to develop good science-fiction short stories, because the reader has become educated to the point where he'll accept an author's basic tenets on faith and permit him to get down to business. By the same token, an author must be thoroughly familiar with the scientific explanations of those who preceded him, for if he is not, and he departs from the line of reasoning readers have been conditioned to accept, he must explain his deviation scientifically or risk being booed off the pages of the magazines.

Thus we see that science still remains the backbone of science-fiction today; explanations may be merely implied and accepted on faith, but they are no less valid and are tacitly present, even in the most elementary tales, such as the ones published in *Amazing Stories* during its "action" era. Cutting this science further would literally destroy the readers' incentive to buy science-fiction—— for it is an established fact, beyond all debate or controversy, that science-fiction is the most popular and best-selling type of fantasy.

Why is this? We know that in the weird tale, science-fantasy and pure fantasy there is often better writing and better plotting. Yet these categories of fiction do not sell well in the United States. I myself greatly enjoy reading them, and some stories in these classifications are among my very top favorites. It is therefore with a feeling of regret that I repeat that they do not, as a general rule, sell strongly. One need not go back in years to the classic demise of *Unknown Worlds*——let us merely look at the field as it existed in early 1952, when science-fiction was on the upswing. Out of the two dozen fantasy magazines produced in America at that time, only one was devoted predominately to pure fantasy and the supernatural. That title was *Weird Tales*, and its circulation was one of the lowest in the field.

Or look at things this way: Between roughly the beginning of 1951 and the middle of 1952 a dozen fantasy magazines folded. (They were: *Worlds Beyond, A. Merritt's Fantasy Magazine, Fantastic Novels, Super Science Stories, Ten Story Fantasy, Avon Fantasy Reader, Avon Science Fiction Reader, Fantasy Story, Fantastic Adventures, Marvel Science-Fiction, Worlds Beyond* and *Out of this World Adventures.*) Of these only four——a third——were out-and-out science-fiction titles; all the others diluted their science-fiction with goodly amounts of fantasy and weird fiction. When demand slackens, their kind is always the first to suffer.

Let us examine one of these defunct periodicals in more detail. Ziff-Davis published two fantasy pulps, *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures*. The only essential difference between them was that the latter featured a higher percentage of pure and science-fantasy. When those two magazines were the same size, sold for the same price, utilized the same illustrators and received the same distribution, former editor Raymond Palmer told me that *Amazing Stories* consistently outsold *Fantastic Adventures*. To add further emphasis to the comparison, Palmer stated that whenever he featured an outright science-fiction story on the cover of *Fantastic Adventures*, its circulation for that issue would jump upward. Howard Brown, Palmer's successor, confirmed this assertion at the March, 1951 meeting of the Eastern Science Fiction Association. More recently, word has come from Anthony Boucher that those issues of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* which used science-fiction covers showed increased sales. As a result, he has decided to increase the amount of science-fiction the magazine uses.

Of course the truth of the matter is that many buyers of magazines like *Weird Tales* have always been science-fiction readers who couldn't get enough of

their preferred fare and who enjoy occasional pure fantasies and yarns of the supernatural. (By the same token, many anthologies of supernatural fiction which appeared during the last war were purchased by science-fiction readers, who stopped buying them as soon as enough science-fiction books to satisfy their wants appeared.)

The reason why science-fiction is more popular than other types of fantasy is simply that we live today in a technical civilization. Superstition and belief in the supernatural is at a low ebb. People no longer enjoy stories their education tells them are impossible. They find it difficult to suspend disbelief in the existence of werewolves, vampires, magicians, witches and magic spells. Science-fiction provides escape in a manner that does not contradict their basic convictions, and also offers logical explanations for the flights of fancy it propounds. Modern man has great faith in science. He has seen science perform miracles, he lives among those miracles, and he can easily believe that there are more miracles to come. Science-fiction offers him hope, along logical lines, for a better future world. It can make him think by graphically illustrating the dangers of misused science. He even adds, or imagines he adds, to his scientific knowledge in a perfectly painless manner. So modern man buys science-fiction, and finds it satisfying and enjoyable.

Time was when pulp publishers felt it was necessary to appeal to an average twelve-year-old mental level in order to sell their wares. Science-fiction magazines went along with this premise, and for many years much that was published was almost unreadable. Then, slowly, these magazines began to die; one by one they faded away, still stubbornly believing they had to cater to juvenility. But when atomic fission and jet propulsion forcibly focussed attention on science-fiction, publishers began to adopt a more mature policy. After Hiroshima they couldn't see anything funny or juvenile in science-fiction, and the biggest upsurge ever seen was in progress.

Let me emphasize that during 1952 science-fiction pulps have been the *only* pulps selling well; most pulp publishing houses have either cut back their entire lines or are in the throes of evolution. Allan Echols' article "The Waning Woodpile" (in the 1951 *Writer's Year Book*) offered a plausible view of what was happening. Individuals with a mental age of twelve or below, he claimed, are now reading comic books, which are a lot more fun and a lot more easy to read than pulps. What few readers who stayed with the pulps to the bitter end switched to pocket-book editions where they were offered specialized fiction with a more mature viewpoint. The conclusion is inescapable: if a science-fiction publisher today wants to sell his product, he either must appeal to the mature reader who may be lured back from the pocket-book or print comics, because he can *never* tear the mental pigmies away from those swell comic books. Avon Publishers, fighting the trend to the last stubborn extreme, bound a comic book inside a science-fiction pulp in hopes of luring the twelve-year-olds back to the fold. Their effort lasted just two issues.

In the past there have been types of science-fiction which enjoyed periods of popularity, and which are incorporated in a modern form into the better stories being written today. There was the travel or lost-race tale, telling of adventures in unexplored lands and newly-discovered continents which the author could people with all manner of fantastic creatures and civilizations. The travel tale died because almost all of the Earth's surface has now been explored, but the theme has been incorporated into modern stories in the form of exploring other planets——though science had to be used to transport the characters to those other worlds.

There was the Utopian tale, marked by such famous examples as *The New Atlantis*, *Looking Backwards*, *Erewhon* and others. In these the authors presented

in detail their conception of the material, sociological and scientific set-ups of better worlds. This remains a popular element in science-fiction today, but now people travel to the future and describe a civilization that is to come, or they visit another planet and discover an alien civilization there. In the hands of capable authors such accounts still make fascinating reading.

Then there was the scientific romance, as typified by Edgar Rice Burroughs' novels about John Carter of Mars, where the idea was to highlight bizarre adventure; but even these had a pervasive scientific tone, as Burroughs described Martian technological advancements in detail, noted atmospheric and gravitational differences between Earth and Mars, and was careful not to neglect the many other similar elements which help make a tale convincing science-fiction.

Something vaguely like a scientific romance is probably what the misled writers of 1952 have in mind when they speak of less science——but they don't want to work even hard enough to conceive different civilizations under different conditions. They want simply to write western stories on Mars and cloak-and-dagger stories on Venus, with virtually nothing to differentiate them from mundane fiction except the locale. But this is like the space ship which the reader accepts on faith as long as it behaves as he has been taught it should. If other planets and peoples are just what we see on this one every day, and this amazing coincidence is not rationalized, readers will disbelieve the premise and will not accept it. Writers will then have reached the point where their stories are no longer science-fiction but something else——quite possibly science-fantasy, which most readers do not want and therefore will not buy.

Hugo Gernsback was the man who popularized the modern type of science-fiction, but he was not the only editor of his time to realize that the science in such stories had to be authentic if they were to interest their audience. The editor of *Argosy-Allstory* magazine, in an editorial prefacing Ralph Milne Farley's serial novel "The Radio Man," which began in the June 28, 1924 issue, devoted almost a full page to claims that the story had been checked by competent scientists for its soundness. In *Weird Tales* magazine for June, 1926, Farnsworth Wright, one of the greatest fantasy editors of all time, used over a page in discreetly but firmly pointing out to his readers that "pseudo-scientific" did not accurately describe the science-fiction stories he was publishing, since while seemingly far-fetched, they were nevertheless based on sound and accurate science.

Now if such statements had come from the editor of a science-fiction magazine, they would have been merely a reiteration of policy, a reaffirmation of something already taken for granted. But coming from editors of a general adventure and a predominately supernatural story magazine, they had much deeper implications. They meant that those editors had discovered from circulation figures and readers' comments that the more logical and sound the science in a science-fiction story was, the better it was liked. These editors worked at a time when the scientific romance of the Burroughs school was at a high-water mark of popularity. This admittedly is the type where science content is at its thinnest, the one which could most easily slip off into fantasy. Yet the readers instead preferred a shift in the opposite direction, toward more and better science. The sage observations of these early editors was confirmed by the immediate success of *Amazing Stories*, which from the first made an accurate and solid basis in submissions the very foundation of its editorial policy.

Why should this be so? Why should readers prefer a heavier diet to a light, frothy escapism? The reason is simply that science-fiction is not entirely an escapist form of literature. There are, we should remember, many types of entertainment. The weird tale entertains by frightening and thrilling a person, arousing his adrenal glands just as a roller-coaster does; the best-selling sex novel activates other glands with different potentialities for entertainment; the

science-fiction story entertains through mental stimulation by posing and answering questions which science at that moment is itself posing or cannot explain. That it is mentally stimulating is evidenced by the extensive readers' departments in almost every science-fiction magazine. No one looking merely for escape and relaxation would knock himself out writing letters discussing every phase of this literature. If you think no one is interested in heavy science, scan the vehement scientific debates that characterize these departments. Are they the result of escapism, or of stimulation? I know some men who have been inspired by science-fiction to become notable scientists; I also know others whom it has driven crazy. Neither state of attainments suggests the individual was reading escape literature.

Because so many people nowadays disagree with some or all of these views, I hope I may be forgiven for buttressing them by a lengthy concrete example. Some time ago, at the close of a tough week's work, I was sitting in my library reading, the only pastime for which I could summon enough energy. I was perusing the concluding installment of Fred Hoyle's remarkable article "The Nature of the Universe" in the April, 1951 issue of *Harper's* magazine. It kept me very much awake, and when I reached the following paragraph I was practically lifted from my seat:

> Galaxies lying at only about twice the distance of the farthest ones that actually can be observed with the new telescope at Mount Palomar would be moving away from us at a speed that equalled light itself. Those at still greater distances would have speeds of recession exceeding that of light. Many people find this extremely puzzling because they have learned from Einstein's special theory of relativity that no material body can have a speed greater than light. This is true enough in the special theory of relativity which refers to a particularly simple system of space and time. But it is not true in Einstein's general theory of relativity, and it is in terms of the general theory that the universe has to be discussed.

To me this was sensational. And so, acting on the impulse of the moment, I uncased my typewriter and copied what I had just read in a letter to Dr. Albert Einstein, part of which ran as follows:

> . . . one of the biggest obstacles science-fiction writers have had to overcome in carrying their characters to the far galaxies is the general acceptance of the idea that a meterial object cannot exceed the speed of light. It has called for unbelievable ingenuity to circumnavigate this premise, generally attributed to you, and get our characters to the nether regions of the galaxy while they were still young enough to appreciate the achievement. To have it asserted suddenly that your general theory of relativity does permit such a possibility is startling. I would greatly appreciate it if you would take the trouble of replying, in just several sentences if necessary, whether your general theory of relativity would indeed permit a material object to exceed the speed of light.

Just how real this plaint is may be judged by recalling the myriad devices writers have employed to get around Einstein's limitation. E. E. Smith used inertialess matter; A. E. Van Vogt (and many others) employed "space warps"; George O. Smith went to the length of creating a "negative space" in which the velocity of light was greater than in our universe; and L. Ron Hubbard postulated a slowing of time-perception at speeds near that of light. Readers can probably think of other examples to add to these.

In due time I was gratified to receive Dr. Einstein's reply:

> According to the special theory of relativity the velocity of light relative to an inertial system is something clearly defined and this speed of light is the limit for the speed of any object.
>
> According to general relativity there is still the well-defined velocity of light with respect to a local coordinate system. In this theory there do not exist privileged coordinate systems so that it makes no sense in general to speak about the speed of light with respect to the coordinate system. In special cases where natural choice of the coordinate system exists it is again possible to speak about "the velocity of light" but it is then not a constant but something which depends from the coordinates, f.i. from time.

I became a sort of celebrity over this. The local press decided I was challenging Einstein, and devoted a full column to the matter with a photograph of me and a part of my science-fiction collection. Goaded on by this notoriety, I wrote the British astrophysicist Fred Hoyle, explaining all the foregoing and admitting my puzzlement over Einstein's letter:

> I frankly found this difficult to understand, so I consulted Willy Ley, authority on rocketry and space travel, and Thomas S. Gardner, outstanding gerontologist, both men having made a special study of Einstein's theories. The best interpretation we could jointly arrive at was as follows: The first paragraph was clear and needed no clarification. When Einstein spoke of a "local" system he was apparently referring to all of the observable universe and all it would be possible to see through telescopes. . . . Since we had observed no action of light in the observable universe contrary to the theories Einstein had laid down, nothing could exceed that speed in this system, so there was no hope for the suffering science-fiction writer. We took his last sentence to mean that it was theoretically possible under his general theory for there to exist other systems in which the speed of light might be faster than 186,000 miles per second (or slower), but whatever light's speed in that system, it, too, would remain the ultimate obtainable. This, then, leads to the conclusion that the galaxies you state may be receding faster than light may progress back to us, and which forever must remain invisible to our universe, are now actually part of a totally independant system in which the rate of the speed of light is different than that in our system. Willy Ley and Dr. Gardner seem satisfied with this conclusion, but I am not and somehow feel it is not what you meant. . . .

An answer to my letter arrived after considerable time:

> . . . As you suggest, the interpretation by Willy Ley and Dr. Gardner is scarcely, I think, what Einstein means.
>
> In general relativity it is always possible to choose a system of coordinates for a particular observer, such that this syetem agrees with the coordinates of special relativity, provided the observer considers only his immediate locality—outside the immediate locality the coordinates do not agree with those of special relativity. When an observer makes such a choice of coordinates it is described as the observer's local system. If we choose a local system for ourselves here on Earth "our immediate locality" would include not only the solar system but the whole of our galaxy. It would not, however, include the whole observable universe and would scarcely be applicable even to nearby galaxies.
>
> Now in any local system it is possible to determine a speed of light, and it is correct to say that no material body in the observer's "immediate locality" can exceed this speed. But outside the observer's "immediate locality" the velocity of a material body can exceed the local speed of light.
>
> The statements in my book were necessarily somewhat vague,because a script for broadcasting can hardly go into the niceties of the theory of relativity. What I meant by galaxies having a velocity greater than the speed of light was this:
>
> As pointed out by Weyl many years ago the universe can be described by three space coordinates and a time coordinate in such a way that the time is "universal"—that is to say, observers attached to the different galaxies all measure the same time. With this system of coordinates, the three dimensional "distance" of a galaxy agrees with the distance as measured by normal astronomical practice, and by the velocity of a galaxy I simply mean the rate at which this distance increases with universal time. Then with this definition of velocity it is correct to say that the velocity of a distant galaxy can exceed the speed of light as measured in our own locality.
>
> What Einstein I think means in the second paragraph of his letter is that the speeds light is measured to have in the localities of two widely separated observers need not necessarily be the same. It will only be the same if the matter in the universe is distributed in a special way. Actually it would seem as if the matter in the observed universe *is* distributed so as to give equality to a good approximation; this is connected with the existence of Weyl's universal time.

I have since thrashed this matter out further with a number of learned people, and though I shy from attempting to coordinate the views of two such outstanding scientific minds, I believe it all means that while objects may appear according to limited measurements to be exceeding the speed of light, with reference to a universal yardstick they actually are still below that important figure.

Anyway, I submit that this rather extended example is truly typical rather than exceptional in showing how reading science-fiction can stimulate interesting speculation.

Some time ago I visited the editor of a fantasy magazine, and regaled him with many of the views I have outlined earlier in this article. I urged him

to adopt a more mature slant, and to include better science and writing in the stories he printed. I informed him that as it stood, his magazine was a pretty sorry spectacle. He listened to me patiently and then said, "Look, Sam, your arguments are all very nice, but I don't slant my magazine towards science-fiction fans. I'm aiming at a different audience entirely. At the most, fans compose a few thousand in number. And I can't let their opinions sway my editorial policy." "Well, just who *are* you trying to attract?" I asked. "A good question!" he replied. "Now, you stated that you think my magazine stinks. I'm not trying to appeal to you. I'm slanting it for the truck-drivers and waitresses——the average person in the street. And if these people like my magazine, then it'll be a success. Consider how untypical you are personally. You've sold science-fiction and agented it, written columns, published books, put on conventions——even lectured at a university on the subject. You're not the typical reader I'm catering to ——there aren't enough like you. But if I can get the waitresses and the truck drivers, then I've got a market. By the way, what do you do for a living?" "I drive a truck!" I shot back (and at that time I did). "And in official capacity of truck-driver I think your magazine stinks! Furthermore, I'm a member of a club of science-fiction enthusiasts——stock-clerks, factory employees, skilled laborers and white-collar workers; I've spoken to them about your magazine, and they think it stinks, too!" From the way things turned out apparently I was a better truck-driver than he was an editor, for since that conversation I've had a raise and he's lost his job.

Simple facts are often overlooked because of their very obviousness. I have listened to dozens of talks by prominent fantasy authors and editors on just what science-fiction is, what kind of people read it, and why they do. Many of them have spoken from dreamy conjecture rather than from any standpoint of reality. In the past eighteen years that I have been reading, writing and selling science-fiction I have spoken, conservatively, to some five thousand people familiar with the medium. Editors and publishers, on the other hand, rarely contact more than a few hundred——and most of those are trying to sell them something.

There exists in this country several hundred thousand people who derive pleasure from being mentally stimulated by a form of fiction which is based upon sound, scientific facts and which speculates provocatively from those facts. Enough science in a story to make it convincing is a prerequisite for holding this audience. In the past, when this preferred type of story was not commonly available or else not available in sufficient quality, this audience supported publications featuring other forms of fantasy, thus often giving false pictures of their intrinsic popularity. For the past quarter of a century, however, the out-and-out science-fiction story has been the best-selling form of fantasy in this country. Cold circulation figures prove it. And if writers hope to keep the present wide market for science-fiction, they had better write what the readers want and will buy and what the editors can sell.

If publishers will pause to reflect, they will realize that new readers today have not turned to science-fiction for off-color passages, fast-action adventure thrills, psychoanalysis, or a placid desire for escape literature——they must have been prompted by sheer, unrequited curiosity. There are nuclear bombs, rocket ships, radar, wonder drugs and engineering marvels today that excite the imagination. What will come next, and how will these new advances affect the lives of human beings? The man in the street knows that science-fiction predicted many of these marvels and speculated on their long-term effects. He knows that it can probably predict still others, and dilineate their world-wide importance. Curiosity and mental stimulation drive him to the pages of science-fiction magazines to find out about them. Science-fiction must continue to offer him what he is looking for. Scientific advances, then, far from presaging its early decline, are the best salesmen science-fiction has.

Book Reviews

CHILDREN OF WONDER, edited and with an introduction by William Tenn. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1953. 336 pp. 21 cm. $2.95.

Science-fiction has by now grown sufficiently in volume that it is possible to assemble anthologies covering its narrower segments without undue sacrifice of novelty. It has also grown sufficiently in popularity that major publishing houses are willing to issue such assemblages. Finally, it has grown sufficiently in stature that they can be made without great sacrifice of literary quality. To a considerable degree all these factors are apparent here, where children play pivotal roles in all entries.

In his introduction Tenn reveals that he had the theme for *Outsiders* in mind for a long time, and that he has been collecting stories for possible use in it for several years. This care and preparation shows; not only are most of the entries clearly eligible, but they have been drawn from a variety of sources. Well over a third come from authors in the literary mainstream——Stephen Vincent Benét ("Nightmare for Future Reference," a very good poem), Truman Capote ("Miriam"), A. E. Coppard ("Adam and Eve and Pinch Me"), E. M. Forster ("The Story of a Panic"), Graham Greene ("The End of the Party"), Aldous Huxley ("The Hatchery," a chapter from his novel *Brave New World*), D. H. Lawrence ("The Rocking-Horse Winner") and Saki ("The Open Window"). Predictably, these represent the best writing in *Children*, and some are, or are so close to, classics in the field that they would have been hard to exclude simply because they are familiar——those of Forster and Saki, for example. These are balanced by a couple that are much less known, "The Rocking-Horse Winner" and "The End of the Party," both little gems.

One story is new and appearing for the first time: Katherine Maclean's "The Origin of the Species." I found it disappointing; after a leisurely development its treatment of the superchild theme is rushed, and the quality of irony (which is the tale's strongest point) is insufficiently accentuated.

The rest of the stories come from "pulp" sources. They include not only some of the better ones of their theme to be found there, such as Ray Bradbury's "Small Assassin," Richard Matheson's "Born of Man and Woman," Judith Merril's "That Only a Mother" and Wilmar Shiras's "In Hiding," but also some which seem to me little more than a representative cross-section of recent work, mostly from the 1941-51 decade. It is here that a reviewer can most justly quarrel with the editor's choices. None of these stories is really bad, but Tenn could certainly have done better. For example, I should have jettisoned Kornbluth's "The Words of Guru," Leinster's "Keyhole" and Jane Rice's "The Idol of the Flies," all merely adequate, to make space for two outstanding classics which Tenn has overlooked or excluded: John Collier's "Thus I Refute Beelzy" and Arthur Machen's "The White People." And how could anyone choose Padgett's "The Piper's Son" when the same authors' "Mimsy Were the Borogoves" was at hand, or Poul Anderson's "Terminal Quest" in place of John Pudney's much less known "The Boy Who Saw Through"? The remaining pulp entry is Tenn's own "Errand Boy," which I should describe as workmanlike rather than moving.

A reviewer might also quarrel with parts of the editor's introduction to this anthology. His personal reminiscences are interesting, but they lead to fussy apologies and justifications for reading science-fiction, which changes such as I have suggested above would make unnecessary. The most effective justification for the existence of this book——or any book, for that matter——is high quality; provide that, and you don't need to explain. Tenn might also have cited more of the works whose length puts them outside the scope of his collection, so that interested readers might explore its theme further. I think here not only of *The Turn*

of the Screw by Henry James, but novels less familiar to the average "mainstream" reader, such as Stapledon's *Odd John*, Beresford's *The Wonder* and Van Vogt's *Slan*.

Finally, Tenn has grouped his entries into seven different titled categories. This looks to me like an oblique and unsupportable claim to scholarship, since these categories overlap and duplicate each other too extensively to be useful. They would better have been omitted entirely.

As some readers of this review will already have noticed, not all the entries in *Children* are truly science-fiction. Half a dozen might be classed as supernatural or pure fantasy, or lie in those gray areas which defy clear categorizing. Tenn excuses them by expanding his horizon of choice to what he calls "science-fantasy." I wasn't bothered by this, and I don't think their presence negates the general principles I set forth in the first paragraph of this review. Neither should they discourage potential buyers. Despite my complaints, I still rate *Children of Wonder* a very good anthology, well worth owning. It is to be a selection of the Science Fiction Book Club, where it will be available at a lower price; and if it eventually appears in paperback form, as more and more books in the field are beginning to do, I'd recommend it as a don't-miss bargain.

——*A. Langley Searles*

OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET by Clives Staples Lewis. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946. 174 pp. 18 cm. $2.00.

A year or so before the war, I embroiled myself in a terrific stew over "pro-scientific" and "anti-scientific" themes in science-fiction. I became quite strident in denouncing those stories wherein science was pictured as a villain, a destroyer of moral values, and a drag on humanity's progress toward that high state of development which is characterized by love for one's fellow man. This aroused, in fact, a most awful to-do on the subject for a time, but like most crusades against pleasant delusions it was foredoomed to failure and abandoned.

The continued popularity of Mr. Lewis's work, however, prompts me once more to seize my cudgel and lay about in high dudgeon. A more blatant, worthless and wholly mendacious piece of anti-scientific balderdash I have yet to see. Mr. Lewis would have done well to remain as silent as his forlorn planet!

This is the story of an English philologist who is kidnapped by a great physicist and his assistant and taken by a space ship (which the physicist had invented) to the planet Malacandra (Mars). On the way, the philologist overhears talk between his two abductors which leads him to believe that he is to be turned over to the monster denizens of Malacandra for some sort of sacrifice. On landing, he finds that this is indeed so; but, aided by the unexpected appearance of a fearsome Martian beast, escapes into the strange forests of that alien world. He is saved from death by starvation by falling in with an intelligent Martian, and for a period of several weeks he is accepted into, and becomes enamored of, Malacandrian civilization——or, to be exact, one part of it.

The climax comes when the philologist is called to appear before the Oyarsa, an unvisible, ethereal being who wields a benevolent dictatorship over the three different races of Martians. He finds out that this overlord wishes to ask some questions about the planet Earth. It seems that all the spheres of the solar system are presided over by their Oyarsas except Earth, whose Oyarsa long ago became so "bent" (i. e., debauched) that he had to be imprisoned (in some manner not described) on his world, and that nothing has since been heard of him. The Oyarsas of all the other worlds are in constant communication with each other, and only Earth is silent. (Hence, of course, the title of the book.)

In the course of this questioning, the Martian philosophy of life, that is to say, the philosophy which Lewis wishes to present to his readers, is revealed.

Under this philosophy three distinct races of Martians, the seroni, the hrossa and the pfifltriggi, are lumped together under the classification hnau, as separate from the unreasoning beasts. A step higher in the scale are the eldil, formless beings of ethereal stuff who are the messengers and servants of the Oyarsa, who itself occupies the next highest niche. Over all is the aloof creator, Melildil, equivalent to the Christian Jehovah.

The hrossa are the poets and singers, the seroni are the theorizers and thinkers, and the pfifltriggi are the artisans, all pretty hot stuff in their own lines. Everything is buddy-buddy under the watchful, all-powerful eye of the Oyarsa, who alone is authorized to punish wrong-doing or to take a hnau's life.

Right in the middle of the Oyarsa's exposition of this idyllic state of affairs, the physicist and his side-kick are escorted onto the scene, having been taken into custody for killing one of the hrossa because of callous greed.

Then the fun begins. The physicist, not being endowed by the author with an understanding of the high pinnacle of moral civilization reached by the Malacandrians, treats them as savages, and is generally made to behave in a ridiculous and heartless manner. In the interchange of philosophies which then ensues between the physicist and the Oyarsa, the latter claims that all he wanted from an Earthman was an account of conditions on his silent planet, and that the action of the physicist in running away when he had visited Malacandria before and had become alarmed at the advances of the Martians was totally inexplicable and evidence of a "bent" mind.

The interchange affords Lewis a perfect opportunity to exalt his own philosophy at the expense of the physicist's, whose views are of course twisted to appear as ludicrous as possible. I'll not attempt to detail the point and counterpoint; in summary, the author's belief is that all scientific advancement now in progress in our civilization is the result of bad influences working on the human mind——something like Shaver's "deros" and their evil rays.

Lewis's contempt for (and ignorance of) science is shown by the ludicrous technical errors embedded in the tale. Meteors "tinkle against the steel hull, making strange sounds"; petrified trees, their foliage intact, and "looking like great masses of rose-colored cloud in the distance," stand on the planet's highest ground, never having been buried, and the fossil bones of a long-dead Martian race bestrew the ground around them.

The book's statement that science, *by its very nature,* is a bad toy for mankind to play with and will eventually dry out all the milk of human kindness, is not only untrue but dangerous. Its statement that good scientists must kill all their normal, warmly human instincts in order to do effective work is also untrue. If Lewis were the only person and *Out of the Silent Planet* the only piece of writing that stated these lies there would be no danger; but the fact of the matter is that he is only one of many.

The dangers inherent in the pursuit and capture of knowledge are quite obvious to any inquiring mind, especially since the invention of the atomic bomb, but there are other solutions to the problem than abolishing or curtailing scientific research. Putting Lewis's ideas into practice would be on the same order of idiocy as doing away with automobiles because 35,000 damned fools were killed in motor accidents last year.

C. S. Lewis holds up for our admiration a society ruled by a quasi-omnipotent, divine-righted transcendental being, no different from all the other kings, dictators and tyrants who have infested the Earth throughout history. It is a matter of some moment that he abhors the democratic principles which are evolving in our own (no doubt dreadful to him) scientifically oriented civilization.

——*Raymond Van Houten*

FANCIES AND GOODNIGHTS by John Collier. Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1951. 364 pp. 21.5 cm. $4.00.

Frustrated Collier fans may now stop haunting second-hand bookshops in search of this author's earlier two volumes, *Presenting Moonshine* (1941) and *A Touch of Nutmeg* (1943), both of which have now become hard to find, because this new volume collects almost all the short stories in both of those books, and another seventeen besides. The only one left out is "After the Ball," for which collectors must still retain their copies of *A Touch of Nutmeg* (or *Lovat Dickson's Magazine*, in whose November, 1933 issue it first appeared). I have already sung the praises of these books in earlier reviews,* so it is enough to say here that they provide some of the finest short stories in the field you will ever encounter: if you are unacquainted with John Collier, *Fancies and Goodnights* offers you one of those golden opportunities no serious fantasy reader should ignore.

This review will concentrate on the new entries in the volume, all of which are appearing in book form for the first time. All are, as expected, well written, but unfortunately only five of them can be classed as fantasy, two being only marginally so.

The first marginal story is "Incident on a Lake," where a selfish, nagging wife gets her comeuppance through the agency of a strange, prehistoric beast in the Amazonian jungle. It is very good, and I should have liked it even better if it hadn't reminded me strongly of James Thurber's classic, "The Unicorn in the Garden," whose theme is similar. The second is "Youth from Vienna," about a researching biologist's wedding gift to an engaged couple, of whom the lady is his ex-fiancée: *one* portion of a newly-discovered immortality potion. Of course the story is about what happens as a result, which the author recounts with his usual penetrating acerbity. You will find it neat and absorbing, and packing a sophisticated and satisfying punch.

"Are You too Late or Was I too Early" is a very fine, delicate ghost story, which reminded me in miniature of Oliver Onions' "The Beckoning Fair One." I enjoyed it. "Fallen Star" is another of Collier's devil vs. angel tales; it is pleasant, but a bit wordy, and I felt it lacked the neatness of his earlier and similar "Hell Hath No Fury." The best of all these new stories is "The Lady on the Grey," where the therianthropy theme is handled with more than the usual effectiveness.

Among these entries, then, you will find no new masterpieces, but all the familiar old ones are there for pleasurable rereading. Collier's beautiful writing style and his tart insights into the macabre, the eccentric and the merely ridiculous remain thankfully intact. At his most uninspired I find him better than 90% of today's fantasy writers at their best——a comforting thought when a new book of his comes into your hands.

My only complaint, and I hope it does not sound ungrateful, is that this volume doesn't contain *all* of John Collier's short stories. There are probably only another half-dozen or so of these that have never been put into book form; couldn't the publisher have squeezed them in, too? For the sake of completeness, to say nothing of pleasure they would give readers, it would have been nice to see them in hard covers as well.

Finally, there is one typographical error which should be corrected: on the middle of page 348 I found that a short paragraph has been omitted from the text of "Possession of Angela Bradshaw." I hope this will be restored when *Fancies and Goodnights* eventually appears later this year as a paperback, as I hear it will.

——*A. Langley Searles*

**Fantasy Commentator I*, 11 (1943) and 25 (1944).

THE LITERARY REMAINS OF THE LATE HENRY NEELE. New York: J. & J. Harper, 1829. xiv,341 pp. 22.5 cm.

A little over a century ago a young man died when barely past his thirtieth birthday, and since his untimely passing his interesting writings have been all but forgotten. His output was not large, but what there is has been collected in this volume.

Its contents consist of Neele's verse, a series of his lectures, and a number of his stories. Two of them are rather long historical narratives; one has a Spanish locale ("Blanche of Bourbon") and the other ("The Garter") is laid in old England. There are also a number of shorter tales, six of which concern us here, for they explore themes of fantasy. Three warrant description in detail.

Perhaps the most clearly fantastic is "The Magician's Visiter" [sic]. A sage in medieval Florence has constructed a mirror in which, once the proper spells are recited, a watcher may see the form of any person now dead. To the sage comes an old man who begs that he may be permitted to see there his long-dead daughter Miriam. The sage consents, and begins chanting the spell. Back, back, centuries back into bygone days the spell reaches, until finally the haze of the mirror clears, and the form of a woman appears. Forgetting he has been warned that under no circumstances must he touch the mirror, the aged visitor reaches out to embrace the long-dead woman——and at his touch she vanishes. The vision cannot be recalled. As the visitor is about to leave, the sage asks his identity. The old man points to a painting on the wall, which depicts Christ carrying his cross to Calvary and a soldier pushing the Saviour to hasten him on his way. "I am that unfortunate soldier," cries the old man, "doomed to live forever undying." And the sage realizes his guest has been none other than the Wandering Jew. This blending of two legends (the other is that of Agrippa's magic mirror) was regarded by Neele's contemporaries as his best work.

"The Houri, a Persian Tale" is also excellent. A shah of Persia compels a magician to reveal to him, through his magic spells, a vision of the houri who is destined to be his eternal female companion in paradise. The magician succeeds in conjuring up a vision of this maiden, who is beautiful beyond description. Learning that she is actually living somewhere at the time, the shah is wild to locate her. The magician warns him he must not do so, since destiny has marked her for death, and upon earth she may take no mortal mate. The shah will not heed this warning, and eventually locates the girl. Though the priests try to prevent it, he insists on marrying her immediately. As the marriage ceremony is proceeding the magician cries out that it is a sacrilege which must be stopped. In rage, the shah draws his scimitar to cut down the old man; but the bride runs between the two and receives the blow instead. As she dies she cries, "He is my father!" Aghast, the shah sinks into insanity and death.

"The Comet" tells of a new occupant of a manor-house. He finds a jet of natural gas on the property and lights it; another pocket of gas there explodes. The strange lights and explosion convince natives of the district that he is the devil himself. He laughs at this, as he does at a prophecy that his doom will be caused by a comet. But a comet does appear, and he dies by accident as it is streaking across the heavens.

Neele was well grounded in literature. In 1826 he prepared and in 1827 delivered at the Russell Institution a course of lectures on English poetry, which are printed as part of this book (pp. 17-147). Some of this interest crosses over into his fiction, where famous literary figures are resurrected to act as leading characters. "The Poet's Dream" is an example of this. In another story, the locale is a famous tavern frequented in their times by both Shakespeare and Ben Jonson; Neele puts himself there, and converses with the two. (This last title is a fragment left incomplete.)

Some of the stories here are merely whimsical. One tells of the decision of the months to hold a banquet: December is chosen to be the host, and sends out as messenger to deliver invitations his servant Christmas. In a similar piece, the days, hearing of the months' doings, decide to hold one of their own. Both of these pieces are actually delightful reading.

There is an introduction to this volume (pp. 5-17) where an anonymous writer gives us some background and history about Henry Neele. He was born in London January 29, 1798, the second son of an engraver. He was privately educated and then articled to a solicitor. Although he never formally relinquished the profession of law, he practiced only briefly, and devoted most of his short life to literature. His first book was *Odes and Other Poems* (1817; 2nd edition 1820); and after his later *Poems* (1823) appeared his success made him a welcome contributor to magazines and annuals. A collected edition of his poems was issued in 1827, as were his Russell lectures and *The Romance of History* (3 volumes), one of a series of fictionized versions of romantic passages in the histories of European countries. He wrote the last title in six months, and the resulting tension and strain of research and composition were believed to be the cause of his death. On the morning of February 7, 1828 he was found dead in bed, a suicide. Neele's picture appears as the frontispiece to this book. It shows the face of an imaginative young man with a high forehead and sensitive features.

In addition to the two sections I have already cited, *The Literary Remains of the Late Henry Neele* prints twelve titles under the heading "Original Tales, Poems, etc." (pp. 147-219), and thirty-six as "Miscellaneous Prose and Poetry, Now First Collected" (pp. 219-341), the latter never having before been in book form. Bibliophiles will be grateful to see that the original places of magazine appearance are usually cited. Thus we learn that "The Dinner of the Months" was first printed in *News of Literature* (1826), and the *Forget Me Not* annual carried "The Magician's Visiter" in 1828 and "The Houri" in 1829. The fantasies I have described above, together with "Blanche of Bourbon" and "The Garter"——these comprising the cream of Neele's fiction——also appeared as a separate book called *Tales* (Hamilton, N. Y., Williams, Orton & Co., 1830).

——*Thyril L. Ladd*

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This-'n'-That —— continued from page 196

As each full year passed, the immediacy of needing to complete this issue of *Commentator* gradually receded. It was a task I'd eventually get around to, I was sure, once my work-load decreased. It never did, of course, and in this way a decade slipped by. But something else had gradually been slipping away at the same time——some of my interest in fantasy and science-fiction, and hence my immediate familiarity with it. I had been reading little fantasy, even though I resubscribed to the major magazines to keep my files intact; and I had written little——just occasional book reviews, and a sort of swan-song summary of science-fiction expanded from my contribution to *The Arkham Sampler's* Winter, 1949 science-fiction issue, which was never published and appears to be lost. Finally, by 1962 I was ten years older; and in your forties you simply do not have the energy, resilience and recuperative powers which once seemed inherently natural and everlasting.

By 1962, then, I felt somewhat out of touch with the field. Finishing this issue meant facing the larger question of whether I could or should resume publishing *Fantasy Commentator* regularly at all, a matter with which I was not ready to deal. How long this state of affairs might have persisted I do not know, but its resolution began in the Fall of 1973, and was initiated by Sam Moskowitz.

At that time, remembering that I had researched an introduction for the novel *Edison's Conquest of Mars* (1898) by Garrett Serviss when it was first put in book form in 1947, Sam asked me to write something similar for *A Columbus of Space*, one of a series of classic works of science-fiction he was then editing for reissue. I resurrected my old notes, did a bit more library work, and wrote a new introduction, finding the process satisfying and enjoyable. Resolution continued during the summers of 1974 and 1976, when I served on the Bronx County grand jury where the long pauses between cases offered ample time for reflection. I came to realize that twenty years of youthful immersion in fantasy fiction had left me with an ineradicable liking for it which I could never hope to disregard or suppress, and decided to publish at least the two more issues of *Fantasy Commentator* needed to complete volume III.

Starting in early 1977 I began reading both current work in the field and what most people seemed to agree was the best of what I had missed. I also read many fan magazines and most particularly the productions of those in academe, where some people were now taking science-fiction seriously. Times and mores had indeed changed in twenty-five years, but I found one principle had remained comfortably intact: 90% of what had been produced in that period, just as in 1932-52, wasn't worth reading.

At this point in my narrative one might ask, Do all these details matter? And is a rigorous analysis such as I have attempted really important? Probably not. The waysides of fan publishing are littered with abandoned and revived magazines. But having posed a question, I became interested in trying to answer it, if only to satisfy my own curiosity. As one ages, history becomes more important, particularly one's own history; and the history of this magazine is inextricably bound with my own. Finally, *Commentator* has become the oldest publication devoted to serious criticism in the field; many of its early subscribers are still living, and I like to think that information about it will still be interesting to them, and hopefully to its later adherents as well.

Here my story divides. I could see that the established policy of *Fantasy Commentator*——printing chiefly short articles and short reviews——could not be continued, because other publishers were doing these things better than I could. A resumed *Commentator* would have to depend on longer pieces, where the experience and informed knowledge of the authors would be crucially important——in book reviews as well as articles. And starting with volume IV, the magazine set out to follow those guidelines. But I also saw that the "old" *Commentator* should be completed as a unit in its traditional pattern. Bringing out the material already assembled for this number is the first of two steps being taken to do this. Publication of #28, which is to follow, will complete the task.

Since these last two numbers will probably be of interest mainly to collectors, their production has purposely been limited. The book reviews, some of which were once topical, are no longer so, but I believe readers will still find them informative. Understandably despairing of ever seeing his work in print, Sam Moskowitz placed the leading article, which he wrote in August, 1952, in the magazine *Sambo*, where it appeared with textual changes to account for its delayed appearance;* here it is printed for the first time as originally intended. Installment 19 of his monumental fan history, "The Immortal Storm," was combined with the earlier and last installments and published as a book (1954); for the sake of completeness, the last two installments will appear in *Commentator* as scheduled. To the best of my knowledge, however, none of the other items you find in this issue has been printed elsewhere. Their authors either forgot they had favored me with their submissions or continued to wait, with a humility describable only as saintlike, for their work to appear. (Patience is not always rewarded!) Some of them,

*Issue #1 (undated), distributed with the 73rd (Fall 1955) F.A.P.A. mailing.

indeed, have long since gone to their rewards: Evans, Ladd, Onderdonk, Wetzel (all of whom retain their staff positions on the masthead of the contents-page), Raymond Van Houten, P. Schuyler Miller and Garth Bentley.

The first twenty-six issues of this magazine were reproduced by mimeography. But frankly, I have no longer any desire to cope with the vagaries of stencils, mimeograph machines and the 1927 Remington portable by which they were prepared. Copy for this number was therefore typed on an IBM Selectric II, and from that pages will be Xeroxed and/or lithoprinted. But for these concessions to progress, however, and the text of this editorial, the contents are 1952-53 vintage throughout. They provide an excursion into the past which I hope you will find enjoyable and, perhaps, a bit nostalgic.

St. Thomas, V. I., Jan. 12-13, 1986.

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A Few More Uncomfortable Moments

A. Langley Searles

Two early issues of this magazine featured critical and descriptive articles on the supernatural fiction of Edward Frederick Benson and William Fryer Harvey. When they were written, I hoped they would be definitive; but a few errors crept into the text of one, and in the years since they were written new material has been unearthed, so for the sake of completeness two brief codicils seem in order. I am indebted to Thomas G. L. Cockcroft for discussions and for providing some of the information presented.

I

In my article on Benson, "A Few Uncomfortable Moments,"* I remarked that he had written "over fifty" short stories in the field; the actual total is exactly sixty. These are divided among his books as follows:

17 in *The Room in the Tower*	13 in *More Spook Stories*
12 in *Visible and Invisible*	4 in *The Countess of Lowndes Square*
12 in *Spook Stories*	at least 2 in magazine form, still uncollected

The first four books cited were scrutinized (and all their known editions described) for the purpose of writing the original article. I did not learn until later that the first of these had different contents in different editions. The original 1912 (Mills & Boon) printing of *The Room in the Tower* contains one title which the later 1929 (Knopf) printing omits: "The Terror by Night." This story deals with mental telepathy of a sort——how the details of her surroundings when a woman dies during an operation are tragically conveyed to her distant husband. It is not an outstanding work, either by Benson's own standards or those of supernatural fiction in general, but (to quote Mr. Cockcroft) "if it had to be told, I suppose it is told here as well as it could be."

Of the fourteen entries in *The Countess of Lowndes Square*, four are segregated under the heading of "Spook Stories": "The Case of Frank Hampden," "Mrs. Andrews's Control," "The Ape" and "Through." The first three are concerned with aspects of spiritualism and clairvoyance, topical subjects during the World War I period when they were written, and of these the first is the best of an indifferent lot. It tells how the spirit of a murderer being executed takes over the mind of a man who at the same time is under anesthesia; the description of how this evil

*_Fantasy Commentator I_, 3 (1943).

spirit is exorcised is actually very effectively managed. "The Ape" takes place in Egypt. In predictable fashion it relates how a visitor acquires almost by accident a statuette with magical powers, and how he invokes these, only to bungle his intended revenge disappointingly at the last moment.

The two uncollected stories are "The Witch-Ball" and "The Shuttered Room." It seems surprising that neither was included in *More Spook Stories* since they appeared in print some five years earlier. The first is about a murder, and how it is solved through clairvoyance. It is well written, as all Benson's fiction is, and exhibits a nice choice of detail. There is also a moving passage where the ghost of the murdered woman——or the dead woman herself——appears briefly as a decaying corpse in bright sunlight, but none of these touches are enough to make the work an outstanding example of genre. "The Shuttered Room" is a little longer, and Benson uses the extra wordage convincingly in building up a circumstantial background. The supernatural element here is intrinsically supportive of the plot rather than merely added mechanically to jolt the reader, and makes this story the best of the titles by this author I have mentioned here.

What is needed, after all this time, is a selection in one volume of the finest of E. F. Benson's excursions into the supernatural——a dozen or fifteen stories from his five books, all of which seem now out of print. Most of his stories were printed in magazines before being collected in book form, and for the benefit of those bibliographically inclined such appearances as are known, incomplete as they probably will prove, are listed below:

"The Bed by the Window"	*Weird Tales*, Nov. 1929
"The Confession of Charles Linkworth"	*The Cavalier Weekly*, Jan. 13, 1912
"Corstophine"	*Munsey's Magazine*, Jan. 1925
"The Horror-Horn"	*ibid.*, Nov. 1922
"How Fear Departed from the Long Gallery"	*New Story Magazine*, Mar. 1915 as "What Came Into the Long Gallery"
"James Lamp"	*Weird Tales*, June 1930
"The Other Bed"	*The Popular Magazine*, Apr. 1908
"The Shuttered Room"	*Weird Tales*, Dec. 1929
"The Thing in the Hall"	*The Canadian Magazine*, Feb. 1914
"'Through'"	*Century Magazine*, July 1917
"The Wishing-Well"	*Weird Tales*, July 1929
"The Witch-Ball"	*ibid.*, Oct. 1929
"The Outcast"	*Argosy-Allstory Weekly*, Oct. 7, 1922

II

Since I wrote the essay on William Fryer Harvey's supernatural fiction* a new collection of his short stories has been published posthumously. It is *The Arm of Mrs. Egan and Other Stories* (London, 1951), which contains sixteen entries, all put in book form for the first time. Of these, four mine veins of fantasy, and hence warrant discussion here.

"Account Rendered" is about a man who comes to different doctors every seventeenth of December in order to be anesthetized between 11:45 P.M. and 12:15 A.M. Each time he has a new alias and a new plausible excuse——an experiment in telepathy, research on the effect of anesthesia, and so on——and he always offers a handsome fee. During each period of anesthesia the figure of a strange old man always enters the room, sees the patient comatose, and leaves immediately. Through coincidence several of the doctors become aware of what is going on, and one of them sees a newspaper account of the man's death which explains it: many years be-

Fantasy Commentator I, 276 (1946).

fore he was accused of poisoning his employer, and the ghost of the latter (the old stranger that appeared during anesthesia) finally caught up with his murderer. This is one of the author's typically ambiguous tales, for a purely natural reason for the man's death is ingeniously implied. It is interestingly narrated in Harvey's usual straightforward fashion.

In "The Flying Out of Mrs. Barnard Hollis," as well as the book's title story, the balance between coincidence and the supernatural is tipped quite clearly towards the latter. Both relate the actions of women who are——or who seem to be——witches. That Harvey can domesticate so outmoded a concept and wed it successfully to ordinary situations in the present time says much for his ability.

The last of the four is "The Habeas Corpus Club." This is a light-hearted spoof, something unsual for the author to undertake, but which he manages to carry off charmingly. It is about a permanent home for victims of crime-writers, "men and women who have given their lives for the novel-reading public" in early chapters of popular detective novels, and has some delicious satire on both these writers and their plots. Though short, it is probably the most memorable of these four newly-printed fantasies.

None of them, however, approach the quality of Harvey's very best work, such as "The Tool," "The Clock," or "Miss Avenal," yet they do show clearly his light, deft, open style of writing, and underscore the neglect into which his work has fallen in the decade and a half since his death.

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TIPS ON TALES

by

A. Langley Searles

Robert Elson's *"Quack!"* (1925): I wonder how many readers remember Nathan Schachner's "I Am Not God," which ran serially in *Astounding Stories* back in 1935? Those who do will probably be reminded of it again by the theme of this novel. In Schachner's effort a scientist possessing a life-giving serum has to decide which individuals shall be revived after the planet's entire population has been put into suspended animation by the gases of a passing comet; the work is memorable for the vastness of its theme rather than for the quality of its prose. Elson works on a much smaller scale, and he more than makes up for it by the charm of his writing. *"Quack!"* is the life-story of Harding Fuller——or, more precisely, of those parts of his life intimately connected with the discovery of Fullamin-plus. Fullamin-plus acts somewhat like our present-day antibiotics, and has a rejuvenating effect besides. Because his preliminary similar discovery has been prematurely publicized by sensationalists, Fullar resolves not to reveal Fullamin-plus until he himself has tested it for a ten-year period. During this time he acts not only as a clinician but as a judge of humanity, deliberately witholding curative treatment from those patients whose past lives he feels mark them as unworthy of remaining in society. This decade of experiment proves his serum a striking success and his attempts to play God an equally striking failure. Most of the book gives details of individual cases and the formulation of Fullar's decisions, thus furnishing a satisfyingly logical background for the climax. Robert Elson's prose-style, especially his handling of conversation, is adept and modern in cast, and is a pleasure to peruse. These characteristics add up to make *"Quack!"* one of those minor, quiet little classics that discerning followers of science-fiction ought to find and read.

Alan Griffiths' *Strange News from Heaven* (1935): In the middle of his Sunday service the Reverend Hubert Snelling suffers a stroke and collapses, apparently dead, in his pulpit. That is not the end of the novel, but the beginning, for in 300 pages of prose frequently reminiscent of Thorne Smith and John Collier we are given detailed descriptions of life in the hereafter. Heaven, learns the very British Reverend Snelling, is a place where everybody enjoys eternal life, though not necessarily eternal youth——for alas! one retains there the same physical age and form possessed on Earth on the day of death. "The things you do on Earth have long ceased to trouble Me," we find Jehovah announcing to the hordes about him. "What are your man-made laws and ceremonies to Me? Go your ways into the fields of Paradise, and leave Me. Your virtues are forgiven." Once the Rev. Snelling has recovered from this staggering revelation, his own sixty years lead him to toss in his lot with most of the elderly inhabitants, who are rebelling to be given eternal youth. In the midst of all this it is discovered that he did not actually die of his stroke, which merely put him into a death-like trance. ("You ought to know what those country doctors are by now," sneered Jehovah's left-hand angel, shrugging his wings.) So Hubert is unceremoniously booted back to Suffolk, where he finds himself inside his coffin during the burial service, hammering on the lid to be released. By a freak of circumstances he convinces his parishioners——and eventually most of Britain as well——of the truth of his experiences, only to perish (actually perish this time) as a result. *Strange News from Heaven* is vastly entertaining. It is slickly written, sports much ribald humor (Griffiths is a master of the double entendre) and is spiced by several really funny episodes, such as that where the Anglican reverend looks down at Earth to watch the private doings of certain acquaintances. Herbert Roese has added neat, finishing touches in the form of seven sly double-paged illustrations. You'd have to be straightlaced indeed not to get an evening's hilarity out of this book.

John Pudney's *It Breathed Down My Neck* (1946): This collection of sixteen expertly written short stories seems virtually unknown to fantasy collectors, possibly because of its limited printing in Britain and the fact that it was published here under the unpromising title of *Edna's Fruit Hat and Other Stories*. That is a pity, for it is completely delightful, and enthusiasts of the genre will probably enjoy reading even those seven entries that are outside the field, for many contain odd, Collier-like twists. The remaining ones run a long gamut from the *conte cruel* ("Spilled Ink," "If Somebody Is Brave" and "Her Pointed Teeth") through several fantasies to "Dunworthy 13," an effective if conventional account of supernatural retribution. The fantasies show the author's inventive wit at its best, and are the most appealing entries in this collection. Three of them——"George's Good Deed," "A Christmas Tale" and "Uncle Arthur"——are sprightly variations on the animal-that-can-talk theme, and deal respectively with a dachshund, a lion and a genial elephant. The very best stories in the book are "Edna's Fruit Hat," a refreshing off-trail thing whose flavor would be lost in a resumé, and a beautifully constructed little sketch of abnormal eyesight, "The Boy Who Saw Through," where the style reminds you of Ray Bradbury. Most of Pudney's work compares favorably with the best short fiction in the late and lamented *Unknown Worlds* magazine, and connoisseurs should not overlook it.

S. M. C.'s *Brother Petroc's Return* (1937) gives a dynamic theme such a delicate, low-keyed treatment that many readers will be disappointed. In the year 1549 the monk whose name gives this book its title dies. His body is sealed in its vault hastily, for the Cornwall monastery where he lived is about to be attacked, and all the brothers are on the verge of leaving. For nearly four centuries it remains uninhabited and almost sinks into ruin before it is again occupied by a group of Benedictines, who gradually restore it to its former state. Their refurbishing

opens and moves several old graves; one is that of Brother Petroc, who miraculously revives from death (or suspended animation?) into the world of A. D. 1929. The novel deals, of course, with his reactions to it, and proceeds rather slowly, if always sincerely, as Petroc's difficulties in adjusting even to the complications that have ensued in his own religion are recounted. Readers willing to abandon themselves to a leisurely and introspective development will probably find S. M. C.'s book interesting and absorbing, for it is certainly an unusual, off-the-beaten-track fantasy——but buyers are warned not to expect any of the fast action or dynamic surprises that this type of plot usually brings.

J. F. W. Hannay's *Rebels' Triumph* (1933) is a forerunner of such more modern tales as "The Roads Must Roll" by Robert Heinlein. Hannay visualizes 15,000 key technicians as the indispensible social group in the United States, and shows what happens when they simultaneously strike and effectively sabotage all the power, fuel, communication and transportation industries. This demonstration is supposed to frighten the government into sponsoring socialistic legislation to bring about better living conditions, but the plan backfires because of sheer human stubbornness, and *Rebels' Triumph* becomes a picture of catastrophe instead of national reformation. It is pragmatic and sharply detailed, with a large Texas city typifying what is happening to the country as a whole. Perhaps the best compliment I can pay the author is to say that despite having read dozens of similar stories before seeing this one, his still seemed one of the most vivid. In a preface to the novel Hannay says he is concerned with demonstrating "the precariousness of modern civilization," but in the light of today's nuclear weapons I think everybody is already conscious of this, and will approach *Rebels' Triumph* as an exciting, well written science-fiction novel well worth an evening's armchaired attention.

——oOo——

Slan!

by
A. M. Perry*

Oh, who is that young fellow lying silent on the ground
With metal chains upon his arms and milling crowd around?
And what has he been doing that the people stop and stare?
It's just because they found out he has tendrils in his hair.

He'd hidden them so carefully through all his boyhood years,
But now deception's over, and he lies in helpless tears,
For someone pulled his hat off, and his head is shining bare,
So all know him a pariah by the tendrils in his hair.

He's a blot on our humanity, and not so long ago
Even lads as young as he is might be lynched or burned slow;
But now we all know better and act civilized and fair,
And no one's executed for the tendrils in his hair.

For we have tools of science that can work to mend and heal,
And it's justice that we use them to show mercy that we feel;
Our surgeons know just how to cut with patient, painless care,
And no slan ever misses those lost tendrils in his hair.

*suggested by lyric xviii in A. E. Housman's *Additional Poems* (1937)

THE IMMORTAL STORM

A HISTORY OF SCIENCE-FICTION FANDOM

by
Sam Moskowitz

(part 19)

It was the diplomacy of chairman John V. Baltadonis that prevented a clash. He dissuaded Sykora from any further action, convinced Moskowitz and Taurasi that Sykora was safe enough for them to resume their seats, and quieted the members of his own Philadelphia group who were itching for a fracas.

Wollheim then arose and asked that Sykora, Taurasi and Moskowitz be made to apologize for their actions and leave the hall. Moskowitz arose, and with great assumption of indignation, asked that the Futurians be forced to apologize for their heckling or leave the hall. (Each seemed to imply that they themselves would walk out if their demands were not met.) With commendable diplomacy chairman Baltadonis persuaded both factions to waive their motions and stay.

Moskowitz then phrased a motion to the effect that the Philadelphia Conference go on record as approving New Fandom's constitution. The motion was seconded and a vote called for, but the Futurians seized on its wording and delayed the vote for forty-five minutes until Taurasi rephrased the motion more concisely. The motion passed by a vote of twenty-one to twelve, and the New Fandom group had scored one of the most amazing come-backs in fan annals.

But though it had earned the right to live, New Fandom still had to renew the confidence of fans if it expected to get the new memberships necessary to insure its continuance; and this could not be done unless it cleared itself of unjustly excluding the six Futurians from the Nycon, or at least minimized that accusation.

Baltadonis had promised Moskowitz that his article of explanation and rebuttal, "There *Are* Two Sides," would appear in *The Science Fiction Collector* in time to be distributed at the Conference. This promise he kept, but in his haste to do so, the hektographing in this July-August, 1939 issue turned out light and indistinct. The article opened by reprinting in its entirety the LASFL statement condemining the "exclusion act" (see chapter XLII). Moskowitz then rebutted each of its statements in turn.

First he called the LASFL members liars because they claimed to have heard all sides of the story, and yet had never written any member of the New Fandom group to get opposing views. Secondly, he questioned whether Ackerman's and Morojo's testimony was "unprejudiced", as they claimed, by quoting published remarks in which they expressed sympathy with the Michelist movement sponsored by the Futurians. He accused fandom of permitting the Michelists, who represented an admittedly Communist-front movement, to insist that their opponents hew to their own notion of "democracy", while barring no holds in their own tactics. "And because they have raised a din of 'undemocratic'," said Moskowitz, "you, who are so afraid for democracy, follow their falsely accusing voices, and like a puppet on a string accomplish what they are not strong enough to do themselves."

He further demanded to know why no fan had uttered a word of disapproval when the Michelist group had barred himself and Alex Osheroff from membership in theGreater New York SFL without any grounds whatsoever. And where was the chorus of protest, he asked, when Olon Wiggins had barred him from the pages of *The Science Fiction Fan*? He termed LASFL members "hypocrites" for their failure to act on these points. In conclusion, Moskowitz maintained that the Futurians actually had planned to be barred from the convention, and that they had deliberately frus-

trated every attempt at conciliation made by him that would have allowed them to enter. He claimed that they hoped by this means to regain the previous position of power they had lost, and that in his view fans had fallen for this ruse. To strengthen his hypothesis, he recounted exactly what had happened on that fateful Sunday afternoon in July, when the first World Science Fiction Convention had been almost shattered by the Futurians' actions.

The wording of his article was so fiery and acridly bitter that few denied its honesty and sincerity.

Near the close of the Philadelphia Conference Moskowitz circulated among the out-of-town fans, asking if they had read his article in the *Collector*, and if so had their opinions of the "exclusion act" been altered by it. Appearing as it did at a time when the Futurian group had shown examples of their reprehensible heckling and delaying tactics that were still fresh in the attendees' minds, virtually all who were queried stated that their opinions had been altered towards New Fandom's side of the story.

An account of New Fandom's overnight change of fortune appeared in the Nov. 5, 1939 issue of *Fantasy News*. It was written by Moskowitz, who gave a one-sided viewpoint with no punches pulled. To accentuate matters editor Taurasi, wherever he felt that Moskowitz might have been impartial or insufficiently vehement, edited into the article such expletives, exaggerations and affronts as would, in his opinion, improve its forcefulness. This literally added insult to injury.

The Los Angeles group was thunderstruck when they read it. They found it particularly hard to believe Moskowitz's statement regarding the "exclusion act" that "all fans contacted completely absolved New Fandom of any blame in the matter." LASFL members dispatched prompt letters to attendees they knew, asking if this was true. Bob Tucker, Erle Korshak and Mark Reinsberg replied that they had not been contacted and had made no statements to Moskowitz. Immediately the LASFL disseminated this information throughout fandom.

When Moskowitz saw this it was his turn to be thunderstruck, because he clearly remembered his talks with the individuals in question. He quickly wrote them. Tucker grudgingly admitted that Moskowitz *had* contacted him after all, and that he had not yet read Moskowitz's article, so was unable to give an opinion. He maintained that while wrong in fact he was right in principle, since Moskowitz had alleged that "all" fans contacted had absolved New Fandom of blame. From Reinsberg and Korshak, however, Moskowitz obtained signed statements saying that they had forgotten the incident but they had indeed been contacted, and Moskowitz could have construed their statements as an absolution of New Fandom. Moskowitz's letter containing this information was printed in the Jan.-Feb., 1940 issue of *Fantascience Digest*.

XLV
The Illini Fantasy Fictioneers

In the fever of excitement resulting from the attempt of New Fandom to obtain approval for its new constitution and the dramatic interlude between Wollheim and Sykora, the Chicago delegation's bid for the next world convention had come perilously close to never reaching the conference floor. Important as it was in the long view, it received neither at the conference nor afterwards the attention to which it was rightly entitled as a move establishing the continuity and annual character of world science-fiction conventions.

The delegation had persevered through much to give the appearance of unity and competence. At the First World Convention in 1939 it was already common knowledge that the Chicago ranks were split. There were two factions. One was headed by Mark Reinsberg, a very serious-minded young man of sixteen. He was intelligent and his activities were marked by great intensity and single-mindedness. Prepar-

ing a convention was of world-shaking importance to him; he seemed incapable of tolerating anything that detracted from his master-plan, even a humorous aside. While always willing to talk compromise, he never in actual practice deviated more than minutely from his own preconceived ideas. His two best friends and invaluable aides were Erle Korshak and Richard I. Meyer. Meyer was a pleasant youth who aided the convention on the scene and acted as associate editor of the fan magazine *Ad Astra*, but was rarely heard from otherwise. Korshak, however, eventually became a well-known figure in fandom. Though only fifteen at the time, he had already accumulated certain personality traits that are recognizable to this day. In word and action he always played the role of the super-salesman, and to do his methods justice the word "super" should be underlined. From his earliest days of fan activity he carried on a little side-business of buying and selling science-fiction magazines and books. For a long period he maintained this business under the name of Melvin Korshak, who he said was his brother, but eventually the truth surfaced: Melvin was Erle's own middle name. In business activities his salesmanship appeared driving, ingenious and mercenary, and some of his methods are legendary. But he had a weakness. It was possible to turn the tables on him by utilizing the appropriate sob story. The salesman's veneer would swiftly melt and Erle Korshak would stand revealed in the generosity and kindness of his basic nature.

William Lawrence Hamling, himself little more than eighteen, was the leader of the opposition to Reinsberg's group. He had the reputation of being temperamental, and giving way to wild, unreasonable actions when aroused, and was accused by his detractors of entertaining a superiority complex. But his achievements show he was an individual of well above-average capability. He had served as editor-in-chief of *The Lane Tech Prep*, whose 10,000-copy circulation was the highest of any prep school publication, and later edited *Stardust*, a fine semi-professional fantasy magazine. In many respects he was extremely cooperative—— more so, in fact, than his opposition.

Before the idea of bidding for Chicago as a science-fiction convention site had been conceived, Reinsberg and Hamling had been on excellent terms, even collaborating in writing the story "War With Jupiter," which appeared in the May, 1939 issue of *Amazing Stories*. If Reinsberg had been able to get an endorsement at the First World Science Fiction Convention it would have given him the upper hand in the situation, but having failed in this he found himself in double trouble. Hamling had hastily reformed the Chicago chapter of the SLF, with himself elected as director, Jack Darrow (next to Forrest Ackerman the most famous letter-writer to the science-fiction magazines) as assistant director, and Neil de Jack as secretary. In addition, such well known Chicagoans as Henry Bott, Howard Funk, and Chester S. Geir were also members. Not only did Hamling lead the only fan organization in the city, but he had more names on his side than did Reinsberg. This being the case, Hamling made the point that perhaps he was better qualified to put on a Chicago convention than was Reinsberg. To lend credence to this claim he sent out printed postcards on October 2, 1939 announcing publication of a printed semi-professional fan magazine titled *Stardust*. This was to be letter-sized, on slick paper, and carry both line and half-tone illustrations. Announcing a printed fan magazine in those times was comparable to *Collier's* announcing today that it would thenceforth continue as an all science-fiction magazine. Hamling's added prestige as the editor of such a journal could not help but be considerable.

Up until then, Reinsberg's group had not been particularly worried about Hamling's activities, for they had just pulled off a coup of their own. On August 30 and 31, 1939 Reinsberg and Korshak attended a FAPA meeting in the Bloomington, Illinois home of Bob Tucker. Present also were fans Sully Roberds, Fleming and Lakewicz. According to the September 16, 1939 issue of *Le Zombie*, which described the meeting, Hamling had also been invited, but had been unable to come.

There is some question in this historian's mind as to how cordially Hamling was urged to come, for the meeting would never have proceeded as smoothly and definitively had he been present. An organization called the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers was formed to sponsor a Chicago convention. It was decided to publish a club organ to be titled *The Fantasy Fictioneer*. Officers of the organization were to be Richard Meyer as treasurer and corresponding secretary, Sully Roberds as publicity director, Erle Korshak as executive advisor and Mark Reinsberg as convention committee chairman; but the crowning scoop was electing Bob Tucker as director of the organization. At that time Tucker was one of the best known and best liked fans in the country. He was more mature that most Chicago fans, and was more likely to win the confidence of editors, authors and fans in the field. He would be an excellent "front" and advisor for the youngsters, and was publishing the popular biweekly magazine of news and chit-chat, *Le Zombie*.

However, since Hamling had now got Jack Darrow on his team, organized a club which comprised a majority of the Chicago fans, and was planning an elaborately printed semi-professional publication, he posed a considerable barrier to the Illini Fantast Fictioneers' plans. They had excluded him from their governing committee, although giving a post on it to Meyer, who had not even attended the organizational meeting. If Hamling protested loudly enough, the Fictioneers might never get a vote of confidence at the Philadelphia Conference.

Indeed, Hamling wasted little time expressing his violent disapproval of the Bloomington meeting. In a letter to Tucker dated September 6, 1939 (which was published in part in the much later November, 1943 issue of *Le Zombie*) he said: "Just a line to let you know that I found out about the election in Bloomington last week from Meyer. I don't mind telling you that any election for Secretary-Treasurer, or for Chairman of the Convention Committee is null and void as far as I am concerned. . . ." He followed this with an angry slur on the ethnic background of his opponents. The was no question that he was very upset.

Something had to be done to placate Hamling and give the fan world the impression that all was harmonious in Chicago. To that end, Reinsberg showed up at the October 8, 1939 meeting of the Chicago SLF chapter. He assured members of the honest intentions of himself and the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers. As a compromise he promised to appoint a City Committee of the convention, giving posts to other important Chicago fans, including members of the SFL chapter; and that the latter would be eligible to work on an equal, cooperative basis with the Fictioneers in presenting the Chicago convention.

In exchange for these concessions, the chapter agreed to support the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers' convention plans, and approved the officers already appointed in that organization. Some details of this meeting remained cloaked in secrecy, but a dispatch giving these points was published in the October 15, 1939 issue of *Fantasy News* under the headline "CHICAGO FEUD ENDS!" This was timed to appear before the Philadelphia Conference, and pave the way for an uncontested approval of a convention bid by the Chicago group.

In order to reach the conference the Chicago group began a great trek. Reinsberg, Korshak and Meyer hitch-hiked to Bloomington, where they joined Tucker and his wife, who had agreed to drive them to Philadelphia on a share-the-expense basis. At Dayton, Ohio they were joined by the young fan Walter E. Marconette, meticulous publisher of the fan magazine *Scienti-Snaps*. (Their journey was considered a newsworthy trip in that period.)

In order to impress the audience favorably, the group produced for the Philadelphia Conference the initial issue of *The Fantasy Fictioneer*. It carried the date November-December, 1939, and contained the club constitution and a progress report from Mark Reinsberg, which among other things announced the tentative date for the Chicago convention as the Labor Day weekend of September, 1940, and

hinted that prominent author Edward E. Smith might be guest of honor. There were messages and reports from Tucker, Korshak and Roberds, and a bit of humor from Tucker's alter ego, Hoy Ping Pong. Reinsberg and Meyer had produced a fourth issue of *Ad Astra* with outstanding material by Smith, Campbell, Haggard, Wollheim and Ackerman plus artwork by Julian Krupa, but its format and production were as carelessly sloppy as in all of its previous numbers. Tucker had a special souvenir issue of *Le Zombie*, which was now openly challenging *Fantasy News's* sovereignty in the field of newsgathering and dispensing.

As head of the Chicago delegation, Reinsberg was originally scheduled to speak after Moskowitz on the Philadelphia Conference program. He had asked, however, that Bob Tucker substitute for him, since Tucker was more familiar with the inner workings of the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers than he. David Kyle wanted the entire matter postponed until later in the program, since it was not related to the debate on fan organizations then ensuing, but after the matter was put to a vote, the assembly decided to permit Tucker to speak at that point. He had a vitally important statement to make. He said, in effect, that the Fictioneers had no intention of incorporating with any national fan organization that might be approved at either this conference or elsewhere, and they intended to present the Chicago convention under their own auspices. Further, since they desired to remain neutral in the fan battles raging at present, they had no immediate intention of aligning themselves in any fashion, cooperative or otherwise, with New Fandom or the Futurians, the two warring groups.

Reinsberg added to Tucker's talk by giving a brief breakdown of the constitutional set-up of the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers. Yet, strangely, none of the group moved that a vote be taken approving their sponsorship of the Chicago affair. They seemed almost to feel that the good will prevalent about them was a tacit indication that they had already won it. The meeting wore on, New Fandom's constitution was approved, and the Fictioneers seemed almost hypnotized by the proceedings. The conference was drawing to a close, and they still did not officially have the very thing they had come to Philadelphia to procure. Moskowitz sought out Reinsberg and spoke urgently to him on the necessity of presenting such a motion. He had his own political motive for doing this. Since the New Fandom constitution had been accepted, he could follow Reinsberg's motion with a magnanimous offer of aid which the Fictioneers might find embarrassing to refuse, and which would show that New Fandom intended to exert its utmost to help every worthwhile fan project, and was therefore deserving of its vote of confidence.

The closing gavel was virtually ready to fall when Reinsberg, with acoustical aid from Moskowitz, managed to get the attention of Baltadonis. Reinsberg then moved that the conference vote recognition to the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers as the only committee authorized to present the Second World Science Fiction Convention in Chicago. He gave as his reasons priority and accomplished work. This motion passed by a large majority. It must be emphatically pointed out here that this constituted the *only* official authorization the Fictioneers ever obtained for sponsoring the convention, no vote on the matter having taken place at the Nycon. Moskowitz then arose and said he was personally behind the affair, and that he would urge full support by New Fandom.

When the Chicago delegation left Philadelphia, they left as powers in science-fiction fandom. Significantly, however, they did not even acknowledge Moskowitz's support or seek the implied support of New Fandom. The Chicago boys felt they no longer needed the help of either to put their project across. They were perfectly capable of carrying through successfully themselves, and they understandably felt that the fewer in the act the better.

(to be concluded)

OPEN HOUSE

(letters from readers)

Hannes Bok comments briefly on the review of The Black Wheel *in the Fall, 1948 issue of this magazine:*

I warned everybody beforehand that the book would be either a great success or a colossal fiasco——evidently it's the latter. I have no argument with your verdict——one either likes a thing or one doesn't——but anyway, fans got the Merritt portion of the text for their collections, which was my chief interest. As for the illustrations, you can see that they must necessarily have been symbolic, since pictures of people simply sitting around talking would have smacked of a *Collier's* story. They were drawn expressly for photo-offset to O'Connor's order, and naturally didn't reproduce at all well in line-cut. . . .

Redd Boggs furnishes interesting background on Seabury Quinn's fiction:

I have a minor correction to Bill Evans' interesting *Thrill Book* index that appeared in the Fall, 1947 issue. Regarding Quinn's story "The Stone Image," in the May 1, 1919 *Thrill Book*, Evans writes, "This . . . is probably the very first of the de Grandin stories, the famous Jules being in the wings, waiting for his cue." Recently I contacted Mr. Quinn to ask permission to reprint this story, mentioning the rumor that it was a part of the de Grandin series. I quote part of his reply:

> "The Stone Image" was written during the closing days of World War I, after the shooting phase, but before hostilities were formally over. I'd been assigned to personnel duty at the port of embarkation at Hoboken and . . . between arrival of transports I used to put in my time reading and writing. The idea of "The Stone Image" was conceived after reading Lord Dunsany's "A Night at an Inn". . . . As to Dr. Trowbridge being a character in the story, that was purely a matter of accident. On a short trip to Elizabeth, N. J., I'd seen the name Trowbridge & Trowbridge on a real estate agent's sign, and just happened to use it. Not till 1925 did I conceive the character of Jules de Grandin, and the use of Dr. Trowbridge was purely incidental and accidental. "Friend Trowbridge" of the de Grandin stories and the Dr. Trowbridge of "The Stone Image" have nothing in common but a surname, and are unrelated.

Which should clear up that minor point. I had hoped to reprint this yarn as a booklet in a series of fantasy chapbooks I am planning on hard-to-find fantasies, but was unable to get the publisher's permission (although Quinn said he had no objection). Street & Smith said they had no intention of letting anyone reprint *anything* from *Thrill Book*, because their records were incomplete as to what rights they had purchased for its stories.

P. Schuyler Miller writes:

Forbid that I should disagree with a *Commentator* opinion of anything, let alone my own work, but it was rather strange to find Charles Peter Brady neatly needling out what was basically wrong with "Status Quondam" (except that I still don't know whether I can write fiction). It is, of course, a novel cramped into the Procrustean confines of an alleged short story. But I do dissent in one respect: there was nothing "hastily dashed-off" about a story which was rewritten fully three times, considerably amended by Raymnond Healy himself, held up the whole book, and would probably have been dropped entirely if there had been time to get a decent substitute. (No loss! says you.)

This was one entry for which Healy definitely set the theme and plot: a scientist fed up with the *status quo* decides to go back to the golden age of Periclean Athens, does so, finds it far from golden, and comes home. The immediate

difficulty was that I knew next to nothing about Periclean Athens, and that facilities for finding out any more than generalities are distinctly limited hereabouts. (As of this writing [*May 19, 1952*] a local bookstore still hasn't succeeded in getting one of the references I ordered in February, 1951.) If I had spent just a little more on books it would have lowered me into another income tax bracket, but I didn't quite make it.

To do the kind of story Healy wanted meant two things. First my hero, McIvor, had to find some way of fitting into the life in that particular period of ancient Greece, so that his rejection of Athens wouldn't be wholly superficial; and second, the forces driving him out again must be inherent in the life of the times. Discovering a little book on business in Athenian times gave the clue to the silver mines made that part of it easy, and straight history did the rest. It then appeared that McIvor, having made very elaborate preparations for his sojourn in Greece (the off-hand approach was Healy's idea in the editorial revision), would find new lodes at Laurion, and generally ingratiate himself with the leaders of Athens. As an alien, if he landed in Greece of *circa* 457 B. C., he still could hope to buy himself the favor of the Assembly and become first a *metic*, or sponsored alien, and then possibly an adopted citizen of Athens with most of the privileges of a true Athenian.

Among the prominent personages in the Periclean circle was one Anaxagoras (see L. Sprague de Camp's recent "Glory that Was," which accepts another of the various alternative dates for his heyday in Athens), whose ideas on cosmogony were sufficiently modern that he be expected to have have had contact with a modern man. These ideas got him and his associates into trouble, and he was used as a scapegoat by Perikles' adversaries, who finally succeeded in banishing him after the Athenian leader is said to have pleaded for his life. In the same series of events, in 450 A. D., an edict was passed which thereafter restricted citizenship and its concomitant privileges and rights to offspring of Athenian-born parents.

Here, then, was a ready-made reason to send McIvor home after he had seemingly reached the top of the heap in the Periclean world: he could never become a citizen. He could never hope to marry a citizen of his own social circle, for their children would have been considered foreigners. His contacts with Anaxagoras and others of that circle would leave him open to charges of heresy and a possible death sentence. So McIvor came home. . . .

I should have known at once, and Healy should have known, that this theme, treated in any way but superficially (as it finally was) demanded a novel and not 10,000 words. I'm keeping my reference books and buying more: after years of considering Greece too recent to be of much interest, my curiosity has finally been aroused; and maybe some day, if I can get back into the swing of writing fiction after six years or more of newspaper stuff, "Status Quondam" will be tried as a full-scale novel.

That shouldn't be difficult——three times the thing got all the way up to 30,000 words without even beginning to make McIvor's success as a *metic* reasonable, let alone laying the foundations for his rejection. Healy was growing desperate: we were far past the first, second and third deadlines. Each time the whole ms. was thrown away and a new one started. Finally we decided to keep a cops-and-robbers element in the recovery of the time-belt, throw in Greek homosexuality as a contributing factor, and take whatever came out. I agree with Brady in rating it at the bottom of the book. Healy then further condensed my final draft, in the process changing some of my own judgments on the charafter of Greek culture at the time. He consented to my re-revising some of these in the final galleys——and the result is what you saw.

Almost certainly one of two things should have been done earlier in the game. I should have pursuaded Healy to let me choose some less well known period

on which I was better prepared, and had reference material of my own instead of having to build a library on Greece. Or I should have persuaded him to let me take an entirely different tone or theme. In the back of my checkbook I have notes for a farcical approach: "Lester Quibbage materialized on the steps of the Parthenon at precisely 11:47 A.M. on the morning of July 13, 446 B.C., just as the Panathenian procession was coming across the open court of the Acropolis." Lester, who had put together his time-machine in a Greek restaurant from a bent fork and some Lea and Perrin sauce in a moment of boredom, was as I recall it all set to make a quick buck for himself. Instead, the Greeks took *him*. But this was by no stretch of the imagination Ray Healy's upbeat theme for the book, it meant some more historical research into a slightly later period when the Parthenon was finished (we did move the date up ten years, to 447 B.C.), and it was far too late to start over, considering how much time I had to spend.

Some day I'd like to write——or read——the kind of story "Status Quondam" should have been. As I've said in my own review of the book, this kind of time-travel story has to have the verisimilitude of Boswell's journals or of John Dickson Carr's historical-mystery-fantasies. To do in a short story what Ray wanted would mean just about a lifetime of studying that one period of Greece, so that the minutiae of daily life would appear naturally and automatically in the background, instead of being inserted from a sheaf of notes or a card file when the writer needed verisimilitude. Naturally, the forces and personages contributing to the plot would have to be seen through the eyes of modern man——but that's the way we see them ourselves, reading old records and studying relics. Meantime, will one of *Commentator's* readers please point out a time-travel story which *does* recapture a sense of the past in this way——a short story, that is?

And since I'm dissenting at such length, I think that Anthony Boucher's "The Quest for Saint Aquin" belongs right up there in the top row with "Bettyann" in *New Tales of Space and Time*. Finally, has anyone else detected a possible hooker in Heard's story——the subtly suggested implication that his helpful little manikin may actually be another bee, bred for the purpose with suitable feedings of bee-food?

We hear next from A. H. Lybeck:

I agree wholeheartedly with Thomas Carter's evaluation of Nelson Bond's *Exiles of Time* in *Fantasy Commentator* #24. Bond's suave prose makes it easily one of the year's most entertaining fantasies, and were it not for the lack of breadth and depth of the central character, Lance Vidor, *Exiles of Time* would be on nearly all lists of the ten best.

However, let us give credit where credit is due. Carter errs seriously in writing that Bond ". . .has combined mythology, folklore and science to produce a most plausible whole." His novel is based on the premise that a comet grazed our planet in prehistoric times, wreaking unimaginable damage to Earth and incidentally begetting folklore common to all peoples.

But that comet was not born in the nimble brain of Nelson Bond. In 1883 the perspicacious Ignatius Donnelly published *Ragnarok: the Age of Fire and Gravel*, in which he developed the thesis that a destructive comet approached our planet within the memory span of racial man. His conclusions were based on what was then known of geology, astronomy and etymology, and were buttressed with an impressive assortment of legends.

You will find many of Donnelly's arguments in *Exiles of Time*——particularly in the second and third chapters, where Dr. Forsythe propounds the cometary hypothesis to Lance Vidor and Jack Trumbull. I am not accusing Bond of plagiarism, of course; he has capably performed the function of the fiction-writer, skillfully weaving a tale using a known hypothesis. But I do think it is approp-

riate and necessary for any review of the work to give due credit to Donnelly.

Bond is not the only one who has recently exhumed Donnelly's cometary hypothesis, incidentally. The other is a psychiatrist, Immanuel Vilikovsky, who has stirred up much furor with his *Worlds in Collision* (1950) and the more recent *Ages in Chaos* (1952). Velikovsky has moved the comet forward in time a few thousand years, thrown in a few touches of astrological poesy, and used it to explain the opening of the Red Sea when the Israelites fled Egypt and the stopping of the sun when Joshua fit de battle ob Gibeon. After this, Vilikovsky moves his comet closer to the sun to become the planet Venus——which no doubt comes as a revelation to the boys on Mount Palomar.

A precis of the Velikovskian hypothesis appeared first in the January, 1950 issue of *Harper's* magazine, where likewise no credit is given to Donnelly. I wrote to them, and they printed part of my letter——edited so that there was no reference to Donnelly!

Ignatius Donnelly, once an *enfant terrible* of American letters, is almost forgotten today. In fact, the only people who keep the work of this erudite nineteenth century intellectual alive are science-fiction readers. He wrote two novels of fantasy interest, *Dr. Huguet* (1891) and *The Golden Bottle* (1892) as well as a gloomy Utopia, *Caesar's Column* (1890), which appeared under the pseudonym of Edmund Boisgilbert; and his *Atlantis: the Antediluvian World* (1882) was enormously popular, and has gone through countless reprintings. He even wrote several books supporting the theory that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays!

A biography of Ignatius Donnelly by Oscar M. Sullivan is scheduled to appear later this year.

——oOo——

Space Opera

by
Garth Bentley

Across the whole wide universe,
From Earth to the distant stars,
Our hero will his way traverse
Through hyperspatial bars;
Ahead of him the villain flees
With heroine gagged and tied;
The reader easily forsees
Her fate (unspecified).
With what result, I ask you, friend?
The hero socks him in the end!

The hero rides a space coupé
To limitless extent,
Complete with every kind of ray
An author can invent;
His arsenal is quite complete
With blasters, heat-guns, bombs,
So when he and the villain meet
He need not soil his palms.
But still, it seems, he can't resist
Relying on his trusty fist!

You'd think that in that future day
Our hero would get wise
And let his fancy weapons play
Upon those fiendish guys.
But no! He sees the villain's face
And instantly goes nuts
And bats him all around the place
With vicious uppercuts.
For editors think a fan demands
The hero conquer with bare hands!

——oOo——

150 copies of this issue have been printed, of which this is copy no. 119