

STACEARY



fourteen

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Cover by Bill Gray. Mucked up by me on transfer to stencil.

THIS AND THAT

As I have said on page 46, if you lot think/you're getting a zine this size in every mailing, you're not. The cover sets the theme for this particular issue and it is big because a lot of it was topical. Also there was the hell of a lot of background work done before I started on it, such/poking around and finding odd facts. Not that I'm complaining - I found a great fascination in doing the investigation - maybe I'm just a thwarted private eye.

To save those who don't want to plough through all this bulk the rest of the article on Camp Crazy comes first. This is followed by long mailing comments as I had so much already for Talking Point I had to leave matter of general interest in the comments. After that comes Bill's report on a peculiar ritual we both attended. Talking point contains some comments by me on this ritual, a letter on witchcraft from a friend in Sussex, and the story of our correspondence with the so-called mystic who sent that marvy letter to Norman Metcalf and which he published in Ul 3. It also contains a few comments on the egoboo poll and some more comments on keeping "smear" tactics out of the TAFF campaign.

I have got myself a new duplicator - still a portable, but a sturdier model than my previous one. The repro is very good on the new one - I only wish I could stop transposing and missing words out when I'm cutting stencils as I would like to put in a zine without a single error. Trouble is, although I try to keep an eye open for them some slip through. And there are no illustrations in this because, dammit, I didn't have the time.

In the last issue, I mentioned going to see Hamlet at the Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon and my comments were rather acid. I have since seen Ian Bannen in the Film version of "MacBeth" (which is well worth seeing) in which he played MacDuff
(Con'd on page 48)

NOT YOUR PHILOSOPHY

HORATIO! - PT 2

6

I ended the first part of this article by saying that not long after the incidents I described I got stuck with a poltergeist, but before that happened there were some other incidents. For instance, there was the story told me by two different Waafs who had taken a trade test.

The examinations started at nine o'clock in the morning and two of the girls from the Orderly Room were taking them. Queenie, an Irish girl, was at breakfast and I noticed then that she was looking tired. She went straight to the trade test centre from breakfast and I sent a girl to Taffy's room, in case she had overslept. Queenie returned just before morning break and I asked her how she had coped. "I don't think I've passed", was the reply. "I felt so tired after that awful nightmare last night - and it's the first nightmare I've had when I've been wide awake." Naturally, I wanted to know what this nightmare was about.

"Well, it was rather warm last night," said Queenie, "so I had the door as well as the window open and in the middle of the night I had the most awful dream - I suppose I must have been asleep, but it seemed as though I was wide awake. The door of Taffy's room was open, too, and I thought I heard her gasp. I looked that way and something grey and shadowy, which looked like a man in German uniform, came out of her room and into mine. Whatever it was came towards the bed and I was so frightened I screamed and rushed along to Terry Casey's room and jumped into bed with her. But the nightmare frightened me so much that I hardly slept anymore and I know I was too tired to do that trade test properly."

Now I believed that Queenie did have a nightmare and sent her off to get some coffee. She had been gone about twenty minutes when Taffy returned from the exam. room and I asked her if she thought she had done well in the trade test. "No, I don't," replied Taffy. "I had so little sleep that I was too damned tired to concentrate on the questions. Now I've probably failed through a blasted nightmare." "Have you spoken to Queenie this morning?" I asked suspiciously. "Of course I haven't," she said crossly, "she was in the hall before I got there and left before me and you know that we musn't talk to each other during the test." "What was this nightmare?" I asked her. "Well, it seemed more like dreaming while I was wide awake. There I was in bed, peacefully minding my own business, when it seemed as though some horrid grey shape who looked like a man in German uniform

came towards my bed. I was so frightened that I couldn't even scream, but gave some sort of squeaking gasp. Then it went through the door and looked as though it was going into Queenie's room. I dived under the bedclothes and was sure I heard someone yell, but I wasn't going to investigate. Er - I suppose it was a nightmare?"

"Of course it was!" I said hastily and gave her the same advice that I had given Queenie. "If I were you I wouldn't mention it to anyone, though. You know how a lot of people feel about this camp and they may jump to the wrong conclusions." She may have taken my advice because I didn't hear any more about it from anyone.

In the late spring there was another attack on me. The only way I can describe it is as a "~~psychic~~" attack. It must have begun during the day because I remember returning from the mess with Pip and Pam Cooper, another Waaf corporal, but I didn't go into my bunk immediately. Instead I went into Pip's room to discuss getting together a cricket team for the season, which eventually developed into a cosy chat about sex. Not long afterwards, Pam poked her head round the door and said casually, "By the way, Bobbie, do you know your room is on fire?" I shot through the communicating door into my bunk and sure enough the place was full of smoke, but there was nothing burning and I rushed to the windows to open them. When I reached them they were already wide open and yet that smoke hadn't moved. Then Pip remarked, "There's something funny about this room - I don't like it," and to me, "What are you muttering?" At this moment the smoke started clearing and in a matter of seconds the room was clear. The three of us went over the room inch by inch because we did think of a practical explanation and that was that I had left a burning cigarette there earlier in the day. But I hadn't been near the place since breakfast and, in any case, Ernst, the German who tidied my bunk for me, would have cleared up any cigarette ends. And why hadn't the smoke poured through the open windows? Pip never realised that I hadn't answered her question about what I was muttering and which may have had something to do with the smoke clearing so quickly.

By this time I had been forced to the conclusion that all these strange happenings weren't figments of an overwrought imagination - if they were I would have been the only person affected, but I wasn't. Therefore, use what was known as one of the most powerful forms against evil - the 91st Psalm. To jog your memory it is the one with the words "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by, not the arrow that flieth by day; etc. (V.5).

It was that same night that a group of us were walking back

from the Salvation Army canteen and one of the airmen on early duty next day left us chatting outside the Waaf quarters and continued on to his own block. Just before he reached it we saw him fling up his hands and stagger into the roadway, right in front of car which, fortunately, stopped in time. When asked why he had run in front of the car the airman protested that he had been pushed - someone, or something, had given him a violent shove between the shoulder blades. From where we were that was exactly what it looked like, yet there was no-one near the man.

I went back to my bunk very puzzled. What the hell was wrong with the place, anyway? I must have sat in a chair for some time trying to work this out as I suddenly noticed it was nearly midnight. One cigarette before going to bed, I thought, and was about to light one when I noticed a tiny spiral of smoke near the ceiling. I hadn't had a cigarette since I had come in so I knew it wasn't smoke that I had caused. As I watched, it thickened and, despite the fact the windows were open, it did not pour out through them. Then I became aware of a terrible heat and also that it was difficult to breathe in the smoke. Not only that, but the familiar smell of sulphur and decay was filling the room. I wanted to fly from that room, but I could not. It may be easy for you to say that I should have been able to leave the place, but I was literally rooted where I was. Then came the depression - a feeling that is difficult to describe. Imagine feeling like ice inside, yet almost roasting outside. That part of it was not too bad, but again, imagine feeling perfectly all right one moment, then for no reason at all suddenly thinking how futile and senseless everything is and what use was it in keeping on this earthly plane. Deep in my mind I could feel myself revolting against the despair and the absolute negation of life, but I could not stop the thoughts - only a shock could do that. There was a feeling of tremendous pressure to do away with myself and I was quite unaware that I had opened my wardrobe and yanked the rope out of my kitbag. I almost had the damned thing round my neck when there came the shock I needed. There was a most tremendous crash and clatter and I automatically headed towards the sound to see what had caused it. All the books, which were fixed quite firmly on my locker had been swept on to the floor. All, that is, except two. I picked them up to see what they were and quite suddenly I had snapped back to normal and dropped the rope as though it were a snake. The two books which had remained on the locker and which I was now clutching were the New Testament and the Book of Common Prayer. I couldn't turn to the ninety first psalm fast enough.

Yes, I can hear one or two of the members say, but from previous mailings you have inferred that you're agnostic. But at the time these events took place I was a very staunch Anglican. Besides, that psalm was written long before Christianity and a

symbol (such as the cross) is not enough to chase away anything bad - there must be faith behind it. In effect, you are not only calling on your own faith, but the faith of all those who believe in the symbol. Call it auto-hypnotism, or what you will, but by firmly believing that such and such a thing will protect you, you are protected. Anyway, the smoke cleared and the room felt cleaner. Not that I stopped to find out if it would remain that way - I grabbed my bedding and moved to the spare bed in Pip's room.

To digress for a moment - in the last paragraph but one, I said that only a shock could have snapped me out of that dreadful depression. A shock did, although I can't explain how all the books were swept on to the floor except two, beyond the fact that somebody, or something, was looking after me. Several times during my life, which has been filled with a goodly number of accidents, operations and spells in hospitals, friends have told me that I keep my guardian angel working overtime. I hadn't thought much about it myself, putting my escapes down to some incredible sort of luck. Last year I was in Glastonbury for the weekend and Bill and I were sitting in the office of the Chalice Well trust. Now Glastonbury is a place that attracts a great number of mystics, some genuine, some not. In that office was sitting a dear old soul who was not one of the woolly minded type, but an extremely shrewd observer. She had the light-blue, far seeing eyes of the genuine mystic (which doesn't follow that people whose eyes are another colour cannot be mystic.) Perhaps psychic is a better word than mystic. Anyway, I noticed the old dear kept on looking at me and seemed to be on the verge of asking a question. She was not looking directly at me, but at a point just above and behind me. Once or twice I caught myself turning round to see what was attracting her attention. I did know that she had the "sight" as the Celts say. Anyway, the three visitors from Wells bade us goodbye and hardly had they gone when the kindly old soul said to me, "I hope you don't mind my asking, but who is the spiritual friend staying so close to you?" Since I was completely unaware that there was a "spiritual friend" hanging about me, I couldn't answer the question. The old soul ~~said~~ that there was an aura of silver about me which, according to the mystics, is a very good psychical protection against evil. But the thought did cross my mind when the kindly old soul told me of this, was this the "friend" who had jarred me out of the depression at Camp Crazy. End of digression.

A few days after the incident of the books I went to Hamburg on a moral leadership course. Did I hear screeches of laughter? Ah, but remember how staunch an Anglican I was at the time. Anyway, the padre who ran the course and to whom I told a little about the camp didn't tell me I was off my rocker. He admitted that there were powers of evil as well as good and that as long

I believed the cross would protect me.

When I returned to the camp things didn't seem too bad and for once it was fairly easy to get to sleep. This phase lasted for a week or two and then things got back to abnormal. Another Waaf and myself were going to the Waaf cricket trials at Bad Eilsen and this meant that we had to be up very early the next morning as the train left at the disgustingly uncivilised hour of five o'clock. For most of the evening I slept as I suspected that the only way I would catch that train would be to stay up all night and then sleep during the journey. About eleven o'clock I settled myself in a chair, put my feet up and started to read D.H. Lawrence's "Aaron's Rod" - and I am sorry to say to DHL's addicts that I thought it very dull. I do remember that the story was about a flautist who became bored with his bourgeoisie life, but his wanderings seemed just as boring. However, it was about an hour after I started the book that for some reason I looked up. There it was again! That same spiral of smoke, which thickened as I looked at it.

I grabbed the arms of the chair and very firmly told "it" that I was not going to do myself in, so there! So there I sat, bracing myself for another attack, which came from a quarter I was not expecting - inside the wardrobe. Quite suddenly there was the most awful racket from inside it, as though something was charging around and upsetting everything. "Mice" I told myself firmly. "Very strong mice," I answered me, "they're rocking the wardrobe. It was rocking, too. I watched, too paralysed with fright to move for a moment, but as it rocked more and more it occurred to me that I was in the line of fire. It also occurred to me that from fright I had gone into a boiling temper - I had had just about enough. I moved out of the danger zone and stood glaring at the wardrobe as though it had done me an injury, and then I reached the pitch where one either goes completely to pieces or rushes headlong to the attack rather than do nothing. I rushed headlong to the attack, helped by the fact that I suddenly remembered there was a full bottle of Scotch in the wardrobe which I intended to take on leave with me. I charged the wardrobe as though I were going into a hockey tackle and snatched open the door. The moment I touched it all the noises stopped, but when I opened the door something small leapt out and I knew a mouse when I saw one. "So it was a very strong mouse!" I thought, feeling thoroughly ludicrous - until I remembered how much the wardrobe ^{rocked} and then noticed my riding boots were jammed very neatly on the top shelf. Even in my most absent minded moments I would not have plonked riding boots up on a shelf - besides, I remembered cleaning them that afternoon and putting them away while two other girls were in my bunk. That did it! The Scotch (intact) was not taken on leave with me.

I poured myself out a glass of it, but as I did not like drinking by myself I poured out another and took into Pip's room.

Pip, of course, was sound asleep, but had no objection to having a glass of Scotch. After another drink each each I sat thinking about what had actually been in my wardrobe and came to when I noticed that Pip was half dressed. "What are you getting dressed for?" I asked. "To go to breakfast." What, at this time of night? "My God! I thought it was a bit dark for this time of the year," she said, and then realised that it was not long after one in the morning. The things she said were shocking. Maybe the two drinks I had made me brave, but I went back to my own bunk and actually managed to sleep until Cynthia came and nagged me to wake up and catch the train. But the night's events proved too much for me. At the cricket trials in the afternoon I raced across the field to catch a ball and went smack into a tree on the boundary, which put me out of commission for the rest of trials.

The next incident occurred at about five o'clock in the morning. I should explain here that I always made my bed hospital fashion and Ethel could tell you that it isn't easy to kick the clothes off a bed made that way. Anyway, I was asleep in bed and awoke as all the bedclothes seemed to vanish. Only half awake, I walked to the other side of the room to collect them and dump them back on the bed. Only then did it occur to me that I could not possibly have kicked them into a far corner of the bunk. I dived under those clothes and clutched them firmly about my ears.

This happened several times and always in the early hours of the morning, and the clothes were always deposited in the corner farthest from the bed, so I just couldn't have flung them that far. Once I did wake up before it happened, so the suspicion that had been nagging at me that I was possibly doing it in an almost asleep state was put at rest. But familiarity breeds contempt and after it had happened about six times I stamped over to pick up the bedclothes and snarled "For God's sake go and haunt someone else!" I don't know whether it took umbrage, or went to haunt someone else, but it never bothered me again.

However, before I realised that it would not come back I spoke of it to Mary, the P.T.I. It was a sports afternoon and as there was no cricket match I should have been out doing a spot of physical training, as should have been the other Waafs, but they seemed to have all mysteriously disappeared. So Mary took the sensible attitude that she should disappear, too, (after all, we ~~we~~ could all have been on a cross country race) and she popped in to have a chat with me. At least we could talk of literature and allied subjects and hope to God that Molly wouldn't track us down with her usually scandalous chitchat. ("Enter Rumour, painted full of tongues"). There is nothing more annoying than to be cosily settled talking about a subject in which both are interested and

and then be interrupted by a clot who wants to tell us that some wench we barely know at a camp we have never been to has got herself pregnant.

However, I am rambling. Somehow or other the talk got round to the odd goings on of the camp and Mary idly mentioned that she had been told that the Waaf block we were sitting in had only been badly affected since the end of the previous August. This was about the time I had arrived, but I did not think of it like that. However, Mary's next comment did set me back a bit. She had already startled me by saying that the place was getting her down, as she seemed to me to be a steady type whom nothing could shake. But the remark she made was that among the girls was someone who was probably unaware of the fact that she was a medium, and did not realise that she was being used as a "gateway" for these "things" to try and break through. I am afraid that I didn't hear her next few remarks as my mind had gone back four or five years to the time when I was stationed in Oban, a sea-side town in Argyllshire. I came into the billet one Saturday to find Rita full of rage and hate because Kay and Connie had gone to have their fortunes told by some old speir wifie in George Street and hadn't asked her along.

To shut her up I said I'd go with her, but I didn't want my fortune told. Kay and Connie were still there when we arrived but before I could say I was only an onlooker the speir wifie had thrust a small crystal ball in my hand. I promptly decided to let my mind become completely blank (and no cracks about it probably didn't take much effort). Eventually the old wifie took it away from me, looked into it and turned round and told me that I had deliberately closed my mind as she couldn't see a thing. This took me by surprise and I began to wonder if she genuinely had the "sight". What fascinated me the most, though, was the way she collected a pack of cards and put them on the table horse-shoe fashion with one casual flick of her hands. Halfway through some very mild stuff, she picked up the cards and said "It's no good my telling you your fortune - you would be able to tell me mine a lot better if you had the training." This startled the girls as I had made some accurate predictions, including D.day. Then the speir wifie added, "Why didn't you tell me you were a medium?" Since I didn't know, I couldn't have told her, but she did give me one piece of good advice. And that was not to practise as a medium, as I hadn't the stamina and was too highly strung - if I did practise I would be a nervous wreck within six months. I had no intention of practising as I had already decided that that sort of thing was best left alone and, besides, I did not believe her remark that I was a medium. But, of course, curiosity got the better of us and we decided we would hold a seance, Connie pointing out that it should be fairly easy for me to go into a trance as I usually walked about in a coma, anyway.

At my second attempt at trance I succeeded and the old speir wifie was right. It worked - and that was my first and last attempt at trying any such thing. Rita had hysterics and I frightened myself damned near out of my wits. Never again!

I came back to earth to hear Mary saying that the rumour that the camp was moving bodily to another R.A.F. station was now fact, which I could have told her as I worked in SHQ. In fact, it was the one thing that kept me going - the thought that in a few months I could get away without having to ask for a posting. I absently minded said out loud that I hoped the poltergeist wouldn't follow me. Mary wanted to know about this and when I told her remarked that this was unusual, as poltergeists usually hung around children and young girls, to which I rather acidly pointed out that I was still well on the right side of thirty. Mary thought a little more, then said in a surprised tone, "Good heavens! You must be a virgin!" "As a matter of fact, I am," I replied, wondering if I were bragging or complaining. "That's all right, you're not alone," said Mary kindly. "In fact, quite a few of us on the camp are, too. Anyway, you know what to do if you want to get rid of the poltergeist."

At that moment, I happened to glance out of the window, just as the most repulsive looking airman on the camp walked by, and I said, "Well, Mary, to quote the words of a medieval bishop whose physicians told him that the cure for his illness was to sleep with a woman 'The cure is worse than the disease!' Besides, I did the monthly percentages in a certain medical file, and the information contained in it would have put even the most rabid nymphomaniac off sex. But as I have already said, the poltergeist had already taken umbrage, or something, and had gone away."

Even Nature seemed to be against the camp at times. Not long afterwards, there was a terrific thunderstorm in which the sky seemed as though it were being ripped apart. Audrey W. came in to the Orderly Room all prepared to indulge in high drama, but I had already tipped the staff off to take no notice of her, as hysterics wouldn't start screeching their heads off unless they had an interested audience. Perhaps it was a bit mean of me, as I rather liked thunderstorms - maybe being born in the middle of the worst storm for fifty years had something to do with it - and did not have a lot of patience with people who got worked up about them. In the middle of all the din some clot rang me up and just after I picked up the telephone there was a blinding flash, an earsplitting crack, and an almighty thud, followed by lots of blue flashes, and to my surprise I found myself knocked right out of my chair and into a corner of the room, still clutching the telephone. Audrey W.

dashed in again with a piercing screech, but I managed to get the next yell in. "Shut up" I bawled, "I can't hear what is being said - the place has only been struck by lightning, anyway." Coming from someone who had been knocked across a room by it took the wind completely out of her sails. She was too surprised to give another screech.

It was not long after this that the powers that be caught up with me at last and I found myself sent on a Junior N.C.O.'s course. Once off the camp, of course, I could concentrate, and managed to come fifth on the course with 82% - which I think might have been more if I had stayed in and studied, but I did not stay in one night for the whole of the course. By the time I returned to Camp Crazy there was only just over a month to go before the whole unit moved and it was surprising how much most of the personnel perked up.

There were still the regular courts martial, courts of inquiry, investigation, absenteeism, and the attempted suicides, but we were more or less used to that. And then Dougie, one of the R.A.F. corporals, up and murdered his German girl. The whole tragedy of that was that Dougie returned to his billet and told his roommates that he had strung his girl up because he had found out she was two-timing him and they didn't believe him. It was the Catering Warrant Officer who realised that he meant what he said and rushed him down to the guardroom. The police piled into a Volkswagen and rushed to the spot and they were just too late. The girl had died a few minutes previously - if Dougie's friends had not thought he was pulling their legs she could have been saved.

Dougie, of course, was hauled before a Field General Court Martial and sentenced to death, but this was later commuted to life imprisonment. But the people who knew him were all agreed that Camp Crazy had altered him considerably from the friend they once knew.

Not long before the murder the Station Warrant Officer had been posted back to England for his discharge from the R.A.F., in which he had spent practically all his adult life. Before he left he mentioned that although the camp had got him down, it hadn't "got" him, to which a friend remarked that he should not tempt the fates like that. Two hours after he reached Hednesford, poor old Tubby dropped dead.

Then frabjous day! The whole unit entrained and we were off - the camp had been handed over to the C.C.G and they were welcome to it. (C.C.G.? Civil Commission Group - usually referred to as Charlie Chaplin's Grenadiers). Camp Crazy was a goodly number of miles behind us when Mary said casually,

"By the way, do you remember the theory you advanced about the reason for the strange atmosphere on the camp? Well, I hunted about a bit and did some reasearch and you were right." To which my reply was, "In that case, thank God we've got away."

For thirteen months I had been stationed at that camp, during which time there had been three suicides, attempted suicides that averaged out at every three weeks, outbreaks of fires for no reason that could be discovered, the death of a child, (I won't count Tubby as he didn't die on the camp), the death of a sergeant that could not be proved to be accident or something else, courts martial and courts of inquiry with monotonous regularity, and a murder. All that, of course, was besides the poltergeist and the hauntings and other things.

Oh, yes, the theory that Mary's reasearch had proved to be an incredible and very nasty fact. Long before there was a military camp there, the place was a hotbed of devil worship, black masses and horrid people who had a habit of calling up fire elementals. Eventually something was called up that was beyond their control to shove back where it came from and has probably been lurking round the camp ever since.

You know, I was glad to get away from that place.

E N D

And the foregoing article only goes to prove that a retentive memory is not always a blessing. When I first started this article I found myself doing practically a total recall of that thirteen months and, in fact, I have not mentioned everything as the article would have run into far more pages than I would have had time to stencil and duplicate. I will add, however, that even the dogs and horses on the camp could not be made to go near certain places on the camp.

Incidentally, when the C.C.G. took over the camp, I forecast that they would last about two years before they left the place. They had it for two weeks under the two years and then handed it back to the R.A.F. with almost indecent haste. As far as I know, the R.A.F. is still running it, and from one small piece of information that I managed to gather there is still a very "Strange" atmosphere about the camp.

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COUNTDOWN

(Being mailing comments, sort of, on the 28th Mailing)

OFFTRAILS. First of all, I think a vote of thanks should go to the members who relinquish office with this mailing, and I think Eric would agree with me if I suggested that Daphne deserved an extra hand, as it were, as she had a very difficult year with proposals, amendments, bye laws, etc. - in other words a lot of official work for small returns. Well, except for the present mailing, Ompa has been a bit attenuated lately, hasn't it?

The new constitution looks good, except that I think the proposal to destroy magazines which contain doubtful words a little too drastic. I seem to remember that the year Joy and Pam were editor and president respectively they censored the words and then put the magazines in the mailing. This is a bind of^a job and the best way to get round it is for members to refrain from publishing words of doubtful taste. But to destroy a magazine on which a member has spent a lot of time and money is going a bit too far, I think. Send it back for deletion of the words or censor it by all means, but destroy it, no!

You know, this stark realism that seems to be the vogue these days is getting me down. After all, we do have the newspapers to depress us, without this kitchen-sink, farmyard morals, illiterate obscenity. Because it is illiterate and shows a poverty of vocabulary and imagination. There is an art in everything, even cussing, and I suggest that the would-be shockers look up Kent's speech to Oswald in "King Lear" - yet every word, taken separately, can be found in an ordinary dictionary. It is not as though the words that the trouble is over are either picturesque or beautiful. They are usually one-syllable words that sound ugly and inimaginative, and why keep on fetching the bodily functions (functions, not emotions and that word when used so often is function, not an emotion) which we all know about. I would rather be told some little bit of knowledge, any interesting personal experience, or read discussions on a wide variety of subjects. I have no objection to bluntness, but I don't really care for coarseness.

One could regard the members of OMPA as a sort of loosely knit family, sometimes barking at each other the way a family does, but would any of you, depending on sex, really use these obscenities in front of your sisters or brothers, or mothers or fathers? I don't believe I come from a stuffy family, yet not once have I heard any of my three brothers use obscenities in my presence. I am not saying that none of us swear - we do, but we have more or less set a limit on the cusswords we do use in front of each other. Don't think I am preaching - I'd hate to see OMPA taking on the

appearance of a set of Sunday School tracts, but I do think we could set a limit on what we say, thereby saving the Ompofficials a bad headache.

While still on the review of OFFTRAILS (and come to think of it, it is the first time I have commented on it) I would like to say I don't agree with all the proposals contained therein. How did that Civil Service jargon sneak in? Upping the membership to fifty five, of which forty five should be British, would not, in my opinion, improve the quality or the quantity of the mailings. I am all for keeping it a British apa, but consider the turnover that we have among the British members of the Association. And those who do stay in often push their quota in the last mailing due to them or out they go. I was guilty of this last year, but my reasons were partly medical, partly marriage. Now Bill and I have got to the stage where I savagely attack him if he snores and he almost shoves me out of bed if I plonk my cold feet on him, and we wince instead of drool when we wake up and see each other's faces in the morning I have almost got back to abnormal. Besides, in the evening we often flee to our separate studies, so that the cat nearly gets schizophrenia because she can't make up her mind which of us to pick on. I've taught her to spell and Bill is hoping to teach her to turn the duper handle, but Heaven help us when she learns to write - I can just imagine the shopping list I shall be presented with by Her Highness the Cat. I have digressed right away from the :subject. As I was saying before I ambled off down a side turning, having forty five British members and only ten Americans would not help OMPA. Think of the number of British fans who have been in OMPA, some of whom are still well-known names, and who have fallen by the wayside. Some have resigned, but asked to be put on the waiting list, only to fall by the wayside again when they became members. And this time round it looks as though we might lose Joy and Sandy Sanderson, Atom and John Roles. Now all these people have had a difficult year through business and settling down in a new country and I think they are all cases where the editor can exercise his discretion because, whatever differences we may have put aside, all of them can write well and interestingly. And they have been in OMPA a very long time, not popping in out as though it were a revolving doorway. I am all for OMPA retaining its British flavour, but to restrict the Americans to ten and up the British membership to forty five would not, I think, help the Association in any way. The thing to do is to make as lively an apa as possible in the hope that it will stir the British fans into participating more and rousing their interest to the point where they want to stay in it.

I did not vote for or against an egoboo poll, because I seem to remember that the last time one was held facetious

answers made nonsense of the whole thing. For instance, Norman G. Wansborough tied for the first place with me as best poet. I don't claim to be a poet, but a versifier and I think I do have a slight edge on Norman. Again I believe I was voted as one of the best artists, and anyone who has studied the covers I have drawn myself must know that as an artist I am nowhere in the running. If the members are going to take the poll seriously let us have one, but if the answers are going to make nonsense of the whole thing let's forget it.

THROUGH THE GORDIAN KNOT. (Donaho) When I opened this and saw more proposals my first reaction was "Oh, good God! Not more suggestions for blasted rules and regulations - I may as well go out and join some crummy political party who are always arguing about according to Rule 6, Section D. para. 4, sub-para 3 and so on and so on." Because watching the shrinking mailings I had come to the conclusion that OMPA was slowly strangling itself to death with fannish red tape. It had been getting on reasonably well for some years with a constitution which received an occasional amendment, then suddenly there were spates of proposals, floods of amendments and byelaws, which kept members so busy trying to work them all out that in the end they lost interest - what had been fun was becoming an irksome chore because of trying to keep up with it all, with the result that a great deal of interest was lost and the mailings started to shrink almost to vanishing point. The present mailing is a big one, but like Daphne, I suspect a lot of the material was a 1st minute rush to save membership. Not that that mattered as it made for a very interesting and big mailing. Fortunately, I didn't shut your zine again, as I realised that it concerned what we discussed at the OMPA meeting at Easter. It has shortened the constitution and done away with the bye-laws, yet has remained perfectly clear and workable. Many thanks, Bill, Bob and Bruce for the enormous amount of time and trouble you must have all taken over this.

ZOUNDS (Lichtman) Small but meaty. For my own views of what caused the near fatal illness of OMPA see the preceding review. I was interested to read of the firm who has put a machine on the market for fastening pages together without staples and am wondering if the firm is run by a fan. Just wondering as some of the fanzines I receive never have staples, anyway. As for ideas for an article - the mailings themselves often give me an idea for one. If I get just a paragraph or two then I put them in Talking Point and refer the particular magazine under review to it. But Dick Eney gave me the idea for the second article I did on King Arthur and, I believe, the second article about Richard III. It was Daphne's mention of a witchcraft lecture that moved me to get an article from Sandra about witchcraft yesterday and today, which in turn set off

the article "Not Your Philosophy, Horatio!", which I have had to spread over two issues. And since the mailing was a reasonable size this time, plus the fact that as I was away on a short holiday I didn't get it until late June, I shall probably go dotty trying to get something in for the deadline. Fortunately, two articles are written, but I have a feeling that I shall have to prune the mailing comments or I won't have enough time or paper left to get a zine in. Talking Point is still in my head, the rest of comments are only drafted, and there is still some more material if I can find time - hell, this issue is going to take matters into its own hands.

THE RUNNING JUMPING AND - hell! (Ashworth) I do wish you 'uns could make it every mailing./These ardent feminists to which you refer were no more women than Narcissus, Claudius' freed slave, was a man. As I said in a previous issue (No. 7, I think) men and wome are complementary to each other and these feminists who go round screeching for equal rights confuse equality with similarity, which is not the same thing at all./ I was fascinated by Sheila's account of her accidental witchery and sorry I can't help her, as I haven't been a witch since Tudor times and my career was cut off abruptly when one of Henry VIII's minions handed me a light, which is probably why I smoke so heavily in this life. But there are a number of witches about. See Talking Point if I get time to write it. If not, watch for it in the next issue. I hope. Some of things you commented on in your reviews I commented on myself so there is no point in repeating them. But I do hope that this magazine will be in the next mailing. It is just what OMPA needs.

SCOTTISHE (Our Eth) No, I am not going into all those remarks again about why you must not drop out of Ompa. With this issue you have proved yet again you are one of our most valued members. But the cover! Migosh! I do take my hat off to you for that. I know that Atom drew it for you, but I suspect that you did the colouring - and you publish well over 100 Scottishes, I believe. This is dedication to the nth degree and all I can do is foam with envy./ Brian's mention of the monster reminded me of the stove in the .22 range at Hawkinge. Tom Collins, the armourer corporal, couldn't get it going properly, and suddenly produced some paraffin from somewhere. The fire started with a roar and a flash and suddenly the exit from the room was jammed tight with one gibbering WRAF officer, three gibbering WRAF S.N.C.O's, and a corporal, all with boxes of ammo they had grabbed from the danger zone as they shot past./Ha, yes! I am not likely to forget the armoured bout at the Con. It was just as well I was carrying a shield myself as I didn't get out of the way fast enough. I looked up just in time to see a sword travelling full tilt at my head and got my shield up so fast that I wondered afterward if I did it by telekinesis. Much to my regret, I missed the SFCoL play as I had to have something to eat and didn't get served in time to get back

and see it. I would rather have seen it the night before than that string of films and from what Joe says of it in his report, I think it would have set things going with more of a swing. Or, better still, have seen it Saturday evening instead of the fancy dress party starting at such an early hour. Two items could easily have been put on Saturday evening. The London sketch and Geoff's talk, for instance. I remember one amusing incident, though. Ella had brought some things to my room and said more light was needed. She tugged a cord, but no light came on as she had yanked the cord for the night porter. Two minutes later there was a knock on the door and there stood - HARRISON! There was room service for you./It is incredible that no matter how carefully a Concommittee works to make sure there will be no trouble, always at the last minute the hotel manages to muck things up. The hotel did the same to me in 1957, although it would have helped if some of the fans who had booked and then decided not to come had told me./ Now I know you never fail to have reviews of the mailing and I know the last one was disgustingly small, but couldn't you have got just a little more out of it? Your layout is excellent, as is your material, but your Bletherings look as though they have gone on a vegetarian diet. Where's the meat?

SIZAR (Burn) And after reading this one wonders why you do not write mailing comments more often. My remarks on the Constitution will be found elsewhere, but many thanks for pruning it and turning it into something reasonable again. When a group of friends start tying themselves up with rules and regulations well, they are no longer friends because they wouldn't have needed to swamp themselves with rules and regulations if they were. Nowadays, if I hear the words "Let's get ourselves organised" I'm off. A club usually has a willing horse who gets more than his or her share of the work, but this is preferable to the "born organiser" (or, rather, someone who thinks he is, but who is too busy carping about rules and regulations for anything to get done, with the result that everyone gets fed up with the bickering and loses interest). An association such as OMPA must have a certain number of rules, but they should be kept to the minimum, and let's hope the new constitution will stay that way. As a friendly group, surely we should be able to agree to differ without hurling amendments, byelaws, etc at each other./ I don't agree with you that "Lady Chatterley's Lover" was a work of genius. The work of a sick genius, maybe. Lawrence was a working class man who had the brains to pull himself up by his bootstraps, but couldn't forget the grudge he had against the upper classes just because they happened to be the upper classes. It was "clothcap" socialism at its worst, which was a pity because, on the whole, the old "clothcap" socialism was far more sincere than the postwar type./ I believe the reason why most of the fiction that appears in fanzines (always excepting John Berry's "Sergeant" stories) is bad because it may

have been written originally in the hope that a professional editor would accept it, but who very properly turned it down. Very rarely you come across the fan who writes for fun and can turn out good stuff, especially parodies, but on the whole, unless it has a definite fannish slant, fiction in fanzines is very poor. Buz Busby seems to have summed it up when he said 95% of the fanzine readers haven't the ability to write comments. If they can't write those then I doubt if they would be much good at fiction. But that 95% contains a large number who are convinced that they can write fiction, hence the low standard in fanzines. Besides, if you can write really good fiction why not sell it to earn the money to put out more fanzines. It's a vicious circle, though. If you want to put out fanzines you haven't much time to write saleable fiction, and if you settle down to write for the market you haven't time to put out a fanzine.

AMBLE (from the Archives of the Mercer) Yet another stalwart of OMPA. Would I be right in saying that since you have been in OMPA you have never missed a mailing? As you will have gathered from my other comments I do not think that increasing the membership would help - the present mailing (the liveliest since God knows when) has proved that if members really make the effort there is nothing wrong with OMPA that a few meaty magazines won't cure - which you feel, too. I have just seen in another of your reviews that you have missed one mailing, but I believe you put in a postmailing. I should like to put on record that I am on record as one of the audience present when the Tom Lehrer LP was recorded in London. His first record is still my favourite, though. I don't think you are quite right about the Times being a Conservative newspaper. I seem to recall that when the Socialists were in power the Times took on a definitely pink tinge, and no doubt if the Liberals (pause for small cheer) got in, it would have a jaundiced look about it. In other words, as far as politics go, I think the Times is the Vicar of Bray of the newspaper world. I prefer the Sunday Times to the daily, which I usually get round to reading about Thursday, after either having finished the Mephisto crossword or given up in disgust. I have not yet got over the shock I gave myself when I finished it by Monday night. I rather liked your ending of the present instalment of "Who Saw Courtenay". In your book of short stories by O. Wilde have you got "Portrait of Mr. WH."? This is the one in which he postulates that Mr. W.H. was, in fact, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton (Shakespeare's patron), the "master-mistress of my passion" in the sonnets and also the "Dark Lady" of the sonnets. It was, of course, quoted against him at his trial. What I'd like to know, how come I've missed getting "English Folk Heroes" and the "Living Stones" into my collection. I remember John Roles looking at my books and saying "What a mouth-watering collection." He

was, of course, looking at the Hindu mythology. But how have I missed the two books you mentioned? Who published them, Archie?/ I read "1066 And All That" a long time ago, and ever since I have never been able to remember whether Horsa was Hengist's wife, or his horse, or some chum who happened to be around at the time.

BURP (Bennett) H'm! You have left Jimmy Groves in a fix, haven't you?

ERG (Jeeves) Yes, you have raised another point about the reviews being skimpier if the membership were increased. Your idea of a member trying to do at least one page of reviews is a good one, but some members are convinced that they cannot do good reviews so decided against it. Not many, of course, and I think enough of us do write mailing comments to keep at least some interest going. Again, if there are some articles you want to get in, and which may have been touched off by the mailing, you may not have time to do reviews. I am rather glad you reprinted "In Touch With Spirits" - it was worth reprinting. Perhaps our experience (The Midnight Mess in this issue) with the same type of people will interest you. Re your comments on Bjottings. Er - don't you think you ought to mention that the two children were from a previous marriage. New members are liable to be taken aback slightly at your mention of being newly wed with two children, although I suspect you did it on purpose. Oh, by the way, if your son would like a pen friend I have a nephew in New Zealand of about the same age and who is interested in s.f. and space travel, who would perhaps like to have a correspondence with your son. The nephew's name is Ian Colin McLean and his address is Okaramio, R.M.D, Havelock, Marlborough, New Zealand.

KOBOLD (Jordan) Yes, I wondered when it would dawn on you that you had forgotten to put your name anywhere in the main part of the zine. Such modesty! Well, Brian, your duper may have died on you, but your zine is a lot clearer than my early efforts were, and it was a nice meaty issue, too. I was rather sorry at the Con that because of other arguments Kingsley Amis was not taken up on his dogmatic remark that there is no such thing as telepathy. Rather than disbelieve something, I think it better to keep an open mind on the subject until it is either proved or disproved. But I don't think telepathy can be dismissed as not existing. Bill is threatening that he won't bother to talk to me as I either take the words straight out of his mouth or else answer his questions before he has asked them. I certainly don't do it intentionally - it just happens. I remember Ella coming up to me once and saying that she had just read an interesting book by Eric Frank Russell. "'Men, Martians, and Machines'" I said, to her surprise, as she was about to say that very title.

I don't know why I should have said it, as it was some time since I had read the book, and I had read more recent ones by EFR.

I am all for a basic or broader education. I know our education system is supposed to be greatly improved on prewar days, but sometimes I wonder. The so-called secondary modern is only the elementary school under another name, and it is still doing the same thing - very carefully teaching the kids not to think. After all, someone has got to do the blind alley jobs. But good God! Why the hell can't they stop concentrating so much on external things and at least teach the kids to spell and add up. Quite often I have found that my work has been held up since I worked in offices because I have had to stop and explain everything at least ten times or more to a clerk. In the end I used to deliberately lose my temper and all of a sudden they remembered what I told them. But when I was working in London, I remember a typist asking me "Where is Norway? Is it in Denmark?" I got a map of the world put in the office, only to come in one day to find the other shorthand typist carefully studying the China Coast. She was looking for Antwerp. I told her it was in Belgium and she immediately transferred her attention to Australasia. Neither does it help when you can't find a letter because it has been filed under a Christian name instead of a surname. The last junior we had at my present office, when asked a few simple questions on subjects she should have been taught at school, answered gaily, "Oh, we never listened to the teacher." To give her her due the present junior is quicker on the uptake.

But one cannot blame the teachers too much for the present semi-illiteracy. If they attempt to try a little discipline some fool of a parent immediately takes them to court. I don't believe in punishing children if they don't grasp something the first time (and that did happen at one of the schools to which I went), but I do think they should be made to listen and punished if they misbehave. Because of the restrictions placed on the teachers we have Teddy boys, a couple of whom have just beaten up the manager of the one of the local cinemas, probably because he has the habit of chucking out those who make a disturbance. But when I have been in a cinema at the weekend and seen the kids surge out just before the last feature starts, I have been horrified. They all look as though they have been stamped out of the same machine, and a cheap and shoddy one at that. They have characterless, crude unfinished faces, dull eyes and God help us! in nearly all of the faces there is a viciousness. It is as though a whole mob of nasty little elementals have managed to acquire human bodies. It is the generation of Not-think, the end product of the Welfare State. Children who have had everything done for them instead of being taught to think and do things for themselves, with the result they don't know what to do with themselves and slash

cinema seats because they are bored and want to be noticed. And if I see this in the ultra snobbish town of Cheltenham, where people "pass by on the other side" (oh, yes, they do.' Not one of them - and there were at least twenty or more people about - went to the cinema manager's aid when he was beaten up). Cheltenham, pale, weak, nouveau-riche imitation of the genuine aristocracy of Bath - if these moronic brats litter the place here, what on earth is it like in other towns? And all this because teachers are prevented from doing their jobs properly. Give the kids swimming baths, give them free expression (the pretty euphemism for a bout of destructive activity), but fill the space between their ears? Let a teacher in a State school try it and see just how fast some damned fool parent has him up before the beak. Occasionally you come across a kid with a reasonably intelligent face, but with a frustrated look. This is a kid who wants to think, but because nervous tension prevented him giving of his best in the eleven plus, he is stuck in a secondary modern school, with morons who can prevent the teachers doing their job because Mum and Dad will sort them out if they try. The eleven plus should be done away with and a child judged by his school work over the year. But, oh, for a time when discipline is enforced (and I don't mean allowing the sadists to take over) and children are taught to use their initiative again. They give them swimming pools and the teachers have to use tattered, badly printed and outdated textbooks. Brighten up the textbooks, tell the kids they don't get swimming pools and wide open spaces unless the school as a whole attains a certain scholastic level and take it from there.

One other thing - why doesn't the Ministry of Education point out to advertisers and certain newspapers that it would make the job of educating kids easier if they were a little more careful with their grammar and spelling? What's the use of trying to teach children to spell when they see posters "Drink a pinta milka day". (And this one was issued by the Government), and read in the "Daily Sketch" headlines "There Ain't Gonna Be No War." This particular headline startled me because although I had been reading other newspapers none of them had mentioned that a war was imminent, and disgusted me because of the spelling and grammar. One could quibble and say that because of the double negative there was going to be a war.

Going back for a moment to the school I mentioned attending, the headmaster and junior mistress there made the grave error of clouting the kids if they did not understand something the first time it was explained to them, quite often blanking the kid's mind to the subject forever - I swear that's why I am so slow on maths to this day. But the headmaster was determined that the kids were going to get the best education he could give them although it was only a small country school and, to be fair to him, if any kid had a gift for a particular subject, he or she was encouraged. He would probably recoil in horror

at my present style of writing, because he did encourage me and when I glanced through some old school exercise books a couple of years ago, I was astonished at the clear prose. No wonder the teachers at my next school were so startled! But my prose these days is not half as fine and clear as it was then. So I should be grateful to that headmaster for one thing - an appreciation of fine writing and good literature, and the way he did his best to give us as near to a secondary school education as he could with the limited means at his disposal.

Members may think from the foregoing that I am against teenagers in general. It's not the teenagers, but the cult of the teenager that gets me. And I know there are intelligent and thinking young men in middle and late teens. Our director's son is a case in point, as is Brian himself. I could name others, but I haven't time, but I do think that our present system of education is going to impose a dreadful burden on the youngsters who do think, because when they get older they will have to do the thinking for the semi-humans coming out of the moron machine. And all this because I agree with Brian that we do need a broader system of education.

PACK RAT (Groves.) And welcome to OMPA, Jimmy. The London Circle fell to pieces when a few members insisted on a constitution and wanted everything to go their way, regardless of how the majority of fans felt about it. When I knew the Circle in 1955 and for a year or two after one could have an interesting and informative evening, but when two or three fans started monopolising and one or two others started ordering the fans about and trying to organise them into doing something they hadn't even been consulted about, the people who could keep the interest going with their stimulating conversation up and left. Again this fanzine fandom and convention fandom split was nonsense in this country. Anglofandom is not big enough to have splinter groups without a lot of hard feeling and until about 1957 all groups got on reasonably well with each other. Again the slavish agreement with someone just because he happened to be a Big Name didn't help to keep everything on a friendly basis. This "it must be like this because so-and-so says it should be" makes me tired. And then this attitude "we don't want anything to do with the pros", some of whom had been fans and were willing to remain fans, did not do any good. I suspect that that sort of remark originally came from one or two fans who had been a bit too presumptuous of someone's time so that the pros didn't want anything to do with them. If there hadn't been any s.f. pro authors, we wouldn't have had s.f. fandom. Again, many fans who don't put out fanzines, or maybe put one out very rarely, often work hellishly hard on and at the Conventions. In this country there should be room for all - fanzine fan, club-fan, pro and convention fan. At the Easter convention it looked as though British fandom was re-integrating again and for this I think we have a great deal to thank Ella Parker for - by the

way, how is her Deportation Fund coming along? She will get a copy of this zine - I bet when you see her she'll be swearing because she has been paid a compliment.

About your comments on colour prejudice - the pureblooded negro has it as much as the white race. When I worked for the Crown Agents we used to have a number of people from the coloured countries. One of our Nigerian girls had her husband over here on a some sort of a course and he was one of the few coloured people I have come across who didn't wear a chip on his shoulder about his colour as though it were the Victoria Cross and what were we going to do about it. He was the son of a coastal chieftain, well-educated and highly intelligent, and after a few minutes conversation you completely forgot his colour because he just acted naturally and forgot about it. But he was a pure blooded negro and Olu, his wife, told me that in Nigeria the full negroes had about as much contempt for mixed marriages and the unfortunate issue of them as did the whites. The Ghanians told me the same thing. On the whole I preferred the simplicity of the Africans to the bumptiousness of the West Indians. Wherever I have been, the latter when in a group have invariably caused trouble and seldom was it a case of the whites needling them. They were inclined to presume, too. When I was posted to Calshot I walked into the camp in the evening and a Jamaican almost fell off his bike in his hurry to accost me and say that if I hadn't got a boy friend I could have him. I clobbered him with my kitbag - and there was an electric iron in it. I should like to say, though, that if it had been a white airman he would have been clobbered, too. When a man rushes up to a girl like that he usually has only one thing in mind and I take offence to the implied slur on my character.

One of the most astonishing things that has happened in the last year is the whites (in the United Nations) seem to have taken a strong aversion to President Tshombe. And all because he was a negro who liked Belgians and was willing to let them stay and help him get his independent little state on its feet. But it was all right for Lumumba to let Communism and hell (such as rape and torture) loose in the Congo. The moment the Congolese started on that they should have been occupied by regiments and regiments of U.N. troops, not a brigade or two, and told they would be fully independent when they learned how to behave in a civilised manner. But come to think of it they were behaving like civilised people - with rape, murder and torture. But when other countries saw how the negro could do no wrong, it was not really surprising that South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth. I disapprove of much that goes on there, but I can't blame them for not wanting to be told what to do by a Government official who pays a flying visit and thinks he knows all there is to know about a country and problems that have bothered them for years. Incidentally, I didn't find out until a few months back one of the main reasons why South Africa is so strong on apart-

heid. The negroes aren't indigenous to the country. It was settled by British and Dutch white settlers and until the discovery of diamonds it was mainly a country of whites. Cecil Rhodes brought in loads of negroes from neighbouring countries as cheap labour. So it seems that the South Africans are taking the attitude that since the whites settled the country the whites are damned well going to keep it. And before someone up and says but what about the other countries in Africa that the whites (mainly the British) grabbed, I should like to ask what would have been the present state of those countries if they hadn't. Who built the roads and bridges, railways and hospitals, and decent towns. Native labour may have done the actual building, but who had the headaches of administration and getting things going? And who stopped the hell of a lot of intertribal warfare? Certainly there was some nastiness on the part of the whites, but on the whole, I think the good has far outweighed the bad.

I liked your comments on the after effects of being a p.o.w. You know, a month or two back I was talking to one of the CND supporters, and I'd better say straight away that^{is} not one of their crackpots, but a very sincere young man. I said to him what was the use of banning the bomb and not war and he gave me the official reason of the CND. "Ah, but a conventional war doesn't affect the mind and body as an atomic war would do, so it's just nuclear warfare we want banned." I was more than flabbergasted - I was deeply shocked. How many bloody little armament kings are in this mob and using the sincere people like Canon Collins as a "sucker" front? Anyway, I told this young man of the ships that used to come up the Solent just after the war. At Calshot we used to watch the Queens go out loaded with cheering American troops on their way home. It was fun to watch them, even though when the big ships went by we had to make a rush to shut the waterproof doors of the hangars because of the wash. But other ships used to come into Southampton and we called them the death ships. They used to turn into Southampton Water very quietly, and although from our pier we could hear people quite plainly on board, from these ships there was scarcely a sound. They were the transports bringing home the men who had been prisoners in the Far East. They were sent by sea in the hope that a sea voyage would help them to recuperate, but many died on the way home. Others would have been better off dead, like my brother's school friend who today just occasionally recognises some of his family and friends. I told the young man of these ships - I told him of the time I was stationed at an operational camp and of how a Halifax managed to get back to the airfield, then crashed and caught fire, and of seeing the crew trying to get out, but not being able to and of men having to stand by helplessly as they burned to death. I told him of the London blitz, when I was three years younger than he is now, and of the night we were bombed out. Of how the shelter next to

ours received a direct hit and there were two little children and their parents in it. Of how three of us managed to pull an arthritic old man from a blazing house just before the ceiling came down on his bed. Of how we had to use blankets to put out the fire because the water mains had been hit and we had to get the fire out quickly because the gas mains had been hit. I told him of how we found an old woman screaming with the pain of two broken arms, and of how we all joined the hopeless search for the family whose shelter had received a direct hit. The father and little boy were never found, but I came across the little five year old girl minus an arm and a leg. She looked up, said "Mummy" and died. Her mother, also minus an arm and a leg, died on the way to hospital. At this point the young man asked me to stop as all this was making him feel sick. Then I pointed out to him that this was the sort of war that the CND didn't mind because it didn't have after effects on the mind and body. Does it not? What would be the opinion of Ronald Searle, I wonder, who had his right hand deliberately crushed by the Japs when they found out he was an artist? Fortunately, they did not realise he was left handed. War - any form of war - is bad, and perhaps I would have more sympathy for the CND if they campaigned to stop all forms of war, instead of trying to ban the very weapon that is making the big powers think twice about going to war because neither side would be a victor. But human nature being what it is, I should imagine that in a few years the A and H-bombs will be mere toys in comparison to the frightfulness thought up by that time.

RANDOM (Daphne) I see in Julian Parr's letter that he mentions the thing that has puzzled you, too (and me, at times). And that is why is homosexuality a punishable offence in men and not in women? As a matter of fact, in Austria it is a punishable offence for women. In this country, however, it seems there is an act, called the Chastity of Women Act or some such wording, and from the way it is worded women can't be punished for homosexuality because as far as the Act is concerned it doesn't exist among them - they can only be charged with a breach of the peace or making a public nuisance of themselves. It was for this reason in the Air Force that, although if an airman were charged with homosexuality it meant eighteen months or two years imprisonment and a dishonourable discharge, the only thing that could be done with a woman (!) was a discharge from the Forces "Services no longer required" clause. But neither men nor women who are inverters should be punished - they could not help being born "wrong". It's the perverts of both sexes that the law should get after.

I don't think I would agree with Brian Aldiss about the dead hand of "nice respectability" still lying heavy on suburbia, unless by suburbia he means the middle class or the Calvinistic

type of offshoot of Christianity. But if he means suburbia he is slightly out. He should come to this town and see what goes on in the parks and open spaces, sometimes in daylight. (No, I haven't been out spying, but I got my information from a young girl who was very proud of the fact that she and her friend were the only two virgins left on the estate - they were fifteen). If Brian could hear the obscenities that come pouring out of the mouths of fourteen year olds in public places, if he knew the appallingly high rate of pregnancy and venereal disease among the younger teenagers (which I see has caused a great deal of perturbation at the annual meeting of the B.M.A.), he would wish for that "dead hand of respectability" back again. Or not that, but some method whereby we could strike the happy medium between the "dead hand" and promiscuity.

I liked your paragraph on newspapers and am inclined to agree with you about the "popular" papers - I have some remarks elsewhere about them. I did try the Guardian, but it seemed to me that although it had dropped "Manchester" from its title, the news seemed mainly in and around that area and, being a nosey type, I wanted to know what was going on everywhere. The women's page in the Daily Telegraph I read once and never looked at again - there was a slight aura of snobbishness about it. But I like the paper for its factual reporting (if it were accused of being inaccurate during the war it has certainly changed since.) Its cricket news is good (go on, Bennett, say I'm biased), it has good general articles, an interesting letter column, and a darned good advertising column if you are thinking of changing your job. On Sunday, we have the Times which has a magazine section. This is useful as it can be removed and digested during the week.

About your comments on God and the Church - I am inclined to agree with you on this. There may be God or a God, as you say, but the Church is the main cause for the decline in belief. Some weeks ago we were talking to someone who is convinced that Christianity is dead. I pointed out that humanity is not yet mature enough to go on without a faith of some kind and is going to need a father or mother image for many thousands of years yet, so what could take the place of Christianity. He believed that the old religion would gain ground again - worship through nature - and he did not mean the "black" kind. As a matter of fact, he has done a lot of work in exposing some of the "black" types, who have no love for him at all. However, I believe the sort of Christianity the Church is teaching is dying out. When one looks back through history and sees the crimes, including torture, murder and war, committed in the name of Christ, one is appalled. There was Bishop de Landa's terrible act of vandalism in burning the Mayan books, thereby robbing us of the history of a civilisation, there was the

Inquisition which turned into nothing but a blackmailing organisation to get more land for the Church, there was the persecution of witches, in which for every guilty person caught, dozens of innocent people died. The Christians talk about their persecution under the Roman Empire, but in three hundred years it averaged out at about half a dozen people a year (many of whom were ecstatics who wanted to be martyred, anyway). But the persecution was not always for their faith - mainly it was because the Christians would interfere in politics. It was after Christianity became the accepted faith that the Roman Empire started declining. And in the Middle Ages, his Most Catholic Majesty, Charles V of Spain, condemned 65,000 Netherland Christians to death in five months.

Again, Christianity soon lost its original meaning - it began as a few simple truths preached by a sincere man and then it got into the hands of a fanatical convert. What we have had ever since is not the Christianity of Christ, but the personal theories and prejudices of Paul of Tarsus. Personally, I am not interested in them. And look at the number of different sects Christianity has split up into - the Calvinists, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Congregationalists, the Anglicans, the Romans, the Eastern Orthodox. Pah! The ancient Celtic Christianity, which took the pure truths of Christ and the higher philosophy of the Druids, was a better form of Christianity and would have remained so if St. Augustine hadn't poked his Roman nose into our affairs.

As for the Jehovah's Witnesses - if they want to follow a 'religion' started by a man who was jugged on more than one occasion for false pretences and fraud - they are welcome to their heaven. No doubt they will get what they expect. Whatever Power there is has a sense of humour - which is just as well for us! Can you imagine a number of heavens, each with exactly 144,000 Jehovah's Witness, each of whom, stripped of the physical body, will be seeing themselves for the petty little egomaniacs they really are? And what are they going to do when they want to move out and are told "But this is your heaven - this is what you wanted and you've got it"? What are they going to do when they realise that their heaven is hell?

There are many little cults besides the Christians, each thinking that they alone have the whole truth, not realising that what they have is one tiny facet of the truth and until they all bury their differences and prejudices and join each facet together they will never have the whole truth. But then, when we are mature enough to know the whole truth we will no longer have any need to be human, will we? I do believe that we have "souls" and that there is something beyond, but I do not believe that I have to follow the teachings of a hair-splitting theologian to find the truth. I can only find it by

searching my own way and it will probably take me many lives, but I do want to find out for myself and not via any fool fanatic.

You wonder if the word "kiss" is derived from Anglo-Saxon and you're right. (A.S. coss, whence the v. cyssen, Dut. kus and küssen, Icelandic koss and kyssa, Ger. Kuss and kussen)

PHENOTYPES (and damn your numbering system)(Eney). Glad to see you have published the real story behind the so-called Jap offer to surrender - I rather suspected that the gen Norman was given was a load of propaganda./ Of the Con reports I like Nancy's best - the other was good, but inclined to be a bit jerky. As for the witchcraft article in Vagary 12 - in two pages it was only the barest outline, but there was a little more in Vagary 13 - and there's some more in this issue on the subject. At least, there might be, but this particular issue seems to have run away with me./ The dangerous "Black Lodges"? Why the lodges which ritually sacrificed a newborn baby a couple of years ago, Dick, and which was hushed up because certain people in high professional places were involved. The lodges which ritually murdered a girl in Epping Forest last year - the newspaper reports said "she had been interfered with" and everybody assumed she had been raped. A cross was cut in her throat and she had been disembowelled. The lodges which were responsible for the murder of a man about fifteen miles from here - he was found at Lammas-tide with a pitchfork through his throat, which was also cut with a cross. And the people qualified to deal with them are the "white" lodges - if the Church won't do anything somebody has got to, as there are four main "black" organisations in this country, each with ambitions to run it. Fortunately, the four main groups are too damned greedy in wanting the money and power for themselves to get together. Anyway, I shall be publishing a letter in another part of this issue which might interest you. As you will have gathered I've been doing some asking around.

This "initiate" of whom you spoke obviously wasn't very deep in anything - if he had been he would have known better than to come dress in his "order" - it would not have been liked. He sounded to me like an exhibitionist who was just after a bit of sex or perversion or both./ In this country we have a very strange place called Chanctonbury Rings and not so long ago (a matter of months) a whole crew of teenage exhibitionists decided they would have a lark on the Rings. They took record players with them and lots of voodoo music, and just before midnight the boys and girls kicked off their shoes and started some primitive dancing to the voodoo music. The music and dancing became progressively more wild, but some time later, without even waiting to put on their shoes a mob of panic stricken teenagers were fleeing from the Rings, convinced that all the devils from hell were after them. The voodoo music, the primitive dancing, and no doubt the fact that the little fools weren't far removed from

the primitive themselves, had called up "something" which the kids couldn't see, but certainly "felt". Older people who knew more about these things than they did went up the Rings, sorted out the "something", and returned the record players and voodoo music to a lot of very subdued youngsters. A year or so back, a group of teenagers in a town in the West Country got their hot little hands on some formulae and thought they would do a spot of "invoking" themselves in an empty house. Again, there were screams of terror and a panic stricken stampede. This time they had got hold of something nastier than the "something" on Chanctonbury Rings. It took six weeks of exorcism to get rid of the "thing" the silly young fools had invoked. Sounds incredible, doesn't it? But it happened./ You know about the best and kindest cult we have in this country at the moment is the Druids, but I can't write about them in this issue - it has already run away with me. Phew! Vagary is certainly living up to the "Off Trail" part of the Ompa title.

HOW NOT TO MOVE (Belle) Well, you certainly had the hell of a time moving, Belle, and believe me, you have my sympathy. All my life I seem to have been moving and I can't say I have ever enjoyed it, except once, when we moved out of Camp Crazy. Anyway, I hope you are now settled in and enjoying yourself. By the way, don't I owe you a letter? Probably, as I owe most people letters at the moment.

THE HICKMANZINES (Hickman) I am rather sorry that one of them didn't get through - out of sheer curiosity, of course. However, I have already covered the stuff about those words and Ompa in general in other comments, Lynn, so I will only be repeating myself if I start all over again. Let's say that I enjoyed the pleasant reading in your zines and especially appreciated the lovely little satire by George Willick. But I am afraid the solution suggested by Basil Wells to end major wars will never be accepted by the power grabbers and ogomaniacs who run so many governments today - it's too damned sensible. Gods! If only I could produce printing and artwork of the standard in your zines.

UL (Metcalf) My comments about your letter from the "Reverend" William Wray will be in Talking Point, as I have done a little digging about. Again, my comments on Ompa are elsewhere in this issue. /So that's what a "filk song" is - and I thought it was a typo! No, I can't really picture Soviet citizens having dupers to themselves, yet I don't know - Russia seems to be getting more and more bourgeois these days. The ordinary people were given technical knowledge and "knowhow" and quite a few of them started to think, so Communism, like Socialism, has within it the seeds of its own destruction. Yet, although I am not a Socialist, I am sorry to see that our own Socialist party has made such a fool of itself over the unilateralist policy, nationalisation, and the

stranglehold it has allowed the trade unions to get on it, that it has nearly alienated the sympathy of the so-called "underprivileged" whom it taught to half-think (in some cases to think). I am sorry because any Government should have a strong Opposition to keep it on it's toes, otherwise it gets complacent - and that is what is happening to ours. We need an Opposition that won't make a fool of itself and become a laughing stock and untill the Socialists stop stabbing each other in the back, it looks as though we shall have to rely on a renaissance of the Liberal Party.

VIPER (Donaho) I have come to the conclusion that Terry Carr is a Brilliant Man - the Fan Aptitude Test was wonderful, and very neatly summed up fandom./ I cannot remember reading anything by John Myers Myers so I can't comment, but I am beginning to get interested./ Poor Gideon - perhaps he is like the ginger Persian cat I once had. At first I thought he was so dumb that he just didn't realise he was a tomcat, but my mother has since told me that when she had the vet to one of the other cats, he examined Ginger and said that he/she/it was a hermaphrodite./ Belated birthday wishes to Habakkuk - when Selina learns to write she will no doubt send a card. No, it's so daft as it sounds - she is learning to read (and this isn't a leg pull) and as I have said elsewhere, God help me when I am confronted with a shopping list from the cat. We thought we were going to lose her at the end of June. While we were on holiday we put her in the Animal Shelter, where she was always well looked after. Unfortunately, some kindly soul turned up with three half starved moggies which he had rescued from a tatty and feckless family, and it turned out they all had cat 'flu. One died, the other two recovered, but by this time the other cats in the Shelter had caught it. Poor Selina was so ill and it was dreadful to see her little jaw going up and down as she was trying to breathe through her mouth and purr at us at the same time. We had the vet in, but after a semi-recovery she got worse again and then disappeared. She is unusually intelligent, very affectionate, and has a terrific personality; she is also very fastidious and knew she was not looking her best, so she just went away to some quiet corner and waited for her Cat Goddess to come and fetch her. I think I called on everyone from Bast to St. Francis to find Selina. We did find her - hiding away in a box in a corner of the cellar and looking most pathetic. We put the box in another room, filled it with some warm material, and told her she jolly well had to get better. I was trying to tempt her with all the things she had fancied, even to going out and getting some little bits of chicken. Poor Bill came into the kitchen one morning, sniffed, and said "Oh, good." Chicken for lunch." "It's not for you, it's for Selina" was the answer. "You've got sausages." Anyway, I think Selina realised how badly we wanted her to recover, and decided she would do so. All this may sound slightly ridiculous, but

unless one has had a pet that has very firmly insinuated itself into one's life, it is difficult to understand. I don't know if you have read Kipling's poem "Don't give your Heart to a Dog to Tear", but it could apply to any animal who has become part of the family./ It took me six days to read "Gone With The Wind", but I liked it. I haven't seen the film, but I expect I will one day as it is sure to be re-issued. I can believe what you say about the young Southern ladies and I know they could look after themselves if the occasion arose. I'll tell you the story next time round./ On to Elinor's comments. From what I said in V. 13, you probably know by now that "invert" is an unfortunate born sexually "wrong". These are the people who are most upset and unhappy about their condition. It is the perverts who cause the trouble, the people with the twisted minds who are seeking new thrills and sensations and don't care a damn how many genuinely sick people are sacrificed for their whims./ Re your comments on Rexwroth, Bill, I rather like the sound of his radio station. About his talk on martyrs, it only goes to show in his story of the disliked doctor that normally intelligent people lose all sense of reason and decency when they become a mob. Even though detested, it was a cruel and horrible way of treating him, although a broomstick was not as dreadful as the red hot poker by which the unlucky Edward II was murdered./ I never saw "Madonna of the Seven Moons", but I must confess to a weakness for Stewart Granger.

DEFESTRATION (The Carrs) Being a Ronald Searle fan, I faunched on "First Fandumites at Bay". Any more coming along? Don't forget the other book "How To Be Topp." /And a nice sensible way Jim Caughran had of solving the problem of Frank, too./ There isn't a lot I can say about this zine except I enjoyed it.

WHY IS A FAN (Hickman) If we had an OMPA award it should certainly go to Lynn Hickman for putting this through the mailing and to Earl Kemp for its compilation. It was fascinating, but it really needs a whole article to itself and I have no time if I am going to get this issue in by the deadline. I know it's only July, but we were away and I didn't get the mailing until 26th June. I have been working on it ever since and I am still wondering if I shall hit the deadline or not. Anyway, thanks and congratulations for this magazine and this time I'll leave it to other members to make some comment. Perhaps in an issue or two I may be able to get round to why I am a fan, but time presses and there is still more stuff to stencil.

And that is the end of the mailing comments this time round, but what a pity it is that we cannot have a few more mailings like the June 1961 mailing.

THE MIDNIGHT MESS

Who said magic was a thing of the past? We have just seen a species of it, practised by grown men and women in England at a certain place known to be a centre for superphysical power in these islands. We were eyewitnesses, and will describe faithfully what we saw, and even some of what we guessed.

The evening started in a hired hall, redolent with the burnings of nine joss-sticks and a stuffy smell left over, probably, by the local Town Council. Three empty chairs occupied the centre of the long table facing an audience of some sixty people, one of which at least was recognised from a television appearance. A nine branched candlestick with lighted red candles burned at a side table, and organ music came from an expensive tape recorder. At the stroke of ten thirty p.m., a small procession of officers entered from the left aisle, two of them in long red robes with white trimmings a la Santa Claus, and the third wearing a plain brown cassock. Seals of Solomon were at their left shoulders and at their throats. They were followed by the lesser lights of the Fraternity in plain dark suits. All took their places at the table except for the centre chair. When they were settled, everyone had to rise again to the appearance of a black-mantled sword bearer, carrying a Knight Templar sword, scabbarded, before the last entrant, who was to occupy the vacant seat.

She was a peculiar figure. We saw a woman of about thirty five, with jet-black tight curled hair presumably dyed, deadpan pallor make-up, vampire-red lips, black eye make-up, dark green small caste-mark between her eyes, wearing a white robe covered by a long black mantle. The picture presented was that of Dracula's daughter. She took her place in the chair of honour without a word or movement of a face muscle, and indeed did not speak an audible syllable the whole time. None of the speakers referred to, or indicated her in any way, and the Mystery Woman Myth was well preserved before the public.

One of the Santa Clauses now announced that we were to hear an address given from their dead leader, now two years departed from this world. We naturally expected some trance mediumship to commence and were considerably surprised when the tape recorder was switched on and a woman's voice came from the machine delivering the message from the departed male. The text of the message might have been from any book entitled "Fake mediumship and How To Work It." All was sweetness in the realms of light, and the dead Leader (now Divine!) was speaking through this "our beloved and specially chosen vessel" to say how well

he was getting on with Christ, together with St. Francis and St. Hubert, all working in amity on the Christ-Plane for the welfare of dumb animals. The Brotherhood were to be "greatly raised" in this world, and the time was fast approaching for a New Messiah. All this took about forty minutes to say, with convincing imitations of the dead leader's mannerisms of speech easily imitated (but exaggerated) such as his long pauses between sentences on account of a chest weakness, and his typical "ah" endings of words such as "heah", "theah", and "pleashah." (Sometimes these were forgotten.)

By this time we began to twig that the Mystery Woman was the medium whose voice was recorded, and that she was supposed to be the vehicle in whose body the departed Divine Leader now sat invisibly before our very eyes. We were tempted to think that if he hadn't lost either his physical disabilities or affectations of speech since death, it seemed scarcely worth the trouble of dying.

At the end of this "deeply inspiring and moving address", a robed Brother with green caste-mark on left temple, spoke against cruelty to animals, and another pleaded for vegetarian dieting. One plain clothes member quoted from Billy Graham, and another read a paper on elementary Zodiacal symbology. Everybody was now asked to stand and (of all things!) sing Blake's "Jerusalem" theme song of every Women's Institute. So far very innocent. It was now announced that the Brethren and sympathisers were to make their way at exactly midnight (1 a.m. Summer Time) to a spot not far away, where they were to call down certain Elemental Forces known to exist at the moment of Solstice, and everyone would be given a wish for the coming twelve months which was to be granted if reasonable. The Brethren processed out in reverse order, and we all piled into cars and a bus which had transported the London Branch. We realised, of course, that the exact solstice time for the place had been 5.11 p.m. and wondered why they were so far out.

After a few minutes ride, we stopped and proceeded across a field by the light of torches and headlamps. Quite a stolid country policeman stood in the lane where the cars were, presumably to keep a guardian eye on things. We spectators were marshalled into a rough circle at a little distance from the Initiates in the centre, who went into a huddle with the Mystery woman in the midst of them. Before all lights were extinguished I noticed she removed her shoes.

The eldest and woolliest Brother then started to roar incantations. First he bawled for SACHIEL, whom we supposed might be the Angel of the hour, but looking the gentleman up in our Catalogue of Demons, we found him to be an underling of the

Infernal Prince ORIENS. No Sachiel appearing, others were screeched for, including Metraton and, apparently in desperation IHVH Himself, followed immediately by Tetragrammaton. A little knowledge of Hebrew might have told the Brother that these last are identical, since no Hebrew ever attempts to pronounce the Name of God and substitutes some pious phrase in Its place, Tetragrammaton simply meaning "word of four letters."

Suddenly a frightful four letter word was yelled. Yes, the Lady Chatterley one, but - in Arabic. Who would have guessed that anyone present might know it. We will not say what the word was, but every British soldier who served in Egypt will know it. Using those frustrating asterisks, it was A**k. We can only hope that the dear old man screaming it, who seemed otherwise respectable, had no knowledge of what he said. Perhaps he thought it was a Holy Name. Let us be charitable enough to suppose so.

After that he began to conjure the Powers in plain English to grant everyone's request for the coming year. If ours is granted, it will be most unfortunate for the Brethren. Everyone then linked hands, "Auld Lang Syne" style, and recited a one verse rhyme wishing luck to the Brotherhood, and the meeting concluded - alas - with the Lord's Prayer, though we could not be certain what some of the others were saying. After that, the whole assembly went back to their transport, and returned to the Hall for (what a let down!) tea and eatables. As a spectator remarked to us "After all this yap about vegetarianism and kindness to animals, they tuck into ham sandwiches and sausage rolls like a lot of wolves."

Now for summation. We daren't give too many opinions while a law of libel and slander exists. All we can say is that there was a very peculiar feel about the whole business, and what enquiries we made produced a variety of information not altogether pleasant hearing. It did occur to us that such an organisation, appearing so innocent on the surface, would make an admirable front for less scrupulous characters operating behind its scenes. To dress up and perform ceremonies is quite harmless by itself, but there are far darker practices to which this innocent pastime may be a gateway for the unwary. Unless forearmed with sufficient knowledge and experience, those interested in such things would be well advised to stick to more orthodox Liturgies and Lodges.

Anyway, for the benefit of the curious, that is exactly what happened from the viewpoint of an invited spectator. Anything taking place elsewhere may be entirely the figment of a distorted imagination. Or - who knows - somewhere, some place, someone, may be doing just that.

Bill Gray

TALKING POINT

Time is now getting so short that this is going straight on stencil - a thing I dislike doing because in drafting one can usually spot errors and make an attempt to do something about them, but with typing off the cuff on to stencil the sheet of wax often ends up looking as though it has a chronic case of measles. And I will transpose!

If you have managed to struggle this far you will have read Bill's report of one of Britain's many sects having a useless ritual on one the "strange" hills of this country. We heard about this lot first from one of our unreliable sources of information (the other three sources are quite reliable). From what she told us they called the devil out of the hill and God knows what else and that she and the curate had hid in the next field the year previously and watched them do these rites. Of course, we were curious, then somebody else told us she was going to it this year and as we knew that she was an extremely kindly person we wondered even more. She suggested that we go the fountain head - the old lady who had the literature.

This we did, although it took us ages to find the house, which we eventually discovered lurking in a clump of a trees half way up a hill. Somehow I had got it into my head that I had met the old lady who dished out the literature, who I remembered as what I call a "dear old soul". I was quite wrong. We rang the bell of this large and sombre house and after a longish interval it was answered not by my "dear old soul", but a bewhiskered female I had never seen before. We explained that we had heard about their ritual and were wondering if anyone could go as we did not want to turn up if it were something private. (We intended to even if we were told strangers were not welcome). We were invited in to look at the literature, which consisted of a few pamphlets that cost about twopence to print but for which this sect was asking half a crown. There were two more ancient females inside and it turned out they were sisters. I left Bill to do most of the talking, mainly because I was almost bereft of speech and was having difficulty in following the remarks of one of the sisters, whose dentures were slipping. Then, of course, I realised what the three sisters reminded me of - the Three Fates, Clothos, Lachesis and Atropos. At any moment at all I expected the one with the needlework bag to produce a large pair of shears.

In the meantime, of course, we were getting the once over. In fact, they were attempting what I can only call a "psychic" probe for want of a better phrase. I thought at first that this was

my imagination until Bill said he had had the same feeling. I wonder what the three fates thought when they came up against a barrier? One of them offered to show me the view while the other two stayed with Bill, but that didn't break the barrier. What we did notice before we left was a tape recorder that would have made Terry Jeeves and Norman Shorrock dribble with envy. It was, of course, the one that was used at the meeting. Which brings me to the meeting.

As Bill has already written of it, I needn't go into detail, except to say that I was so bored with all the guff and the incense that I had the utmost difficulty in keeping awake. I do remember that when the Santa Clauses and their attendant sprites entered the hall I was not impressed. One of the brothers instantly made me think of Torquemada, which was rather odd as he did not look in the least like the horrid Thomas. Oddly enough Bill said that the moment he saw the brother he was reminded of an Inquisitor Bishop. The other two brothers were just woolly, but this one made me feel suspicious. Then, of course, the sword bearer and the Mystery Woman entered and my hackles stood up and stayed up. I suddenly took a dislike to the whole pack of them. But the most appalling thing of all was that an artist from a nearby city fell for her with a resounding crash. And don't think that I was surprised just because I was a woman, because a number of men were astonished at the way he fell.

To me it was obvious why all the stuff about animals had been put in this supposed message from our (Divine" Leader. One of the woolly brothers was hipped on the subject of cruelty to animals and vivisection and, of course, any message about animals would convince him that the "message" was genuine. It convinced me otherwise. To be fair to the woolly brother, he was absolutely sincere when he was pleading for kindness to animals and I felt extremely sorry that this love of his had been used to deceive him, because I am convinced that that was the intention.

The Torquemada brother claimed to be a physician and spoke quite sensibly on diet and how to become a vegetarian gradually. All I could think of was roast chicken. Then the other woolly brother, who was the leader of this lot, nattered a lot more and of how they would go up on the hill and invoke or conjure or something - I wasn't concentrating very much on what he was saying. There wasn't a single good speaker among the whole pack of them.

I wasn't in the least impressed at the midnight service on the hill. I know very little about ritual, but even I could see that the brother was making a muck of things. As for calling on Sachiel.- he might at least have studied the occult a bit more and got his facts right. Besides being an underling of one of the infernal ones, Sachiel is the angel of the first hour and in

the occult calendar the first hour starts at sunset.

Naturally, we were very curious about these people so we went to our sources of information to find out more about them. From the unreliable source we learned that the medium's name was Fifi (it would be!) and that she shared a flat in London with a woman called Robin "who wore men's clothes". A little caution is needed here, as according to this source any girl who gets into slacks, jeans, or shorts - even pleated ones - "wears men's clothes." However, at the meeting of this sect I did notice a fair sprinkling of Lesbians and pansies and they must have been damned obvious if I noticed them. From one^{of} the reliable sources we got the London address of Fifi and her friend and the name of another cult to which they belonged.

As far as the two Santa Clauses were concerned, nobody had anything bad to say about them, but from two of the reliable sources, we learned that Brother Torquemada had a faith healing clinic somewhere in the Midlands and that the police kept an eye on his activities. This stemmed from the time when the police booted him out of this particular place after complaints had been lodged that he was not averse to a little fraud and blackmail on the side. However, nobody likes to admit he or she has been made a fool of, and as the police could not persuade anyone to prosecute, the gentleman was requested to leave.

And this is the lot who say they have been chosen to prepare the way for the second Coming. All I can say is that^{is} a damned shame that so many genuine believers in them have been taken in.

Now there are bits of information scattered in one or two of the mailing comments, but members may recall that in my footnote to Sandra's article that I had heard of a recent witch-burning in Mexico and I asked if anyone had any information about it. The following is a letter from Mrs. Doreen Valiente, Basement Flat, 20 Lewes Crescent, Brighton 7, Sussex.

.....Nos. 12 and 13 of "Vagary", and I have been very interested in the data they give about witchcraft; also your own remarkable story of "Camp Crazy".

"I have been interestedⁱⁿ witchcraft and the occult all my life. I have quite a collection of books on the subject, and some objects which have either been used in witchcraft or which are in some way connected with it. I am always looking out for additions to my little collection.

I note that Sandra Hall tells us new covens are being formed at the rate of between three and four a month. This seems a rather startling figure, and I should like to know upon what

information she bases it. The info was obtained from one black and one white magician. R.

"In my time I have met quite a number of people who claimed to be witches. Some of them have been exhibitionists motivated by a burning desire to get their names in the Sunday newspapers; some have been crooks; some perverts of one sort or another; and some have been people who genuinely held to what they believed to be an ancient tradition. There have been very few who fell into the last category, but there have been some.

"Sandra has made one error in the dates of the Great Sabbats. They are Candlemas (February 2nd), May Eve (April 30th), Lammas (August 1st), and Halloween (October 31st). Midsummer Eve, like the Winter Solstice, and the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes, was a Sabbat, but one of the three-monthly Great Sabbats.

"I agree with you, and not with Sandra, about the banning of witchcraft lectures and paperbacks. Firstly down with anything and anybody that wants to stop free speech! Secondly, why pick on paperback editions as the ones to be banned? Why not ban all books on witchcraft, if you are going to ban any? Why shouldn't the ordinary man and woman be entitled to knowledge and discussion, and not merely wealthy people who can afford to amass expensive private libraries?

"Of course, some books on witchcraft have a big element of propaganda, unfortunately. Montague Summers, for instance, wrote propaganda in favour of the Roman Catholic Church; Gerald Gardner, for instance, writes propaganda for his own particular cult. Level-headed and factual writers about witchcraft, like Christina Hole, are rare. However, this situation is not confined to books about witchcraft. It applies to any controversial subject. The intelligent reader has to pick out the facts from the propaganda.

"About the witch-burning in Mexico; the American edition of "Fate" Magazine carried an article by Wally George in August, 1956, headed "Mexican Witch burned in 1955". It stated that a woman called Josephina Arista was publicly burned at the stake on July 3rd, 1955, in Ojinaga, 'a little Mexican border town, 85 miles from Alpine, Texas.'

"According to the story, the local priest ordered her to be burned, the alcalde agreed, and the police gave their co-operation. She was burned in broad daylight, in the town square. Apparently, she had been arrested while performing a witch ceremony in company with six other women. All seven were lodged in the town jail, and the proceedings were apparently entirely ordered by the local priest. There was no pretence of a legal trial. The six other women were ordered to have their heads

shaved, and to be driven out of the town.

"I have been told that, when stories about the witch burning began to leak into America newspapers, the Church transferred the Priest to another district and hushed the matter up. But I have no definite information of the end of the affair.

"On the 9th September, 1956, the Sunday newspaper, "The People" reported that in the little village of Aliajayucan, Mexico, two women accused of being witches had been hacked to pieces and their bodies burned on a bonfire by an excited mob. Apparently, however, the mob had had sufficient mercy, unlike Holy Church, to beat its victims to death with sticks and stones first. "Forty of the villagers were in jail yesterday", said the newspaper report, so apparently they had jumped the gun and done it without the padre's permission.

"I note your comment about the 'shop in Los Angeles which caters for witchcraft'. I have a cutting about a shop of this kind in San Francisco, run by a man called Roy Heist. Could this be the same one? Yes, printing L.A. was an error on my part. R/ The cutting states 'Most of his customers are sophisticated people from Los Angeles.'

"I've been very intrigued by what Leslie has told me about the Witchcraft Museum at Bourton-on-the-Water, and I've been told that the Museum contains samples of ritual objects from an organisation called "The Temples of the Tanats", or "The People of Troy", which exists in the West Country, and is said to meet at the "Moon Pool of Tanat", near a place called Temple on Bodmin Moor. Is this Dozmary Pool? I have heard of this place before as being connected with witchcraft.

'Tanat, or Tanith, was the Moon Goddess of the Phoenicians, who certainly traded with Ancient Britain. In fact, "Tanat" is the old name of the Isle of Thanet, in Kent. According to Dr. L.A. Waddell, who published a book about the Phoenicians in Britain in 1924, the old legend about Brutus landing at Totnes, Devon, after the fall of Troy, and bringing Trojan civilisation to Britain, may be true. Furthermore, he believes that Brutus and his followers were Phoenicians. Hence, I suppose, the title of "The People of Troy."

Doreen Valiente.

Well, there it is, and I think members will find Doreen's letter as interesting as I did. To start at the end, some years ago, I wrote an article for a children's magazine about the landing of Brut and his Trojans in this country and if members are interested I can run it in a later Vagary, as there certainly isn't room to put it in this one. I had never heard

Dozmary Pool until I received Doreen's letter. Has any member any information on this place at all?

To say that I was appalled at the report of the witchburning in Mexico would be an understatement. The "witch" may or may not have been an enemy of Christianity, but the priest most certainly was. It is this sort of action that is causing many people to give up Christianity in disgust. Besides, it isn't Christianity. That terrible, wrathful, jealous, vengeful and unforgiving God of the Old Testament said "thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (or was it that dotty King Saul?), but I do not remember reading anywhere that Christ said it. He threw away his life for nothing. Fortunately, something spiritual is stirring and I don't think it will be long before these cruel fanatics have had their day, though they will be more fortunate than their victims as the next "religion" to come along won't condemn them to be burned alive. In case any members are wondering if I've gone all mystic I'd better explain that I have been several times to one of the two "enchanted" spots in these islands and it is here that I think a new and a kinder religion than any we have had yet ^{will start}. There is an air of "getting ready" about the place, but I doubt if the time will be in our own lifetime. This place, where time seems to stand still, deserves more than a passing comment in Talking Point and one day I hope to write more fully about this spell binding district. Once we called it Avalon.

Anyway, my thanks to Doreen for a most interesting letter, and if any members want to comment on it, I am sure she will be most interested in receiving a copy of your magazine.

And now a few comments on the little Wray of moonshine who had the crust to write the letter to Norman Metcalf which he published in UL 3.

We were so astonished at the utter crust of this chap Wray that Bill and I decided to do a little digging about. From one of our reliable sources of information we learned that one of the Sunday newspapers, the "Empire News" (now folded) ran an article on him on Aug. 7th, 1960. Here follows some extracts from the article by John Burney, which is headed "Don't Fall For These Pennies from Heaven."

"The 'Reverend' William Wray is a dogooder with a mission in life. Armed with a certificate that he claims conferred upon him the right to call himself 'Reverend' - gained after only two postal courses with an obscure American ministerial association - and a fantastic piece of nonsense he calls a "course on Money Success from Metaphysics" he is out to cleanse the poor of their sins and teach them how to "attract" money through prayer.

For £1 (or \$3) this master of metaphysical mysticism will supply you with two typewritten sheets (4 pp) of sanctimonious which, he says if accepted and believed will assure "money success". He is equally convince that one he really gets going it will also spell big money success for the "Reverend" W. Wray.

'Pverty' says the introduction to the course 'is a curse'. 'The sufferer must realise that he has a deficit in God's Bank of Justice and must do all he can to put an abundance of credit (good deeds, words and thoughts) into his cosmic account.'

'Place a saucer before you, holding a coin in your hand, saying "You are circular in nature and are the universe. To you I give generously without thought of recompense." Cast coin in saucer and say to God: 'That which I have given freely will return to me manifold as is the Will of God.' Place saucer in a safe place with its contents and remove coins next day.

Maybe I am not so illogical as I thought, as it seems logical to me that one is placing money in the saucer with thought of recompense. R

Or one could write on a piece of paper that one is suffering from great poverty and financial distress and then throw the paper in the fire, afterwards saying to God 'I thank thee that my distress has left me for ever. Amen.' As the paper is consumed so is one's sorrow. This is an old African method of repelling undesirable circumstances.

Or you could place an apple green light in your room and inhale the vibrations for half hour periods. Or meditate and imagine a powerful green and golden ray round you. Alternatively one can imagine the same sort of ray entering one's nut from above. This is supposed to be Ray of Abundance and plenty.

Burney pointed out to Wray that though the course is headed as written and published by the Reverend Wray, it omits to mention that he is a telephonist of the Gas Board. (Gas Board? Gas? Well now, I come to think of it...R.) Wray replied that most people are inclined to take more notice of a reverend - and anyway, he has his certificates. He continued that he has a mission to bring these teachings to the people. The mere fact that his home circumstances do not permit him to do these things himself does not mean that they are wrong. Under more questioning by Burney he admitted he had been pretty broke, and though he had not earned a lot of money he believed he would eventually. Burney pressed to him to explain why he did not have a go at the course himself and finally he admitted that he had done so, but had had little success, protesting that he had not got much opportunity in such a small house.

Burney: 'I bluntly challenged him: "Do you mean to tell me that you believe any of this?" He mumbled, "Some people who have not much faith might call it mumbo-jumbo. But anyway, I

I don't believe it can do much harm."

Burney: If you are left in any doubt about the "Rev." Wray's good intentions, let me tell you how he plans to spend your money if he can get hold of it. After assuring me it would go to several causes he had in mind, he admitted, under questioning, that good cause No. 1 would be to provide a nice new home for Mr. Wray and his family. Good cause No. 2 is to finance Mr. Wray and establish a fat banking account in his name. Way behind is good cause No. 3. To help and expand and start a local group of the Universal Harmony Foundations, who supplied him with his certificate as a "Reverend". Although he hastened to explain that the methods in his course are not necessarily those of the foundation. They are, in fact, purely the invention of the "Reverend" William Wray.

Still Burney: Finally, he had the cheek to suggest that the newspaper help the cause by buying 50 or 100 of the \$1 courses and distributing them among the readers. There is a much more worthy cause deserving of our support. It is to let the public know just ^{what} Mr. Wray is up to before any more innocents are kidded into parting with hard earned cash on the empty promise of having their pockets filled with Mr. Wray's pennies from heaven."

That was the gist of the article in the newspaper. After studying this and the letter reprinted in UL 3, we decided to try our own hand at the game and Bill concocted the following letter:

Accommodation address on the Physical plane only.
True address available to Initiates alone.

Address

To the Rev. William Wray,
of the Universal Harmony Foundation, U.S.A.

Dear Reverend,

Having read your letter in UL 3, we would be interested to learn of what your Foundation consists.

Unfortunately, it is strictly forbidden by our own religious principles to subscribe even a single cent towards other Groups than our own, and therefore we deeply regret that we are not in a position to assist you financially in any way. We are willing, however, to accept as a free gift whatever literature you have to offer concerning your dynamic, simple system.

We have every confidence that if your system really works, you yourself will now have gained the Happiness, Success and Abundance promised to others, and therefore in a position to dispense it to those like us, still suffering from poverty, failure and misery.

We feel that you'll readily help those less fortunate than yourself, and wish you all success in your charitable works.

For an on behalf of the Metacarpian Group.

Bill signed the letter as "Ivar Hand", Pronator. No doubt Ethel Lindsay and Dick Eney are chuckling already, but for the benefit of other beside myself who may not know what it all means I'd better explain. Metacarpian concerns the long bones of the hand and pronator is the muscle which turns the hand out flat.

Now re-read the letter we sent and ask yourself if anyone could possibly fall for it. All it proved was my theory that many people who rely on the credulity of others are inclined to be credulous themselves. Wray fell for it, hook line and pronator. Almost by return we received a reply from him, written on the back of our own letter, and enclosing a free copy of his course. The letter ran:

Dear Friend,

Enclosed, please find your request granted.

If you can spare, in any condition, courses, books etc. of your own group, I would be pleased for same.

Should you wish to give me Hon. Membership of same group, and send me a Membership Certificate for same, I will gladly display same here on my wall, and thereby doubtless attract local attention in same.

Please tell me a little more when you have time, on how you heard of me, my document, and my connection with U.H. Foundation .. the document has no connection with U.H.F. and is entirely my private publication. Fraternally yours, William Wray.

P.S. If you give any numerology, Astrology or past life data from the following I would be pleased for same.

His birth data followed. I have read the course and it seems to me to be a mishmash of Christian requests (always give a tithe of what you receive to a good cause) and muddled mysticism. Bill read it and said it was harmless - and useless. However, since he had asked for astrological data we sent it. Among the books Bill had from his mother were several on astrology, including one on how to cast a nativity. Now this is the curious thing - if one judges on the letter sent to Norman Metcalf, the article in the newspaper, Wray's course, and the letter we received from him, the star map cast for him was surprisingly accurate. Anyway we forwarded the map, with astrological comments. Bill wondered what his reaction would be. My reply was that he would have the crust to send starmaps for readings for his whole family. And, dammit, he did! However, the following is the letter we sent to him with the star reading. Note the name by which Bill signed this one.

"Accommodation Physical Plane only

Dear Mr. Wray,

Your "Course", and letter on reverse of our previous communication with you has been passed to me by our Pronator, Bro Hand, for perusal and comments. Few, I think, are called for.

Specific prayers for money are forbidden within our Group, as also are charitable appeals except insofar as exigencies may direct.

Our Astrological Technician has cast and made brief comments on your Natal Map, which I have the pleasure of enclosing as a courtesy return for your own information. We hope it may prove helpful to you.

We regret that no information about our Group is authorised for distribution at present. There is no such thing as Honorary Membership, nor Certificates of any form. Members are not sought, nor can any money buy initiation, which is earned by service alone.

We thank you for your leaflet, which will in due course be filed in our Archives after psionic analysis. It is regretted that we do not supply study courses, or tuition.

Should any future points arise from our contact, you will doubtless be communicated with.

For and on behalf of the Metacarpian Group.

S.F. Reeder.

MAGISTER Templi in Mundi.

As I said, we received a stamped addressed envelope and the starmaps for his whole ruddy family. The letter to us was addressed for the attention of the "Astrological Technician". A part of the letter is reproduced below.

c/o S.F. Reeder,
Magister: Templi in Mundi, etc.

Dear Friend,

Thank you very much for your recent Astrological Chart on my own birth-data which I value quite a lot...from its layout, etc. I can tell you are well versed in the ancient art.

I am now to ask you for a further service...or I should say services. When my next child is born, I would like you to cast it a little Chart from the data I will supply later...

For an immediate request, I enclose two actual Charts made out some time ago by a friend in Scotland who could not interpret them for reasons stated.

I have been unable to get any-else of much experience to do so since, and trust you will oblige. [Here followed requests for a reading of his wife's chart and the marriage chart.R/

In return for these personal favours, I enclose a list of books etc. I am selling..you can have up to about £1.10s.0d. of these if you comply with the above requests within a few weeks. I think you will find them of great interest in your own studies ..your friends likewise. Return the list when you have finished with it, and you can have the books etc. when I receive the Charts.

Fraternally Yours. William Wray.

That is part of the letter we received and I have no doubt that members have noticed the last sentence as much as I did.

As for the books - my knowledge of the occult is very scanty, but even I knew that no genuine occultist would waste any time on them. I give one or two titles below.

"The Coiled Serpent". Van Fleet. All about sexual fluid etc.
 "The Fire of Wisdom" by a reincarnation of the Virgin Mary.
 "Messages from Jesus and other Celestials". Over 500 pp of rare messages from spirits..Jesus, Apostles, Socrates, Paine, etc.
 "Bumper Mixed Packs" of varied occult, religious, mystical and Mail Order magazines, lectures "coursettes", unusual advertisements and contact offerers. Try your luck with one of these, add new interest to life thereby! The true seeker will find luck with one of these, and add new interests and contacts via these to justify the outlay. "

You see what I mean?

By this time we decided the legpull had gone far enough and although we weren't in the least interested in the books, Bill did the starmap comments for the two children. Since the other reading had turned out so surprisingly accurate, after looking at the other maps we decided they were best left alone. However, we did the starmaps for the two kids and sent a purported extract from the Astrological Technicians report, with a covering letter. This time I signed the letter.

"Extract from AT/872/Tem. Ast. Technician's report.

So far as your enclosure from Wray is concerned, little can be done. As you know, I am not supposed under our Rule (Sec A.17b) to do any outside work whatever. When I cast the Map for the birthtime of this individual you sent recently, I had wrongly assumed that the information was needed purely for Group purposes. While it is occasionally permissible to do such work for personal friends of Officers, it is to be always understood that such is not communicated from official sources. Was authority obtained from Ipsissimus? This is a matter for the Grand Council, from which I presume you had Warrant, though no intimation of such was sent to me. Please check carefully before any further letters are sent in that direction. "

The children's star readings followed. Below is our letter.

Dear Mr. Wray,

Your requests for Astrological readings have been duly noted. I am instructed to return these to you together with a copied extract from a communication by our Astrological Technician. Authority has not been given for further readings and it is hoped that what has been done on your behalf will be of service to you. We would recommend that you get in further touch with your friend who set up the Natal Maps.

We would point out that the list of books you enclosed are worthless from any genuine Esoteric viewpoint, though doubtless of interest or amusement to the uninstructed. Literary toys are

pleasant playthings, and we do not grudge them their rightful place among the children of the Path.

While thanking you for the information about yourself which we requested, it is felt that at this present time no further correspondence would serve a useful purpose.

For and on behalf of the Metacarpian Group.

Copy to G.L.I.

I
M.T. A. Rec.

pp I. Hand PRONATOR

V.A. Gary
Amenuensis 3

When Bill handed me the letter I said "Who's this lot that the copies are for?" "I haven't the faintest idea," he replied.

And that is the end of our correspondence with William Wray! Or is it?

Since I started this issue, three postmailings have come in, but as it is getting nearer and nearer the deadline, I am not going to do any separate comments on them. The first one was "Blush" (I just knew I'd forget to vote until it was too late. This, of course, is the egoboo poll, about which I already have some remarks in the mailing comments.

Firstly, if this is supposed to be for 1960 I shouldn't have been in so many categories or so high. Secondly, it is about three years since I have written any poetry in Vagary. Thirdly, since I have never written any fiction for Vagary I don't know how I got into that category. Fourthly, I am no artist - the illos which appeared in the 1960 Vagary (and that was the only one I put in last year) were done by Pat Ellington and the credit should have gone to her, so I suggest that the two points given me should be transferred to Pat's score. Lastly, since I only had one zine in the mailing in 1960, I should not have been placed so high in the cumulative results. However, in that zine I said I would try to get more in this year and I have managed two mailings on the trot. But if you lot think I can manage a mailing every time with a zine the size of this present issue, I can't. In fact, I am not even going to promise to be in the December mailing, but I'll try. I've been working on this present magazine since 26th June and it is now 7th August, but owing to certain circumstances, I did stop working on it for a while.

Before I forget, I did like the way "Blush" was laid out and many thanks to Bob Lichtman and Bill Donaho for the hard work they put in. I see that some members have commented for the lack of interest which overtook Ompan and seem to think it is mainly due to lack of mailing comments. I have already stated elsewhere that my own theory was that we nearly strangled ourselves with fannish red tape. I do believe, however, that mailing comments,

or reviews - and there is a difference - should be a part of everyone's magazine, but not all of it. My own method is to draft out comments on each magazine, then take various paras and weld them into "Talking Point", if I think the subject matter may interest the majority of Ompans. I do this because I suspect that some members read what is said about their own magazine and skip the rest of the comments. I am sorry that I was unable to do so with this issue, but I just didn't have time.

Now the other postmailing "Space Charge" 1 and 2. I see Alan Lewis is only eighteen, so I'll put ~~down~~ ^{down} one or two of his remarks down to hot-headed youth and thoughtlessness. By this, I do not mean that his zines are bad. They are not and Alan has been honest enough to point out where he has contradicted himself. But he makes two accusations in S.C. No. 2. One concerns post-mailings in which he says that some postmailings have not been received by members. That has happened to me on more than one occasion, but I have put it down to the modern inefficiency that is even creeping into the Post Office or a genuine lapse of memory on the postmailer's part. Too, one member may have moved and not yet notified anyone, with the result that their mail never caught up with them. But Alan has practically accused Dick Ellington of cheating and that some other members may have been guilty of cheating, too. I only know Dick Ellington through his magazines and my opinion is that Dick is too forthright to even know how to start cheating. Nor do I think any of the other post mailers have cheated and I think they might appreciate it if Alan withdrew that remark. This is one of the things that can kill an apa stone dead.

The other was his review of Back Your Fancy. Now I have never belonged to an American apa, but presume that they are run on the same lines as the British one and I am not too sure that the U.S apa would care for your remarks on Dick Eney. Let "smear" campaigns stay where they belong - in professional politics - though they shouldn't be there, either, but when ambition runs riot what else can one expect? Perhaps it never occurred to Alan that N3F has changed from what it was. How did he know that Eney never made a promise that when N3F changed he'd rejoin it. How does Alan know that some of the Neffers won't vote for Ellik, anyway? Sure, everyone is entitled to their opinions, but to accuse a man of being a backstabber just to rob him of a few votes to my mind is nothing but a smear campaign. Did Alan know that that sort of thing was one of the reasons which nearly killed OMPA? And does he want it to start all over again, just as the Association seems to be stirring itself towards better things? I had already cast my vote for Eney when this postmailing arrived, but if I were still trying to make up my mind who to vote for, after reading Space Charge I would have instantly voted for Eney. Believing in fair play, it would have been my own attempt to balance the scales again. Anyway, talking from personal experience, would a back stabber offer to scatter the ashes of an unknown woman for a couple of people he had never seen. Because, you see, that's what Dick offered to do when my mother-in-law died

recently. Incidentally, I voted for Dick long before this. But all this should not be construed as a personal attack on Alan. I have pointed out that in my opinion he used the wrong tactics to get votes. He has every right to vote for Ron Ellik, but he would have done more good by enumerating all Ron's good points instead of attacking the other candidate. So for God's sake let us keep "smear" campaigning out of Taff, huh?

THIS AND THAT - Cont'd from page 2.

and proved that, with the right producer, he could act.

We have had another trip to Stratford since that terribly produced "Hamlet", this time to see "Richard III". Christopher Plummer, the Canadian actor, took the name part, and he thoroughly deserved the tremendous ovation he received at the end. It was a magnificent performance. But, as usual, I have a quibble. The whole play was extremely well acted, but the scenery and costuming was terrible. In fact, the scenery was almost non-existent and the costumes looked as though they had been bought in a hurry at an old-clothes shop. During the last part of "Richard III", there was nothing but the huge, bare octagonal stage, not even a crummy little tree with a notice saying "This is Bosworth Field." Frankly, I'm fed up with this modern "gimmick" idea and I think it's about time the directors at Stratford got it into their thick skulls that when people come from all over the world to the Memorial Theatre they expect to see a well staged play. And it's no good the purists telling me that Shakespeare didn't have any scenery and his plays are being staged as they would have been in his own day. If Shakespeare had had our modern facilities he'd have written plays round the scenery. People are apt to forget that Shakespeare set out to entertain and not to educate.

I am also getting fed-up with plays and novels about sleazy, idle, foul-mouthed jerks who think the world owes them a living. Noel Coward has made some forthright remarks about this trend and a modern playwright has replied that Coward had "the last of the wine." Maybe he did, but is that any reason for throwing the dregs in the public's face? Mind you, a deep psychological reason has occurred to me to explain this sudden upsurge (or should I say downsurge?) of lavatory literature. Maybe it's because the people nowadays just can't take their minds off chain reaction.

Bobbie.

If undelivered return to:

Roberta Gray,
14 Bennington Street,
Cheltenham, Glos.
England.

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