

AMBLE 8

(EVERY ISSUE MORE IDENTICAL)

30th OMPA MAILING

Perpetrated by ARCHIE MERCER of 434/4 Newark Road, North Hykeham, Lincoln, England. (E&OE) Emanating from within the Caravan in the Shadow of the Malleable Ironworks. Yngvi is a Louse. A MERCATORIAL PUBLICATION

Starting (or possibly only commencing) with the regular lead-off department, to wit

THE SHAMBLES

reviewing the 29th Mailing and whatever else is to hand since last time.

BLUSH! (Bill Donaho)

A more eloquent argument against popularity-polls in OMPA (for assorted reasons) would be hard to imagine. Anything

I said on the subject now would be only supererogatory. Donaho has done it far better than I ever could.

SPACE CHARGE 1-3 (Alan J. Lewis)

Al, you are hereby forgiven for OMPALOG.

THIS is the sort of thing I'd been waiting for. Personal stuff and mailing reviews and not unlike that. I feel I sort of know you now - my inner reaction to OMPALOG was that I didn't particularly WANT to, so you have Made Good with a vengeance.

One thing that I'm not exactly 100% pleased with is your mention of Eney and the N3F in No 2. Bobbie's already picked you up on this I'm glad to say - though I had already seen the item elsewhere as a matter of fact. Has it perhaps not occurred to you that voting for a candidate just because he happens to be a member of a given society is an utterly fuggheaded thing to do in the first place? And by joining the N3F himself, Eney has perhaps stopped a number of enthusiastic neoes from doing something for a reason that in maturer life they'll realise was fugg-headed. This is not to say that Ellick doesn't deserve plenty of votes - though as you probably all know I'm an Eney supporter - but NEITHER OF THEM deserve votes for no better reason than that they happen to belong to some given society or other.

Slan - the first time I read this story was in the SS/TWS (whichever it was) reprint, and I found it about as good as tradition said. But three months ago or so I re-read it (in pocketbook this time) and found it did not come up to what I'd remembered, you'll be interested to learn. The same applied to the Green Millennium, the Currents of Space, and possibly something else I forget. On the other hand, the Green Odyssey, Search the Sky, and Fowler Wright's Deluge/Dawn binary all passed re-reading with flying colours.

CHECKLISTS (Brian Burgess)

Looking at this just now prior to reviewing it, I've only just noticed that it gives Aldiss's and Rayer's stories as well as Tubb's, to which extent the format is misleading. But to anybody who wonders whether, for instance, Brian Aldiss has ever written a story whose title begins with a Z, these checklists will obviously be invaluable. Thanks, Brian.

OFF TRAILS September 1961 (Bruce Burn as Official Learner)

It doesn't actually seem to SAY any-

where, but reading between the lines one is led to suppose this to be the OO accompanying the 29th Mailing. Certainly plenty of good red meat in it, anyway, without much in the way of wobbly jelly. Which is a Good Thing.

As usual, I'm sorry about the leavers, and I hope I'll be equally sorry when and if their replacements ever leave.

CONVERSATION 13 (Lynn Hickman)

The thing about this issue that obscures the rest of it of course is the bit that's been blanked out. If my x-ray vision discerns aright, I wouldn't have bothered personally, but still. Otherwise, the "we did our very best" article is an amusing bit of rhetoric as full of holes as a leaky sieve and the Duplantier artwork is pretty fabulous.

HUNGRY 4 (Alan Rispin)

Messy cover, ignore it. I was really interested to see what gave with this "Parrallism" that Laurence Sandfield wrote about, and was ever so disappointed that it turned out to be only a Risprint for "Parallellism". The trouble with LS, though, is that about half the articles he writes are this one, which is a pity because it's well worth writing once. Bruce Kidd's piece amused me for no reason that I can put my thumb on, and I particularly enjoyed the "Son of Neditorial". I don't like flatbeds either, but I use mine at least once every year just to keep my hand in like.

WALDO 3 (Eric Bentcliffe)

The holiday report was agreeable, the remainder of at least some interest, and the whole fabulously produced.

JETSTREAM 2 (Jhim Linwood)

According to my information, Davy Crockett surrendered when the fort had been over-run, and was one of those slaughtered in cold blood.

ERG 9 (Terry Jeeves)

This, except for the last two sheets, has been passed unread to the Secretary of the Lincoln Astronomical Society who has more use for it than me. I'll say here though that it LOOKED very well presented.

ZOUNDS! 5 (Bob Lichtman)

My ideal newspaper would be no larger (in paper-size that is) than American quarto. No item would be carried forward to another page unless it ran out at the bottom right-hand corner, in which case it would be permitted to continue on the top left-hand corner of the page immediately following. Sport (including such marginal matters as chess, agricultural-show prizes etc) would be rigorously segregated into a (preferably) detachable section. The front page would be devoted to the principal news item(s) with the leader-page following as hard as possible on the heels thereof. Items mentioned in leading articles should be dealt with in the news columns somewhere. (Sounds such a silly point to make, this one, but I make it from experience).

Re the "ZOUNDS!/WATLING STREET Fan Poll". 1. If I was offered a tax-free income of 1000 tax-free dollars^{per month} (or, let's suppose, the sterling equivalent), I'm not at all sure whether I'd accept or not. I suppose I would in the long run, but either having or refusing such an income would cause me much embarrassment. I'd far sooner not be given the opportunity. I imagine I'd engage in activity that was at least culturally beneficial to society, though I'm not quite sure what. Though doubtless I'd be deluged with interesting enough offers if it came to the point.

2. In the event of a nuclear war, whether I wished to survive or not would depend on how uncomfortable life would be afterwards. And in what way. I don't think I'd mind lack of mod. con. so much, but if it meant being permanently diseased or like that I wouldn't be so keen on it.

Anyway, a good meaty zine this, I wish all OMPresidents would do as much during their terms of office.

VAGARY 14 (Bobbie Gray)

I think quite a number of people will be disappointed that the "Camp Crazy" story didn't end on a more dramatic note, either clearing everything up according to known scientific law or really going to town in the other direction. Myself, I wasn't really expecting anything more than I was given, so I'm at least satisfied if not actually more than just that. I'd like to see some other people's comments on the whole saga though, and wish I felt capable of going into the matter at greater length myself - it deserves it.

Technically, I missed a complete Mailing, postmailings and all. The absolute dearth of egoboo in the ensuing Mailing had to be experienced to be believed.

Which Tom Lehrer LP was recorded in London? I heard somebody say (well, saw somebody write then) something to the effect that part of the second one had been recorded in Australia - my impression had previously been that it was all 100% American content.

The Sunday Times, I presume you realise, has no connection with The Times proper.

The Oscar Wilde book does indeed contain a story entitled "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.", which is not much more than a thinly fictionalised article identifying the mysterious Mr W.H. with one Willie Hughes, a boy-actor of the period. According to the credits, the story had never been previously reprinted in this country since its original magazine appearance in 1889, so you can be excused for being somewhat off the beam about it. The other stories in the book, by the way, are Lord Arthur Savile's Crime, The Canterville Ghost, The Sphinx Without a Secret, and The Model Millionaire. The first is a sort of fantasy, the two last-named are both very short anecdotes.

I've already written ^{in a letter} about the "English Folk Heroes" and "The Living Stones". The first, by Christina Hole, was published by Batsford, and the second, by Ithell Colquhoun (female), by Peter Owen.

The "Wray" lowdown was utterly hilarious, and the remainder was also (as always) of much interest.

ENVOY 1 (Dick Schultz)

Pity there isn't something substantial for the front cover to be a front cover to, I rather like it.

OPHIDIAN 1 (Chuck Hansen)

I'm in something of a quandary about this. From what you say about yourself, Chuck, we have much in common - and also much out of it. For instance, and in particular, we differ in our attitudes to animals. I like animals, but I could never stomach living with laboratory animals. And it would be interesting to/a defence of fur-ranching apart from the obvious one of financial convenience. But all in all, this is of considerably more interest than are most six-page zines.

MORPH 24 (John Roles)

Welcome, WELCOME, WELCOME back John.

The cover's good but repulsive - that is one nude that fails to raise the Mercatorial blood-pressure. "Eye Balls" is the most interesting content, probably because it's the only content at any length. The whole is of interest though, and I hope now we'll be seeing a lot of it again.

THE WALL Ep. 3 (Jim Groves)

That cover-stock's sensational. I realise you didn't actually do anything towards the design yourself (apart from the superimposed lettering of course) but you deserve some sort of Special Award for getting the idea of using the stuff nevertheless.

SCOTTISHE 25 (Ethel Lindsay)

I wouldn't know about the TIMES's policies at the time of Suez, the NEWS CHRONICLE (which was agin' it) was still alive in those days. And I'm not sure which candidate it favours for TAFF. But it supports the Winds of Change, and even tends to oppose Katangan separatism on the grounds that it's Belgian-inspired.

Your somewhat-longer-than-usual Mailing comments approved.

You forgot Norman Shorrocks, PMG.

Just as a point of interest, my own Mailing comments seem rapidly to be turning into a sort of conversation-piece between me and the people who comment on AMBLE. What happens is that I look rapidly through each zine in the SHAMBLES pile trying to spot jumping-off points, then read the review of AMBLE (if any) in full. The latter usually provides more than the former. I'm probably not paying enough attention. The Willis and Lindsay autobiographies continue to enthrall, Masher Varley is as machiavellian as ever, and not unlike that.

paraFANalia 8 (Bruce Burn)

Well, quite frankly, I'm glad I did miss the play at the Ixicon - I'd have been no end embarrassed by being unable to laugh in most of the proper places. Oh, it has its points, the theme is more or less valid, "The Lady is a Fan" is a Good Parody (t'other one suffers from my never having heard of "Poetry in Motion" whatever that may be), but overall it seems to be utterly pointless and the switch at the end doesn't seem to come naturally somehow. The Wandering Ghu made up for the shortcomings of the play, though.

UNICORN 3 (George Spencer)

Re "Maryland My Maryland", it occurs to me that you may be thinking of the words rather than the tune. Personally, apart from "Maryland" twice and "my" once, I have no idea of the "Maryland" words, and I'm pretty sure that about ninety-nine out of ten other jazz fans in this country are similarly situated. It's the tune that gets played (without words), and is among the favourites referred to. The tune is also known as the tune for The Red Flag, a German christmas-carol Der Tannenbaum (which I believe is where it actually originated) and McDonough Let the Trombones Blow. George Bernard Shaw is supposed to have said of it (specifically in the Red Flag context) that it wasn't fit for anything better than to be the Funeral March of a Fried Eel. (That's GBSHaw the playwright, not another bloke of the same name I once knew).

The usual jazz version is arranged as a march, with quite a bit of introductory melodiousness before it gets on to the main tune. As a march, it could perfectly well be played by any military marching band.

These plastic relief maps - would they have the same scale vertically as horizontally? And would they have such things as grid lines, names etc, plastered all over them? Ideally, I should tend to say, they should have these things, but in a special kind of semi-invisible paint that only shows up under certain conditions.

WHATSIT = NO-ONE (Ken Cheslin)

Another one of these time-consuming covers that deserves praise for industry rather than for accomplishment. The contents, though, are meaty forsooth, and were much enjoyed. I hate lots of things too - only I don't LIKE to hate them, in fact I probably hate them worse because they make me hate them when I'd far rather not if you see what

I mean?

Your project for a waiting-list fanzine has to a great extent been overtaken by the relentless onward march of the waiting-list, from whose ranks you have yourself now risen. (Consider yourself welcome and not unlike that while I'm about it, likewise the rest of you that I may have forgotten to mention individually if I had the opportunity). The idea I consider a good one, whether or not the actual publisher is himself a waiting-listener or merely an ex-waiting-listener. Half the average waiting-list these days is chronically unheard-of, this would (provided they collaborated of course) correct that somewhat vague condition.

And Metzger illoes are very good for us, too.

DEPT OF SECOND THOUGHTS.

In the "HUNGRY 4" review above, I mention that I habitually use my flat-bed at least once a year just to keep my hand in. This somewhat ambiguous-looking remark is not, of course, to be construed as meaning that I actually keep my hand in a flatbed. I mean, I've heard of flat feet, but this is ridiculous.

And in the "WHATSIT = NO-ONE" review just now, I had intended to mention that the "drill-sergeant" story on the inside bacover reminded me of the one about the similar type who blandly informed his squad that they were shortly to be given a lecture on "Keats". "You're an ignorant lot," he gratuitously informed them - "I bet there isn't one of you knows what a keat is."

And I'm damned if I can remember what the other thing was, maybe it'll come back to me later.

BLEATHERINGS 26 (Ethel Lindsay)

Curiously enough, your mention that you weren't really trying to decry the "Times" brings it to mind that I wasn't really trying to decry the (Manchester or otherwise) "Guardian", either. Isn't it about time the matter was permitted to rest there or something?

Having had experience of teaching from the pupil's angle, I don't consider myself to be altogether ignorant on the matter, and I imagine lots of others may well think similarly, Ron Bennett or no Ron Bennett. In the same way, having lived my earlier years as part of a family, I claim to know something about married life. Not everything, certainly, but something.

To quickly scottish your argument in your "HUNGRY 4" review, let me just cite Butter-Scottish, Hop-Scottish, Scottish Broth and Scottish Mist. (This is one of my set arguments, I have a vague idea I've mentioned it not so long ago in OMPA). Or to put it another way, why shouldn't a Scot be able to accept "Scotch" as being the Sassennach word for "Scottish"?

Your book-catalogue starts too briefly and tantalisingly, but as you begin to spread yourself it blossoms forth wonderfully. John Roles, it's taken a year or two to warm up, but look at the OMPA-wide movement you've started!

SIZAR 5 (Bruce Burn)

It's a question as to whether it's worth reading ninety-nine cruddy stories to find one worth-while one. I say it isn't - though when it comes to the point I do it anyway. Though not to the extent I once used. And by the time I find the one good one, I'm so jaded that I probably fail to appreciate it fully in any case.

So you've noticed it, have you? There is, I agree, a vague difference in atmosphere between ARCHIVE and AMBLE. It can possibly be put down to my greater maturity, or possibly to my having run out of extravagantly ridiculous ideas, or possibly a bit of both, which are (come to think of it) only aspects of the same thing anyhow. I'm sorry about the fiasco over the sequel to the Search for Eney's Fault. Lars Bourne was the first to offer to run it, so I of course let him.

Then he changed his mind between instalments, and it just sort of fizzled out. (Thank you for spelling ARCHIVE correctly by the way, Bruce).

Sorry, but I don't think "People of the Kitchen" would have been worth reading even if it had been printed normally.

PACK RAT 2 (Jim Groves)

George Locke's piece is Superb, the perfect answer to the question of what to do with Thomson and Berry.

Dolls' houses - toys generally - can well fascinate. Something like my collection of musicians and other things. I just let them stand around on shelves in various groups as whim dictates.

"Freedom includes the freedom to injure yourself if you so wish" - who said it didn't? The deliberate incitement of morbidity in others is something else again.

I grow my beard for Reason No. 1. I must admit to a certain preoccupation with No. 2, but that's an effect, not a cause. No. 3, to me, is the main reason I haven't grown one years ago. I'm not sure about No. 4. Re this mysterious wave of ginger-beard, it does occur to me that most men's hair is artificially darkened by the constant application of daily goo whereas possibly the same man's beard, if he lets it come through, is more its own natural colour. But this doesn't explain why Donaho should have blond hair and a red beard.

The business about the earth's surface is fascinating, more details would be appreciated.

KNELL and BRENNSCHLUSS 5 (Ken Potter)

Only a Little Knell, as is of course appropriate to the demise of a valued

OMPA membership. Thanks for putting it all into the stack Ken, anyway, I'm already thinking up plans for a short letter of comment on the latter item that may well materialise some day.

ROPE OF SAND 1 (Brian Jordan)

But what's wrong with ordinary postage-stamps as currency? They too are not "dated", do not in-

cur any poundage charges, and don't even have to be cashed at a Post Office - they can be used as they are.

This amendment business - I'm not so worried about the first one (the President seems to have powers to adjust things pro tem if it seems needful), (that's on the question of having amendments once a year or four times), the second one needs thinking about (I mean the third one, re appeals), and the fourth one is of course dear to my heart. Then there's the "Great Britain" versus "British Isles" one - have to go into this next time I read the Constitution.

Like in the year 2234, an expedition was sent out to search for the source of the River Jordan, which had somehow got lost during the preceding century. They looked all over, and eventually had to report back empty-handed. Hron Behenneth, the leader of the expedition, happened to be talking to Fernando Peguto about it one day, and Fernando showed signs of interest. "What was the terrain like, Hron?" he asked. "Sand - nothing but sand," replied Behenneth. "Then you were looking in the wrong places," replied Fernando. "Of course you'll never find a river flowing through sand - it'll just soak away. Look for some heavier soil, and there you'll probably find it."

The Second Expedition, mounted the following year, found the source without any difficulty at all. Much praise accrued to Fernando Peguto, and next time they met, Behenneth asked him how he'd known where to look. "Oh, well obviously you wouldn't find it in the sand," Fernando told him. "To find Jordan, you had to look for a sign of the neighbouring loam."

OH DID HE not ramble - - - stylish, but hardly colloquial enough, it's got to be

OH DIDN'T HE RAMBLE

THE COLUMN WHERE ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN BUT SELDOM IF EVER DOES

OUTLINE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY It seems to be quite The Thing these days for newly-joined, and even oldly-joined, members to come forward with an account of themselves and their potted life history. For various and sundry reasons, I have never yet done this in so many words. But every other OMPA-zine one sees seems to contain somebody's life, and I've recently started thinking seriously on the subject. My life to date seems to fall naturally into three parts and an introduction. This is the introduction, in case you were wondering.

So far as I'm aware, I'm no relation to Johnny Mercer. Nor to Manny Mercer or Joe Mercer (well-known footballer and jockey, or possibly vice mercer), nor to the founder of F.L. Mercer & Co the estate agents, nor yet to Dornford Yates. In fact, the only relation of mine that I know of who has achieved anything approaching fame in comparatively recent times is the bloke who commanded Mercer's Battery at Waterloo. The event, at which the Battery distinguished itself somewhatly, was written up at fair length in a book called "Deeds that Won the Empire" which my father won as a school prize. A certain Colonel Seccombe, R.A. (whether the initials are supposed to designate "Royal Artillery" or "Royal Academy" is uncertain in the context) ~~did a painting~~ of the Battery in action, showing the carnage in the foreground, and black-and-white framed prints of it hang on both my father's and my brother's walls. I rather like it as a matter of fact, though I wouldn't care to be personally involved in the action.

That was the introduction. Now for

PART ONE: Contrary to all the best reminiscive authorities, I do not by any
MERCER means look back on my childhood as the happiest period of my life.
THE BOY I've had plenty of happy times in my time of course, but I just sort
of accepted them as my right and let it go at that, whereas the less
happy times seem to stick easier in my memory. I'm not, generally speaking, even
particularly proud of my childhood. Two things, however, I do remember with particular pride. One hot summer - I must have been seven or so - my mother used to take me frequently to the local swimming-bath. I was reading the sort of brochure affair that this joint issued one day and I came to a ruling that negroes were not allowed in the bath. Not unnaturally, I asked my mother about this, and she answered to the best of her ability to the effect that some people didn't like mixing with negroes. I couldn't see this - they were all people, weren't they, and presumably a negro was just as likely to faunch for a swim as a white person was. In fact for years afterwards I had a sort of mental picture of these unfortunate negroes being denied my birthright of a nice cooling swim.

As a matter of fact it was all entirelyly hypothetical, because coloured people were very few and far between in those days. To see a black man was just as big an Event as to see a Lord would be, and I doubt if there was a single coloured person in the entire district. But hypothetical injustice annoys me at least as much as does real injustice.

The other matter dates from some years later. When I used to say my nightly prayers, I can remember including the family dog (a small Sealyham bitch with a bad

temper) in the "bless-list" as a matter of course. It didn't occur to me to do anything else.

I was born (to set the chronology straight) in 1925, in an ancient swine-pasture on the Weald of Kent. I had no particular ancestral connection with the district, nor any other part of Kent (nor anywhere else in particular come to that - my relations were scattered at large over the south of England and more far-flung parts of the globe). But I had to be born somewhere, and as my parents happened both to be living there at the time, it got the vote. I inherited both my given names from my mother's brother, who had been killed in the first world war, and on the anniversary of whose death I had been misguided enough to be born. Otherwise, so they tell me, I would have been Anthony - Tony to you. But in the circumstances I never had a chance - Archibald Henry I have been ever since.

We stayed in the swine-pasture for a year or two after my birth, and then we moved - the first of a succession of a dozen or so moves I experienced during my first eighteen years. There were several reasons - sometimes my father was looking for work, and we all moved together, sometimes he got work somewhere else and we followed, sometimes he was moved around within the job he held at the time. The homes we inhabited ranged from a railway-carriage at Shoreham-by-Sea to what I remember vaguely as a fairly large house in rural Surrey, but the typical family home can be regarded as a (probably) semi-detached on a suburban housing estate. No particular suburb of no particular southern town, but a conglomerate of them all. We never spent more than about three years in the same place before moving on, often much less.

When I was four, my brother was born. In those days we had a wonderful old dog - a large male Sealyham - called David, or "Tumps" for short. He died under rather tragic circumstances. My grandmother was staying with us at the time, and she apparently didn't approve of dogs in the living-room, so although he was old and not very well, he was banished to the cold hall. This was not very good for him, and by the time my grandmother had either gone or been overruled (I wasn't told the full story till much later, and was far too young then to remember the proper sequence for myself) it was too late. They sat up over him all night, coddling him, preventing him from creeping away to a corner to die by himself. (I call this cruelty, but sentiment can be cruel too). Then he was buried in the garden, and we were all very sad.

When I was six, I started school. The classroom was lined with wall-bars, which fascinated me, and every time the teacher turned her back I was up them. This habit proving apparently ineradicable, my parents were asked (as the euphemism has it) to remove me. They did, to another school nearby. I forget just what I did this time, but the same thing happened there too - only the family doctor, who lived next door or nearly, interceded on my behalf and I was allowed to return. I survived this time, and when presently we moved away from the district I stayed on as a boarder. Shortly afterwards my brother joined me, also as a boarder, thus starting school as a boarder at the age of four. This was the only time we've ever been together at the same school at the same time. There are things to be said both for and against this in principle, I've never entirely decided whether in the long run it was a Good Thing or not.

This school (mainly a day-school) took boys up to the age of nine or ten, and girls up to fourteen (which was the minimum school-leaving age in those days). Actually most of the pupils were girls even in the lower forms (to me at that age,

this was not necessarily appreciated, and in fact though I was soon the oldest boy there, I preferred the company of the other younger boys to that of girls my own age. There were two other boarders besides myself and my brother, a rather older girl and a girl about my age, the latter of whom went home for week-ends. On the whole, I'd tend to say that I have happier memories of that school than of any I've been to since.

Shortly before my tenth birthday I was transferred to a boys' boarding school, the first of several such. My brother left at the same time, and for the next few years went to local day-schools wherever we lived. My own life was complicated by the fact that my boarding-schools, like my home, kept getting the wanderlust and moving on to some other location. I was two terms at the first one, in two different places, eight at the next (in one place but different locations), and nearly six years (though at opposite ends of England owing to wartime evacuation) at the last. I never took kindly to the regimented life of a boarding-school. Also, it was my constant bane that whenever we moved home it would be during term-time, so that my brother got all the fun and I didn't. Furthermore, his birthday always occurred during the holidays and mine never did. On the other hand, at the six-year school my holidays were always longer than his, sometimes by as much as a week at either end, but as I didn't consider myself to be really on holiday until he was too, even this was only a negative advantage.

The extent to which my chopped-up education retarded me is problematical. I know for a fact that when I first went to the six-year school I was near the bottom of the class, and when I left it I was near the top. And it's afforded (in reminiscence) some amusing incidents, such as the time I didn't know how to subtract (my previous school had taught taking-away instead), and the time I could only answer an exam-question on the feudal system (of which I'm sure I'd never heard) by postulating that it meant everybody feuding with everybody else. But on the whole, I think my main subject to suffer was languages. I started with French, then at the eight-term school did German instead, and was just beginning to get a sort of feeling for the language when I moved to another school and back to French again. As a result, I'm incompetent in both languages. Which of course is entirely my fault, as having spent a year or so each in Brussels and Hamburg I could have if I'd wanted become pretty proficient in both. (This was when I was in the army of course).

Our home continued to move around, and we acquired the Sealyham bitch afore-mentioned and a very second-hand car. This was a bit of an old wreck (on one occasion one of the rear wheels came off as we were travelling) and it gave place first to a newer model, then to a brand-new Ford 8, the £100 (or maybe a trifle over) Ford. My brother started going to boarding-school again. Among my lead toys, empires rose and fell. Around 1938 or so we moved from a suburban housing-estate into a caravan. This, for four people and a bad-tempered dog, I am unable to recommend. Of course us two boys were at boarding-school most of the time, but particularly during the christmas holidays it was murder, and we all got regularly on each other's nerves. Eventually we moved into a flat, but we kept the caravan as a sort of country cottage. I forget if we got the flat before or after the outbreak of war, but I remember I was in the caravan when I heard Chamberlain's speech saying we were at war. My brother's school offered to take any of its pupils back for the holidays if their parents wanted, and he duly went. That left me feeling rather lonely, particularly because I'd always found it easier to share his friends rather than go and look for friends of my own. However, the "phoney war" period quietened

everything down, and next holidays we were all together again. Came next summer, and the blitzes had started - though us boys contrived to miss the worst of them. We spent the summer holidays in the caravan, augmented by a tent which relieved the worst of the pressure. Once a week my mother would have to travel home to do the shopping - it being too big a job changing retailers every time with rationing - and I used to have to cycle there and back daily for the milk and papers, a duty which I (naturally - I'm like that) resented. My mother used to get on my nerves with the wireless - first she'd have the ordinary BBC Home Service news, then she'd switch over to the European service for the news in English there, then back to the Home Service for THEIR next news, and so on. She just couldn't wait. But on the whole I remember those days kindly. My attitude to the war was to ignore it as best I could, and just try to carry on as if it wasn't there. When we were at the flat and there was an air-raid, I hated being woken up to go down to the shelter in the basement. After we'd locked ourselves out in the panic, and I'd climbed up the drainpipe to the bathroom window to open the front door (a thing I'm not at all sure I'd have done so nonchalantly in daylight), my parents decided that we might all continue to lie-in come what might. Myself and my brother were sleeping in the hall anyway (as recounted in - I think - TRIODE) so from then on I was able to ignore the war more than ever.

It is my personal belief that I stayed at school too long. In the end, I was just sort of vaguely hanging on there, doing virtually nothing, waiting to be called up. That was after I'd taken and passed School Cert - it got easier every year in wartime as standards dropped. Much is made from time to time of the hardship suffered by those whose education is cut off too early for their full development - nobody ever says a word about the opposite case, those who'd be far better off doing something than learning something. I'm sure that if I'd left school at fourteen and got a job - any job, office-boy or delivery-boy or apprentice or something - I'd have been far better fitted for adult life than I was when it came to the point.

We had one more move before I was called up - the first one since I'd left the mixed school that I was at home to participate in, though if I remember aright I was kept from returning to school a week or two to help. Like in those days they NEEDED me or something. This got us back in a house again, semi-detached, and with the caravan parked in the front garden. That was the last family home - when I came out of the army I was on my own. I was at school when the calling-up papers came. My headmaster tried to get me deferred to finish the term - which was a bit of cheek, as I was just wasting my time anyway and he must have known. It was turned down. So I packed up and went home for the last few days, right down England and from top to bottom. Then on the 17th of June 1943, back up north again, all the way to Scotland this time.

Part One of my life had ended.

(END OF PART ONE. TO BE CONTINUED)

COALS TO NEWCASTLE

BUT

POLLS TO COVENTRY

It may appear somewhat illogical that one who dislikes popularity-polls as much as I do takes any notice of their results when they appear, but I'd just like to put it on record here that I feel very strongly about the 1961 "Hugo"

award to "Who Killed Science Fiction". This item, so far as I am aware, was distributed almost entirely amongst one or more apas, and it was specifically stated that no copies would be available to the general fannish public at large. That its highly select readership thought so much of it as to give it enough votes

to take first place says something for its quality, certainly. But I do feel that an item that was not generally available should never have been considered for the award in the first place, however good it may be.

This is not just sour grapes because I haven't got a copy, incidentally, because I doubt if I'd have taken the trouble to obtain one even if they HAD been obtainable. Umpteen pages of people talking about the same thing, probably repetitively, is not my idea of relaxation.

And of course, it hardly needs to be pointed out that if the Hugoes were abolished, this sort of situation wouldn't arise. (Yes I know - if people were abolished, there'd be no more war. Depends on one's affection for Hugoes - or people.)

And again while I'm at it, my continued strictures on popularity-contests do not, inevitably, apply to TAFF. Granting that TAFF's a Good Thing (which everybody reckons to, including me), the delegate has to be chosen somehow, and the TAFF election seems inevitable in the circumstances. But where nothing but egoboo is at stake, away with them!

LAMB'S TALES I have recently been reading Robert Graves's two books about the Anglo-American Civil War - "Sergeant Lamb of the Ninth" and "Proceed, Sergeant Lamb". They are founded upon the reminiscences of an actual individual, a British soldier who was involved in about as much of the war as anybody was one way and another, due mainly to his continually getting taken prisoner and then escaping to join some other unit elsewhere, and who bothered to write his experiences down.

Sergeant Lamb was a regular soldier, an Irish Protestant who began his service in Ireland before embarking for the New World. As a regular soldier and an NCO to boot, he was of course very much in favour of discipline and general Shapiro-type behaviour only with cattle. And according to him, as interpreted by Graves, it was only the discipline and like that that kept the British troops going.

Now my sympathies in the longer view are with the British side in the conflict - we were fighting to retain the unity of something that I consider should have retained same. Granted the American colonists - or some of them - had legitimate grievances, so did plenty of the inhabitants of the home islands. There was a case for being anti-government on both sides of the Atlantic. But not a case for Americans being specifically anti-British as such. And the superb disciplined robots who stood for unity in the colonies were, I consider, fighting on the right side for the wrong reason - ie, that they had been told to rather than that they wanted to.

Although my sympathies lie in the long run on the British side, then, my short-run sympathies - and my utter admiration - lie very much with the Americans. The main American forces consisted of volunteers who armed and equipped themselves, elected their own officers, and fell out to go home when they felt they'd had enough. They joined in because they wanted to - rightly or wrongly, they felt that they wanted to fight the British, so fight us they did. They didn't have the discipline of their enemy, or the organisation, but they kept it on the run for several years and played the major part in its ultimate defeat. Furthermore, they seem to have been pretty badly served on the whole by their higher echelons, whereas although the British high command at home wasn't much use, the commanders

in the field were superior to those of the Americans for the most part.

Nowadays, of course, the American servicemen are as highly-trained as everybody else's, with discipline and Shapiroism (still with cattle) and all the rest of it. Yet people like Heinlein call them the heirs of the original volunteers and minutemen and the like. On the contrary, they are nothing of the sort - they are the heirs of the redcoats, who were ultimately defeated. Defeated by these same volunteers and minutemen and people. Particularly the people.

POSTSCRIPT
TO THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY

My father, who claimed to know London like the back of his hand, gave me explicit directions. Go down this road here, this one here, along Park Lane, over the Thames at such-and-such a bridge, fork left (or possibly right) at the Marquis of Granby, along here and here and here and you're there. He drew up an elaborate route-map for me, with all the turnings shown that I had to take or avoid. And come morning, I mounted my trusty bicycle and off I went.

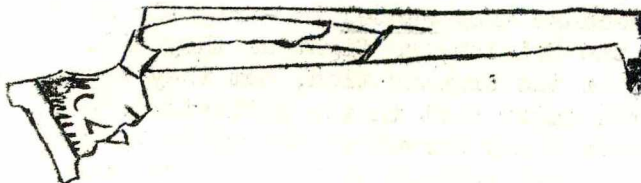
I was not in those days used to central London traffic, and this was quite an adventure for me. I followed the map, down into the centre, Park Lane, the river, and onwards towards the south. South of the river I came into the tram-lines. These are notoriously dangerous to cyclists, though personally I've always tended to approve of them - at least they tell you where the trams are going, they can't suddenly pull in front of you and stop dead like the buses can. The cobblestones were another matter of course, I've never cared for them when on a bike.

I duly forked at the Marquis of Granby, kept going south, and eventually came into open country, with trees and things - a sort of public wood and effort actually. Eventually I turned down a pleasant narrow winding lane that led between tree-girt bungalows. And suddenly before me the road seemed to drop away into space. My sense of wonder well to the fore, I approached the lip to find the road still there, but dropping away steeply. Below me was what seemed to be an inhabited forest, so thickly did the trees grow among the houses. I coasted down. Careful now - turn off here - down again - and there was the road I wanted, running between the front gardens of one row and the back gardens of the next, and virtually tunnelling under the chestnut trees. I checked the house-numbers - and there was the house I wanted.

Dismounting, I leaned the bike against (probably) the nearest chestnut-tree. The front gate was wide open, so pulling a tape-measure from my pocket I solemnly laid it to the ground and began to measure. Finishing, I noted the measurements, rolled up and pocketed the tape, and rode back (apart from walking up the hill of course) the way I'd come, my mission accomplished.

There was joy in the Mercer homestead that night. We would be able to move as planned, safe in the knowledge that the caravan would fit in the front garden.

You'd better go in
here, Fabulous
Fred, mate



BE AN ANGEL

I HAVE COME to the conclusion that I need an ocean-going yacht.

Nothing very elaborate - just a nice convenient vessel of maybe four thousand tons displacement will do to start with. But even so, it will require financing somehow. Apart from the price of the yacht itself, there will be maintenance and servicing charges, harbour dues, captain's and crew's wages - the complement will have to include at least two kept women of course for appearances sake - and, no doubt, sundry other disbursements that don't occur to me offhand. More money than I have readily available, certainly.

Which is where YOU come in.

In order that I can get my new hobby off to a good start, I have decided to throw it open to all my friends for financial support. I am therefore willing to accept donations towards the cost and expenses. Any amount of money will be welcome - even as little as a thousand pounds. Subscribers will receive a certificate, suitable for framing, entitling them to the title of Honorary Mate, and in addition will be given free tours of the vessel whenever I find it convenient. For a certain extra consideration, to be discussed at the time, Honorary Mates will even be taken on short trips, such as round the harbour.

So come on, all of you - now is your chance to participate in making my dreams come true. You may never get another chance like it.

I need hardly add that if the necessary financial support is NOT forthcoming, then this thoroughly worthwhile and important project will fall through, and I'll be forced to take up some less expensive hobby. Which will be all YOUR fault. So rally round everybody. • I need your cash.

Thank you.

THE NEXT ITEM is something of a departure for a Mercatorial Publication. And you needn't be afraid that I'm going to make a habit of it, either. When I was ~~last~~ in London (which was the occasion of the Farewella Party) I happened to be enveigled one evening into going somewhere I'd far sooner not have done. I once went (for much the same reason - I was with a crowd) into a revivalist meeting in Glasgow, and if ever I felt like a fish out of water it was then. And I felt the same way on this occasion. The by-product, which ought to make sense to most of you who are in any way familiar with London, is dedicated on two accounts to Bruce Burn, and is entitled:

THE LADIES' BALL

THE ATMOSPHERE WAS oppressive. That is, not the atmosphere so much, which was pretty reasonable for a heatwave, but the ATMOSPHERE. The glaring lights everywhere; the concourse of movement on all sides (part disciplined with almost hypnotic regularity, part random but far too intense); and the noise. The rumble of the balls as they sped along the polished woodwork of the alleys, and returned down the chutes at the

side. The mechanical clatter at the bottom end as the pins fell, were collected from above and re-set without ever being touched by human hand. The buzz of many conversations, dominated by the occasional loudmouth of either sex who walked by talking, with the loudspeakers coming in every so often to drown out all other noises while they said their necessary piece.

Ben, twelve years old, sat there soaking it all in and hating every minute of it.

Just in front of him, his party were playing out a set. His big sister Pat, Pat's boy-friend Jack, Jack's even bigger sister Aud, and another girl called Sal. All around the twenty-year mark. Ben hadn't wanted to get mixed up in their bowling excursion. "Why don't you come along?" Pat had casually suggested. Ben would far rather stay and read, and had said as much. "But you're always reading," Pat had protested. Then Jack had spoken up with a "Yes, come on kid - I don't see why I should have to cope with three women all on my own". Ben had no intention of going in any case, but then his dad had got into the act and practically ordered him out of the house. He spent far too much time reading, never got enough exercise, and give me that book before you go - do you good to get away from books for a few hours. So, at pistol-point as it were, Ben had gone with the party.

And here he was, stuck in the middle of this ghastly place, without even the fare to get home again if he walked out.

Life at the moment was pure hell.

He was momentarily distracted by the party bowling in the next alley. There were three or four men - two with beards - and a woman called Ella, and he tried to catch their spasmodic conversation between throws. One of the bearded ones - answering to the name of Bruce - threw a strike. "A one-shot!" he exclaimed gleefully. "On a flatbed, too," put in somebody else. The bed of the alley was mathematically flat, certainly, but Ben didn't see the point of saying so. Then the woman called Ella threw a ball that hit the array of pins dead centre, but failed to knock even one over. Ben had seen that happen before, too - it happened every so often almost as if it were pre-ordained. "Whatever went wrong?" the Ella woman asked. "Must've passed through hyper-space," said one of her companions. This was better - Ben had come across references to hyper-space in some story or other he'd read. Though he didn't pretend to understand what it was all about, it sounded legitimate.

Another thing Ben noticed about this Ella woman and her friends - they seemed to be mostly using a special speckled ball. Instead of just taking the next one from the rack, they'd wait for it to return down the chute and grab it from under the noses of Pat and Jack's mob, either for immediate re-use or hoarding till required. Idly, he wondered about that. What connection, if any, had the speckled ball with hyperspace? He began to keep his eyes open to see if any other ball produced the same effect at all.

Presently, before his curiosity had been satisfied, the woman called Ella and her friends finished their set and left. Jack's sister Aud promptly grabbed the speckled ball, and turned to Ben. "Come and have a few throws, kid," she called. Ben arose with no great show of reluctance - to tell the truth, just sitting lost among all this paraphernalia of superlatively mechanised self-entertainment was driving him up the wall, and a little action - even in so futile a cause as throwing

balls at mechanical skittles - came as welcome relief. "It's a special light ball," Pat told him as Aud handed him it. "They're really meant for ladies - only there's usually far too many ladies for them to go round. You put your fingers so" - she showed him. Ben gripped the ball, drew back his arm, ran and threw.

It was a good throw. The ball sped true along the alley, not dead central but going straight for at least some of the pins. Ben watched it. As he watched, he seemed to be inside the ball himself, bowling ~~purposefully~~ along the boards. In fact he was the ball - and simultaneously, somehow, he was still himself, and upright. He was very near the skittles now. Then suddenly it wasn't a skittle-alley at all, but an escalator, one of a brightly-lit bank of several going down into the bowels of the Underground. The lights were the same, the rumble was similar, the chatter was the same - it was uncanny. Wildly he looked about him, and nearly fell over backwards as the escalator deposited him gently on the stone floor below.

There was a uniformed woman in a little kiosk marked ENQUIRIES just ahead, so he approached her and asked rather selfconsciously where he was. "Where d'you want to go?" she asked him.

"Home," he answered laconically.

"I'm afraid this line doesn't run there," the woman informed him with a slight smile.

"Where can I go then, miss?"

All trace of a smile had now left the woman's countenance. "You can either go to Hell on the Piccadilly Line, or you can go to Hell on the Bakerloo."

Ben wasn't sure he heard aright - in fact he tended to the opinion that he didn't - but he was too confused to say so. "What difference does it make?" he asked.

"No difference in the long run," the woman told him. "You have to go to Hell from here, but you have free choice of how to get there." Several people waiting behind him seemed to be getting impatient, so Ben gave it up and turned to re-ascend the escalator. But there was no escalator going up. All were descending towards him, packed tight with people, and dithering, he found himself swept along by the crowd. He went down another escalator, and then a flight of steps, at the bottom of which were two hands pointing left and right, labelled respectively TRAINS TO HELL GOING EAST and TRAINS TO HELL GOING WEST. Willy-nilly, he found himself carried on to the east-bound platform. He had just time to notice the overhead indicator, with its appended message ALL TRAINS FROM THIS PLATFORM GO TO HELL, when a train came in, and he was surging towards the sliding door.

There were no seats available, but this didn't worry him as he was fully determined to get out at the next stop. As the train duly drew up there, he tried to worm his way back to the door again. "Excuse me," he panted, "I want to get out here". But as soon as the doors opened, another horde of passengers poured in. It was hopeless. He ended up jammed very uncomfortably half leaning over somebody's knees.

Eventually he lost count of the stops. Every few minutes the train began to slow down once more, and the little red bulleye signs flashed into sight along the tunnel walls. And sooner or later the station they identified was HELL. Once more the automatic doors opened, and this time there was no incoming horde of passengers - instead, those within began to stream out on to the platform, Ben with them. He found himself going up some steps again, then there was an escalator ahead of him. An escalator going up this time.

Up? To Hell? Surely not.

Only it wasn't an escalator.

He was back in the bowling alley.

It had all been a weird dream or something, he decided, looking round for any sign of his party. There was a group of people standing in front of him. As he looked, one of these turned to face him. Never in his life had Ben seen so utterly pitiful a sight as that face. He winced.

"~~Why~~ don't you take a turn, kid?" the face mumbled.

"No thanks - I'm just looking for my ..."

Something whirred into life overhead, and before Ben could duck back out of the way he was grabbed round the neck, lifted, shaken, and set back on his feet. He tried to move, but he seemed to be musclebound.

Then he got it.

This was a bowling alley all right. But he was standing at the wrong end.

As he stood wretchedly there, in the midst of nine others as wretched as he, something moved up at the other end of the alley. Something jerked, approached, and abruptly checked itself as the black sphere left its grasp.

And then there was nothing in the world but the great ball, hurtling ominously towards him.

The above was pre-drafted. Right - BACK TO THE SHAMBLES

MORE AFTERTHOUGHTS

Further to my review of JETSTREAM 2, a word about "African Waltz". Perhaps it isn't jazz. Personally, I wouldn't call it either African or a waltz by any stretch of the imagination. I'd call it a slip-jig or hop-jig - "Sir Roger de Coverley" is the best-known example of the genre. And it - African Waltz - is a wonderful noise. The thing on the back - grrrr. It epitomises most of what I dislike about modern and big-band jazz.

Then re ZOUNDS! 5, and my ideal newspaper. This would have two lettercols. Not officially, mind - but letters would always be segregated into two easily-recognisable batches, and it would soon become apparent that the second batch was reserved exclusively for letters that the editor considered fuggheaded. For instance, one the other day in the "Times" sought to blame the current alleged lack of (mainly sexual) morality on the emancipation of women. Another recently came out with a categorical generalisation to the tune of "All thinking people must agree that so-and-so". (As it happened, I didn't, and I resent the implication).

Finally in this sadly overgrown issue, one gets round to the tenth instalment of

THE LAIR

beginning as usual with new stuff:

BEYER, WILLIAM GRAY

Minions of the Moon

Bound edition, to replace the 2CSAB version I already had.

KIPLING, RUDYARD

The Jungle Book

In paperback. Only the first of the two volumes, and don't look now but I wouldn't be prepared to swear that all the stories are included. Still, there's the essence of the "Mowgli" saga, the two apparently best-known stories "Rikki-tikki-tavi" and "Toomai of the Elephants", "The White Seal" which gave my Sense of Wonder a powerful charge back in the days when I first read it (if memory serves, sitting on the toilet at home wherever that was at the time), and the gently readable but almost plotless "Her Majesty's Servants".

WALLACE, EDGAR

Again Sanders

To my gratification, I find I'm not alone in liking the "Sanders" books among fandom. In fact, some fans like them considerably more than I do. I just like them enough to collect as they come out in paperback.

WILKINS, VAUGHAN

Once Upon a Time

I must have nearly all of Vaughan Wilkins's Fiction by now (including three fantasies which I no longer possess). This is a sort of present-day historical - an adventure-story involving echoes of the past (period Hanoverian-Victorian of course) and ranks with his historicals proper in readability.

GRAVES, ROBERT

The White Goddess

Be brief, Mercer, or there'll be no room for any of the backlog. Well, to start with, according to Graves, poetry isn't necessarily poetry. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines "poetry" as "Art, work, of the poet; elevated expression of elevated thought or feeling in metrical form" and refinements and variations of the same words. Fair enough, I'd have thought. But poetry, to Graves, is properly a damn sight more restricted field than the above would appear to indicate, being basically homage to the prehistoric Mother-Goddess in her various ancient and modern guises, and what one has to say takes (if I understand aright) second place to how one says it. That is, however inspiring or whatever the message the poet wants to get across may be, it isn't poetry unless it's wrapped up in intricately allusive form that is fully comprehensible only to the poet's in-group, whether in class or in time.

I was almost put off when I saw the sub-title "A historical grammar of poetic myth" and the opening words of Chapter 1 "Since the age of fifteen poetry has been my ruling passion", but luckily I persevered, and was richly rewarded for same. Poetry - according to the Graves definition - may constitute the book's central theme, but the incidental details are of far more general application. The book is in fact the result of the author's researches into the meaning of various obscure early writings, ancient Celtic and Breton and such, and is positively fraught with interest. All praise to Faber & Faber for putting this out as a paperback, albeit a damned expensive one.

Right - over the page for some of the backlog:

KITTO, H.D.F.

The Greeks

A Pelican all about the (ancient) Greeks.

SELTMAN, CHARLES

Women in Antiquity

The Twelve Olympians

Both extremely absorbing studies of aspects of antiquity. The "Women" ~~table~~ is self-explanatory, dealing with the situation of women in ancient times (so far as can be ascertained) and pointing up the contrast with their situation today. The "Olympians" book concentrates not so much on recounting the myths themselves as on their interpretation - in fact it's not too much to say that it tells you who the Graeco-Roman gods and goddesses actually were.

ATKINSON, R.J.C.

Stonehenge

One of the most interesting books I'd read for a long time was my verdict when I'd read it. See AMBLE 3 for a full write-up.

COTTRELL, LEONARD

The Great Invasion

A vivid account of the Roman invasion and conquest of Britain.

BRØNDSTED, JOHANNES

The Vikings

Another Pelican. (All the above volumes reviewed on this page so far are either Pelican or Pan). This gathers into one volume the entire history of the Vikings and their expansion in all directions until they merged into the general population of everywhere except their original homelands (and one or two other places come to think of it - it's drafting on stencil that makes one commit these whatsitisms). A useful and interesting book, anyway.

BLAIR, PETER HUNTER

An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England

Still a paperback, Cambridge University Press this time, and even more expensive (though not so high a page-count) than/as "The White Goddess". Well worth it, though.

THE PELICAN HISTORY OF ENGLAND

(8 volumes by 8 different authors)

This is a notable project and potentially highly useful. It falls short, however, in several ways, largely due to the system under which it was organised. The eight specialists were each commissioned to write about a set period, and each was then given completely free reign. Thus certain things (such as the early Tudors - if you'll pardon the apparent assignation of the appellation "things" to kings) get covered twice in different volumes, whereas other things (such as Celtic England) are omitted altogether except between the lines in the Roman and Anglo-Saxon volumes. There is also a noticeable lack of continuity in the subject-matter itself. One instance that occurs to me here is that the early mediaeval volume (?s) refer constantly to "the barons", whereas a later volume always refers to apparently the same people as "magnates". One is left with the unspoken impression that with the passing of the years the word "barons" is no longer strictly applicable - but nobody bothers to explain why. This sort of thing is of course inevitable when the volumes are written entirely independently, and not even published consecutively.

For what it's worth, my argument is that the volumes should have been commissioned in strict sequence. Each specialist would be handed his predecessor's volume before he started his own, and would be told to tie up any conspicuous loose ends that ran into his period, and also to account for any changes in usage that he saw fit to make. That way the series would hang together more as a whole, which it now doesn't.