

THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT

or

The Snag in Michael's Mailin:

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Comprising Vol.1 No.1, with all the other nutbers thrown in free of charge

Comrade fans: "The Snag" hereby claims the proud distinction of being the only fan-mag on record that starts out grimly determined never to sink to the issue of a Vol.1, No.2. If Michael will kindly duplicate No.1 he will have a consolation nobody else's sheet can offer: that he will see no Snag ever more again. The Snag, in fact, sprang into being as a medium for one R.G. Medhurst to say a particular say. Not that he dreams of an unnumbered multitude hanging on his words, but because he has a constitutional weakness: to wit, a dislike of people Getting Away With Things.

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Let us now give thought to one Christopher Samuel Voud, fan, philosopher, and devotee of the Higher Logic. In the Past, his well-aimed fanta-cynicisms have given considerable upset to a number of sensitive souls: but that is very likely why sensitive souls were placed in this world. Just recently, in War Bull, he has turned some part of his energies towards clearing up those vexing questions of Pacificism and the Future of Mankind. Those few who had the temerity to dispute his findings are annihilated by some cold clicks of the logician's typewriter; not, however, without some withering sarcasms on Ivory Towers and nomenclature. With much trepidation we determined to test the quality of this logic. Trembling, we ventured to indicate to our friend some of his pronouncements that seemed to us, in our muddled-headed way, contradictory. We even went to the length of nibbling tentatively at what we thought was the infirm foundation of his method of reasoning.

And with what result, comrade fans? No, you've all guessed wrong. Our Samuel Didn't withdraw War Bull with much clamour about the feeble-mindedness of fans, as you thought last month. That appears to be mere camouflaging, because another issue should appear in this mailin - with controversial matter eliminated!

That isn't quite all. It has been conveyed to us, somewhat indirectly, that our friend "didn't seem to like" our remarks.

Now, we are sorry, brother Samuel, that you don't feel it expedient to match your logic against ours. Or perhaps we are being egotistical. Possibly our strivings seem beneath the notice of a contributor to Lilliput, and one who has drunk at first hand of the wisdom of the intellectuals of the B.B.C. If that is so, we are even sorrier...for you. But we do not apologise for offending you, remembering how, in the past, you have always held the triumph of your logic as of far higher importance than any personal offence you may give.

What we regret above all is that you appear to feel under no obligation to give a hearing in your newsheet to any opposition your propaganda invokes. That attitude certainly isn't contrary to the rules of logic. What it does violate is intellectual decency.

Fido's Editor describes Samuel, in Fido No.3, as "searching frantically for an adequate philosophy of life, which he hasn't found yet". The way to trap that rare game is, not to formulate a theory and reject or ignore whatever fails to fit into it, but to attack any new idea or scrap of evidence with everything you've got,

and, if there's still anything left when you've finished then you have something to add onto the credit side of your "philosophy".

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The Snag had planned to snarl his snarl on one of the others of Fido's pups, "The Gentlest Art". His liver was stirred to wrath and his rabies roused by the unethical procedure by which The Smith is encouraged to extend and develop his Thoughts on War ("machine-superstition seasoned with archaic moralising on man's capacity for 'dumb endurance of agony'", sneers the Snag), sawhile opposition to his first effusion is "crowded out". "Sure you can sit on opposition: there's not a mug of 'em 'd beef about that", clancurs the Snag (it was our opposition, confound the disagreeable animal!), "but if you crowd that out you ought to darn well crowd out that Smith as well". He was heard to mutter something about "it ought to take two to make a row", which doesn't seem to make sense to us because The Smith can make a helluva-row, all on his own. But, anyway, reflecting on such tried maxims as Honour Among Thieves we have come to the conclusion that we must suppress this particular Snarl of the Snag.

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Don't get the Snag wrong, comrades. He's a contankerous animal, sure enough, but you can tickle his funny-bone if you sneer him with a piece of neat and really mean reasoning. His yellow fangs dripped widely in the snarl of mirth that Ronnie Holmes drew from him with this pretty proposition (spelling guaranteed authentic and highly original):

'Reminds me of an argument I had with a proprietress of a Cafe the other day. My crowning argument went like this. I pointed vaguely in the direction of our building and said, "If I went around borrowing money from the fellow over there, I would be called a Scroun-er, a Sponger, someone who could not keep himself and had to rely on others. I would be branded as the lowest of the low, I would not be able to hold up my head with the lowest of them. That is the price of being a parasite. Now, to go to church and trust in a God, to do nothing but plead to be forgiven, to hope to eventually reach heaven thro' the good graces of a loving and providing God. That God becomes someone who you are scrounging from. You become reliant on someone else, and become low in the same sence ----- so, to be an average Christian is to be a "Bum". It won't's point and I went away leaving her dumfounded. I went outside and laughed until I ached, truly this is a verry funny world.

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Our Christopher Samuel gives as his reason for shutting down War Bull an alleged outcry from fans who have "found political and ethical discussion boring...when the greatest war is so palpably present". The Snag finds it just a little difficult to credit this. He tells us that, while his opinion of fans has been pretty low for the last fourteen years, he finds it hard to believe that they can still bury their heads in the sand while the Civilised World, not to mention H.E. and incendiaries, is tumbling about their backs. He says, in his crude way, that he'll need plenty of convincing if we want to have him think that even fantasy fans can be such abject fools. Maybe some of you fellows will help to convince him?

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To the rest of you, who still have some interest in life outside of rayguns and time-machines, we would heartily recommend

Herbert Best's outstanding novel, "The Twenty-fifth Hour". The Snag harbours a grudge against it because it was a Time's Literary Supplement choice as book-of-the-week, but despite this its a fine and topical account of the collapse of Americo-European civilisation at the end of this war. We know its been done, or attempted before, fans, but don't let that put you off. This is the real thing. Available at most libraries: and its even possible to buy the thing...

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We should explain that any tremulousness of our typewriter is not evidence of senility, but a result of the blitz that, on a bright moonlit night, is banging around us. We type furiously, while all but we have fled into the wee brick shelter, urged on by a Snag fairly bounding with heroism. Incidentally, being a thing of the spirit, bombs can't touch that exasperating beast. Anyhow, if the worst transpires, let us formally place on record that we Died for Fandom. And if you could see the view of London from our window you'd admit that the contingency isn't so remote.

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We do our best to restrain that animal, but the Snag, having burst through our guard, insists on telling Fido's shocked subscribers that Johnny Burke's remarks on Magic v. Science are a "pack of nonsense". He wishes to inform Johnny that he may know his magic, but he certainly doesn't realise what science (do you mean "mathematical physics", Johnny?) is driving at. How the blazes, he howls, can you compare, say, Dirac's latest electron theory, with its entire abandonment of the idea of the model, with the 4 element theory of the occultists?

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Query: would our Samuel, applying his Gargoylish technique for reading the Fortune of fannags from their pet-names, deduce that the "Snag" is a pleasant, chatty little paper that ought to have had a long life? (No prizes offered for best solution.)

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It took Thorne Smith to really put indecency on the fantasy map. And when he'd done it, it turned out to be one of the funniest things on record. The things that man couldn't do with a body - or two - and a little magic to display it properly are scarcely worth doing! Now, in the magazine fantasy world we've had sadistic indecency (see "Marvel Tales" and the old "Mystery-Adventure Mag.") and just plain indecency (see quite a few issues of "Weird Tales"). What we and the Snag want to know is, why we can't have a mag. of Funny Indecent Fantasy. There's a title, even, all ready for someone. Judging from Thorne Smith's sales, it ought to be a shocking success.

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Since it seems the fashion to boost one's pet political paper, we might mention that if you read "The Socialist Standard" (from The Socialist Party of Great Britain, 42, Great Dover Street, London, S.E.1. - 3d. post free - 1/6 for six months) you'll find very few catch-phrases, and not a lot of emotional appeal, but what you will find is an intellectually honest attempt to work out world problems on socialistic lines; and therein you may find some element of newness... Recommended to Communist comrades - "The People's Convention", in the December issue.

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Would you believe it! this shocking Snag had actually got it into his fearsome head that he was going to snarl on, of all people,

the G.O.M. of Fido! On the most elementary principles of tact, we have suppressed (see the trail scene in Alice) our Snag, and we will ourselves deal with the individual whom we hope to persuade to duplicate this. The passage that enraged the Snag ran thus:

"Why should I be shocked at your dabbling in spiritualism? You will probably run from one extreme to the other and become an ardent believer soon! Actually it is a phase every intelligent person seems to go through in some way or another, tho' personally I do Not like spiritualism itself. That doesn't mean I believe it to be a fraud; but rather that it seems to me to be sort of low and underhand. Straight-forward mysticism I have a leaning to; esoteric doctrines and so forth but the hit-or-miss business of messing about with what appear to me to be surely the lowest and 'earthbound' creatures of the spirit-world, is distasteful and nasty."

This is an astonishing thing among so many fantasy fans, that they will swallow almost anything you hand them providing the language is right! Tell Michael that some unfortunate clairvoyant is working with "earthbound spirits" and he'll run a mile! Actually, Michael, we are most unlikely to become ardent believers soon, because we are not "searching frantically for a philosophy of life" (we gave that up some time ago!). What we are looking for is EVIDENCE, and we don't give a hang how low or underhand are the channels it comes through.

And we try to start out with as few assumptions as possible. Personally, we haven't the faintest idea how we would know an "earthbound spirit" if we met one - outside of a Weird Tale - and we can confess to no beliefs one way or the other about the "spirit world". This business about "straight-forward mysticism" is very mystifying to us. We thought that mysticism was bound, by definition, to be crooked, since it claims to convey transcendent ideas by language based on everyday experience.

Sorry, Michael, but though we're quite prepared to read the great men of "Unknown", on Words of Power and magic lamps, on Elementals and fairies, we'd be very much shocked if, one fine day, you showed us evidence of them! We trust that that doesn't sound too much like treachery. One thing we refuse to do is to allow this curious structure of notions to prejudice our estimation of evidence that we actually have.

On the very inadequate basis of a mere preliminary survey, we might add, with all due reservations, that while there certainly seems to be in spiritualism evidence pointing somewhere, the thing it doesn't seem to indicate is the presence of "spirits", of any intelligence.

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Looking at the quaint results of the Author Poll we're tempted to think that the Snag overrates the Mind of the Fan. Campbell pulls in twice the votes of Wells, five times those of Stapledon! Binder ranks $1\frac{1}{4}$ times higher than Stapledon! Need we say anything?

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In the remote contingency of someone feeling an urge to differ from some judgement of the Snag, that low-plane manifestation can be got at in a private way via R.G. Medhurst, 27, Owlstone Rd., Cambridge. If you wish to set about him publicly, we can only suggest that you seek the ready hospitality of the sheets of Messrs. Webster, Burke, or Rennison - or even of one known as CHRISTOPHER SAMUEL VOUD:

To Whom this Sheet is Dedicated.