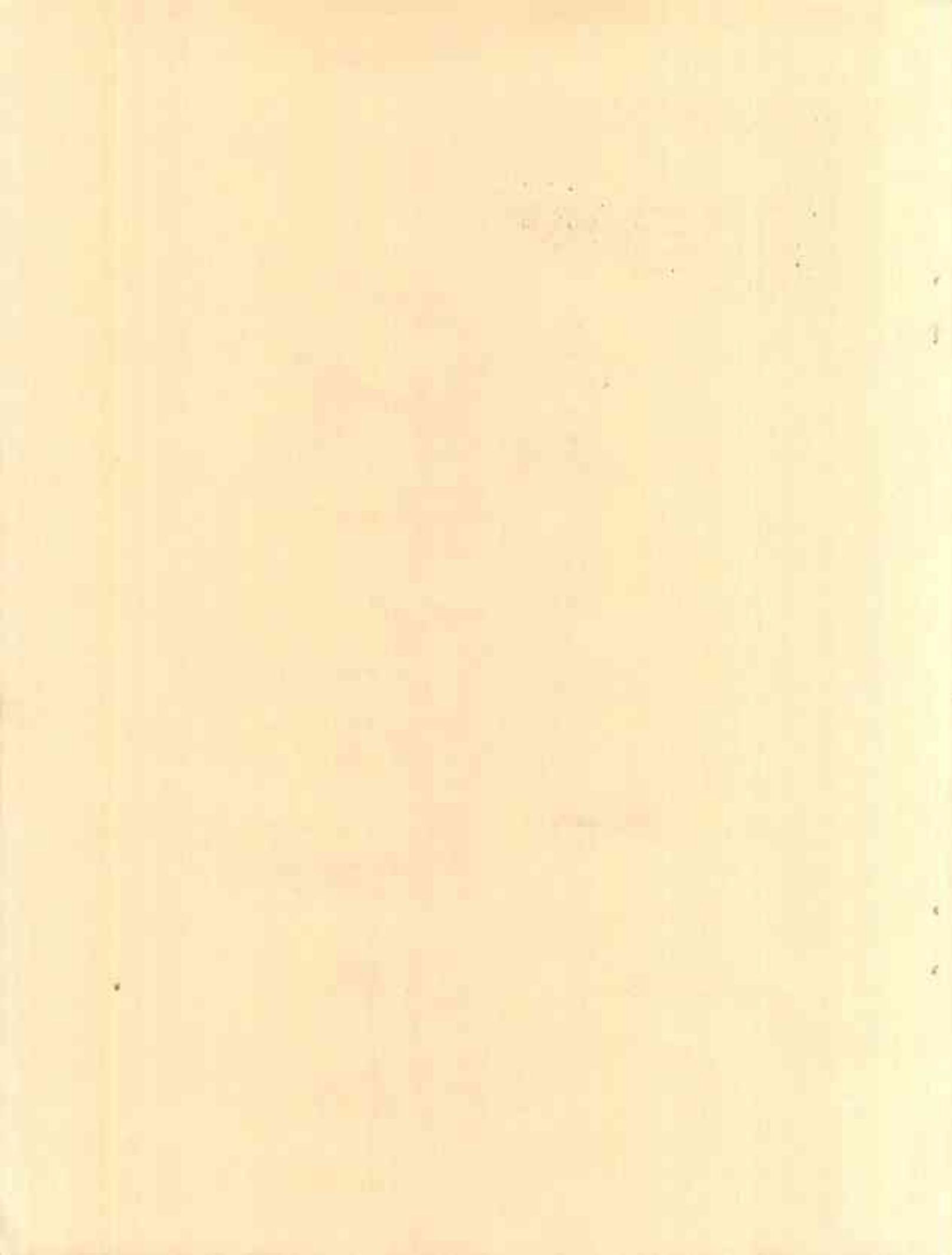


# bixel type

Oi'd like ter know wot that  
Jeeves bloke h'expects er  
judy ter do, ter get a'ead  
h'in this world h'of  
h'autcmytion!

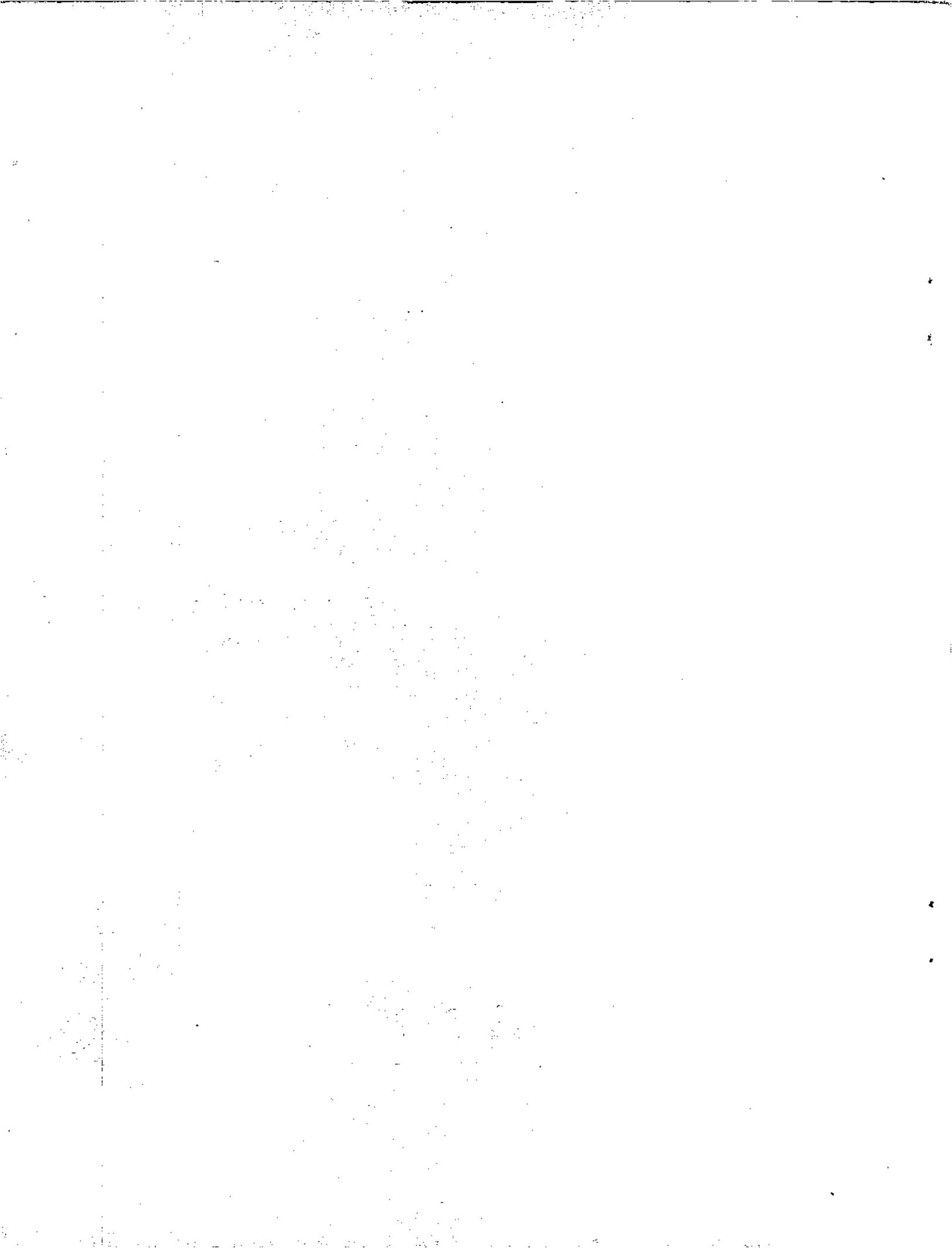




F. J. Towner Laney's

# AH! SWEET IDIOCY!





Gentlemen:

As the chief targets of Laney's spleen in Ah! Sweet Idiocy!, you've probably suffered more damage, and certainly more pangs, than anybody else in consequence of the fact that F.T.L.'s work has stood so long as the uncontradicted, and thus by default official, history of Los Angeles fandom in the mid-forties.

So it's only fair, I think, that you should benefit a little now that a West Coaster has finally had the gumption to try and set the records straight. This, then, is dedicated to you:

F O R R E S T   J   A C K E R M A N

W A L T E R   J   D A U G H E R T Y



This distinction is important because, in addition to their general doctrine (which probably had healthy effects, all in all) the Memoirs have a specific content of attacks on the LASFS as the citadel of all Unclean Influences in fandom. Alva comments on the way in which "Just Like A Daugherty Project" has gained proverbial force; almost as much could be said for any of the personal attacks with which Ah! Sweet Idiocy! is filled -- the memories that exist are memories as given by Laney. The LASFS in general retains an even more damning reputation. I need only cite the LassGrass episode in Terry Carr's "The BNF of Iz" -- written ten years after Laney -- and the response of a Prominent New York Fan to a warning that the Discon would not tolerate the presence of a homosexual wolf: "I had never known that the streak of Laneyism was this strong in fandom!" -- to point up that Laney's Memoirs established the association of the LASFS directly, or of the Memoirs and thus the LASFS indirectly, with one of the more repulsive perversions, and that to a degree that still amounts almost to reflex conditioning. Despite the existence of earlier and later references, the Memoirs were almost entirely responsible for this, thanks to their minutely detailed accounts of the LASFS' adventures with such fauna.

With regard to all these specific indictments, naturally, the question rises whether, in addition to being detailed and circumstantial and like that, Ah! Sweet Idiocy! has also the felicity to be true.

That it has long been accepted as perfect truth is in large part the responsibility of Los Angeles fandom. When repeated inquiry by dozens of different fans, for purposes ranging from friendly curiosity to the collection of data for historical publications, produced no accounts disputing Laney's -- and mighty few unsupported denials -- it was not unfair for fandom as a whole to conclude that Laney's account was in fact beyond dispute. I'm quite unable to guess what aberration led the different members of LASFS -- who are neither stupid nor wanting in pugnacity -- to unanimously display so fantastic an attitude as their silence implies. The idea of a club-wide Conspiracy of Silence is beyond belief, unless we assume that the quod deus vult perdere principle was getting in its licks; yet how could so many individuals just chance to react in such a peculiar way?

Whatever the explanation may be, it wasn't until the fourth inquiry I made for facts, or even memories, to reinforce the LASFS' members' bare claims that Laney made many errors that I finally contacted Alva Rogers -- the only person mentioned with any prominence in Ah! Sweet Idiocy! who seemed to be still active in fandom, barring Burbee himself. And that did the trick; Alva, ghod be praised, had something to say and was willing to put it down.

The result is presented herewith. This publication will be kept permanently in print, for the benefit of latecomers to fandom; that's the least I can do in view of the fact that I've also redistributed Ah! Sweet Idiocy! as a part of my anthology, A Sense of FAPA, and used Laney's Memoirs as a source for the historical data in Fancylopedia II. Guilt feelings afflict me not at all; a major collection from FAPA could never justify the omission of the Laney Memoirs, and -- as I said -- an historial may fairly conclude that an undisputed account is

substantially valid. It's just a manifestation of my own drive for self-justification: I want to make sure those objectors Alva mentions know I wasn't faking it when I offered space and full credence for the victim's-eye view of Ah! Sweet Idiocy!

Dick Eney

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BIXELTYPE is an OMPazine written by, and credited to, Alva Rogers, of 5243 Rahlves Drive, Castro Valley, California, USA. Merry Christmas or Cheery Chanukah, as the case may be. God bless all here.

F T L   a n d   A S I :  
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A Critique of the Man and the Book

by

Alva Rogers

PROLOGUE:

Historical Note On the LASFS:  
Classical Version

AH! SWEET IDIOCY! IS rightly considered one of the great contributions to the literature of fandom. But its fame should rest on its merits as a polemical document, not as a history.

Since its publication and distribution through FAPA in 1948 Ah! Sweet Idiocy! has come to be regarded as the definitive account of certain tumultuous events that occurred in Los Angeles fandom from late 1943 to about the middle of 1946; a true and accurate analysis of the characters who were in and around the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS) during those years; and an effective demolisher of the myth that Los Angeles was Shangri-La. All this is true, to some extent; but to one who knew Francis T. Laney, in those years, as well as or better than most, who knew well most of the dramatis personae of his little drama, and who was in fact a sometime participant and always an interested observer of the dramatic events that took place, it is not entirely true.

Ah! Sweet Idiocy! was written in 1947 -- when the events it encompassed, and the bitterness, disgust, and disillusionment those events engendered, were still fresh in Laney's mind. Much of it was composed directly on stencil, thus precluding any temporizing revision that transferring from first draft to stencil might have allowed. I say "might have" because I seriously doubt that it would have made any difference to Fran. Regardless, what is written is written, and it is with the published work that we are concerned.

ASI is an intensely personal document written by a man with a strong puritanical streak in his makeup, who involved himself to the point of mental and emotional exhaustion in fan activities, at which point he felt compelled to unload his disgust for all things fannish as a warning to others not to follow the yellow brick road to the land where Fandom is a Way of Life. The republication and wide distribution of the memoirs has been disapproved of in some quarters\*; some feeling that it merely exacerbates old wounds or stirs the ashes of long dead fires, others feeling that it might tend to tarnish the god-like image of Laney that has been firmly built up in the minds of fans of a later generation by showing him to be a disputatious, self-centered character assassin.

It was not in Laney's nature to pull punches, even if they happened (as was frequently the case) to be wild ones. Laney refused to equivocate in his opinions of others -- right or wrong they were his opinions, and he believed in expressing them regardless of the consequences. As far as his image is concerned, I can't see where the republication of ASI is going to materially alter it. Laney is still a giant among fans (whether admired or hated); a prodigiously active writer in his heyday; and one of the most articulate members fandom has ever had. It's true, he was disputatious, he was self-centered, and he did indulge in character assassination (no matter what you prefer to call it, that's what it amounted to) -- but does that make him entirely unique in fandom? I doubt it.

In spite of its flaws I consider Ah! Sweet Idiocy! to be an invaluable book. In spite of its flaws it does give a quite good picture -- in general -- of Los Angeles Fandom in the early forties, and provides, in lieu of anything better, a "historical" reference to an important and fascinating period of fannish history. Its republication should be welcomed by anyone having any interest at all in the fannish past.

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\*None of which, apparently, felt enough disapproval to voice it to the re-printer. Ironically, the complaints I got about A Sense of FAPA concerned, not Laney's misstatements, but two incidents whose truth is not in doubt. -- RE.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Sketch of a Fan (I)

IT HAS BEEN JUST TWENTY YEARS, as of this writing, since I first laid eyes on Francis Towner Laney. What there was about this tall, gangling, opinionated character from the hinterlands that appealed to me on first acquaintance I can't say; but appeal to me he did, and from the very beginning we became close and good friends. In appearance Laney was tall and lanky, slightly stoop-shouldered, and walked with a sort of lurching lope -- if you can visualize a lurching lope, that's the way he invariably walked. He had slightly cadaverous cheeks, a sallow complexion, a generous mouth with full lips, rather nondescript brown hair combed straight back in a no-nonsense manner, wore thick glasses that kept sliding down his nose, and had a laugh that had to be heard to be believed. He was also, probably, the least phlegmatic person I have ever known. Fran was twenty-nine and I was on the eve of twenty-one when we first met, but the difference in age was no barrier to our friendship. That was always on a firm basis of liking, respect, and trust. We had our disagreements in the months that followed, but no matter how we might have disagreed on things fannish or political it never affected our friendship.

At the time, the area of disagreement between us on matters pertaining to the LASFS and fandom was much narrower than it is today. Or I should say, rather, that today I disagree more with what he wrote in his Testament, with his views and analyses of people and events, than I did at the time. Time has given me a perspective that Laney lacked.

Not everyone found Laney as likeable as I did. It was easy enough to see how he might antagonize others. He was frank, at times to the point of cruelty; recognized no sacred cows; had a wicked sense of humor that turned many people off; and liked to be a leader rather than one of the led. It is obvious to anyone reading ASI that Fran had a mercurial temper -- at one moment hating a certain fan's guts, the next claiming a great liking for him. This tended to make a few of the LA fans a little skittish around him, wondering which it would be today.

Regardless of how much I liked Fran, or how much admiration and respect I felt then (and still feel, for that matter) for his mind and

talents, and fully recognizing the brilliant accomplishment that Ah! Sweet Idiocy! is, I feel that there are several points therein on which demurrer must be entered. In the past no one else seems to have been willing to do this, not even some of those most personally concerned; so (as Dick Eney puts it), "as the only known fan surviving from those remote times covered by ASI", it has devolved upon me to make these demurrers. In doing so it will be necessary to make some observations on the character of Laney, in an attempt to understand more fully why he reacted to certain things the way he did, and to present a somewhat different picture of the man than that the average fan today gets of him from the myths that have built up around him. What I say should not be regarded as invidious; I'm sadly aware that Fran is not around to defend himself or to offer any rebuttals, but what I have to say about him in no way affects the memory I cherish of a beloved friend, or is anything I wouldn't say were he alive today.

Reading ASI for the first time, fifteen or so years after the period it chronicles, left me with mixed reactions, a combination of excitement and disappointment. Excitement, because while reading it the intervening years were swept away and I could see all the friends and characters I had known then parading before me, marvelously brought to life by Laney's brilliant character sketches in Chapter Five; see the old LASFS clubroom at 637 1/2 South Bixel in all its tawdry glory, bursting at its seams with countless fans involved with some form of fanac twenty-four hours a day; see the pyrotechnics that occurred when Laney and Daugherty clashed over some issue at a club meeting; and in general recall all the sights and sounds that made up the LASFS in those days. Disappointment, because of the dominant theme of bitterness and disillusionment that pervaded the book; the emphasis placed on the Feud; and the attendant annihilation of the characters of Forrest J. Ackerman and Walter J. Daugherty, who hardly deserved the treatment they got from Laney.

Laney, almost from the beginning of his fannish career, was noted for the brilliance of his prose when attacking someone or something he didn't like, his fine use of pungent words and phrases, the unmistakable meaning of his words, and his refusal to hedge. As Eney has correctly pointed out in his introduction to ASI, Laney's mastery of "plain speech and direct reporting" was an invaluable contribution to fan writing and most of the time was a delight to read, causing howls of outrage in some quarters and appreciative laughter in others. But this style of writing requires a certain judiciousness in handling to keep it from getting out of hand, as Laney found out a couple of times to his dismay. For instance, in his editorial for ACOLYTE #9, Winter 1945, titled "The Dog in the Manger", Laney -- undoubtedly with just cause for complaint -- criticized A. Langley Searles for his method of publishing a bibliography of fantastic book titles and for his threat to sue ACOLYTE's editors for copyright infringement if they proceeded with their plans for publishing a bibliography of their own; and reluctantly stated that he and Samuel D. Russell were withdrawing their plans for a bibliography. The matter would have ended there except for the fact that Laney's penchant for a pungent phrase or two led him into further difficulties with Searles, who took umbrage at

his choice of words and threatened a libel suit if a retraction were not forthcoming in the next ACOLYTE. A retraction was printed in ACOLYTE #10. Searles' threat of a libel suit against Laney was, of course, disapproved of by most fans and regarded as highly unfannish.

The point I'm trying to make is that Laney could just as forcefully and convincingly have presented his opinion of Searles' copyright ban, gotten his point across, and made Searles appear ridiculous, by the use of less inflammatory words and phrases than he used, while depriving him of the ammunition he needed for the continued harassment of ACOLYTE.

Laney's slashing-attack style of writing most often led him into difficulties or untenable positions when used in attacking or criticizing someone whose words or actions directly concerned him, personally; as in the above instance and (in a somewhat different sense) in his involvement with Ackerman and Daugherty. In dealing with less personal issues, however, he was superb, as witness most of his comments concerning Claude Degler -- not only in ASI, but elsewhere.

In FAN-DANGO, his FAPazine, he teed off on both Degler and FAPA in the Summer 1944 issue, in an article called "Gutless Wonders -- A Discussion of Fan Ethics":

"The appalling amount of Shilly-shallying in the case of Clod Degler is enough to gag a maggot. Are fans so weak-minded, so spineless, so completely lacking in intestinal fortitude, that they cannot even expel an undesirable from their midst? I had hoped devoutly that it would not be necessary to waste further space on Degler, but the infuriating vacillations of cowardly pollyannas -- both in the LASFS and in FAPA -- make it imperative for someone to speak plainly."

He goes on to give his reasons why Degler should have been forcibly expelled from the LASFS instead of merely being informed that he was dropped, and why FAPA should also take positive action. The concluding paragraph in this section of the article is the purest distillation of the Laney spirit:

"It has been said by several that Degler has done nothing in violation of the FAPA constitution. This may very well be so, but I fail to see what bearing this has on the question. If FAPA is to be a general fan organization (which Cthulhu forbid!), a group to which any person may belong regardless of merit, perhaps this view of the constitutionalists is valid. If, however, FAPA is to make any attempt at being a worthwhile group, it seems to me its membership should be limited to the elite of fandom, that a person should not only prove himself worthy of admittance but should also continue to demonstrate this worthiness by his actions after he becomes a member. If these criteria are to be applied in judging Degler, there is no question but that he should be expelled. Despite the contentions of the sob-sisters and Pollyannas, all healthy organisms find it necessary to defecate occa-

sionally. I suggest we defecate Degler at once."

Here, in one pithy paragraph, Fran sums up: his view of what FAPA should be, his opinion of a certain faction in FAPA, his judgement of Claude Degler's qualifications for remaining in FAPA, and his suggestion as to what FAPA should do with Degler...and doesn't it all have a familiar ring to it, today?

Delightful though such bits of Laneyana are, they don't have much to do with ASI except as they demonstrate in capsule form the typical Laney style of attack. In ASI he is seldom this brutally direct, but the cumulative effect is the same.

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Laney, in presenting his case against the LASFS, naturally emphasized those points which he felt bolstered his case and proceeded to ignore anything that tended to weaken it. Consequently -- as far as I'm concerned, and as far as other Angelenoes of the period are concerned -- the LASFS of ASI is a weirdly distorted picture of the LASFS we remember; even though we might recognize many of the details related by Laney, and accept the fact of them, these individual instances, contrary to Laney's insistence, did not go to make the totality of the organization or of Los Angeles fandom. In Chapter Five, "Utopia In Shangri-La", he makes his first charge against the LASFS. He tells of meeting Albert de Pina (through Ronald Clyne) and of how impressed he was by him and his idea of turning the LASFS into a retreat for Hollywood characters who were science fiction readers.

I was always somewhat bemused by the gosh-wow attitude Fran displayed toward professional writers in the flesh. Laney had an acutely developed critical sense of values when it came to the printed word, but this sense of values took a nose dive, occasionally, when he came in direct contact with a writer. Not always ... but this was one of the times it did, and it led to one of the first major explosions between him and the club. I met dePina for the first time a short while before Laney arrived in LA (in fact, I also met him through Ron Clyne) and remember quite well one evening spent visiting him in his home. DePina was pleasant enough and an interesting conversationalist, but impressed me as a rather egoistical, vaguely effete man who fussily brewed syrupy Turkish coffee (it had to be just so!) and talked interminably about himself. He had published a few stories in PLANET and was at the time doing some screen work -- although I must confess that I never saw any evidence of the latter, and I was an inveterate movie goer in those days. I was not as impressed by dePina as Fran was.

If Daugherty had championed dePina's idea of turning the LASFS into a retreat for Hollywood stars (and mind you, dePina never at any time produced one star to give any credibility to the idea), Laney would have been the first to hit the ceiling and say something caustic about another "Daugherty Project". But as it was, Laney presented the idea for discussion to the club and the club rejected it out of hand. The whole idea was so sophomorically unrealistic that it's small wonder we were not receptive to the idea and didn't treat it seriously. Laney

draws the conclusion, from the club's rejection of the idea, that the members were unwilling to broaden their horizons, that they were using the LASFS to escape reality, themselves, and their own woeful shortcomings -- the recurrent leitmotif of Ah! Sweet Idiocy! I like to think, however, that we were just being realistic and trying not to make fools of ourselves.

Fran took this first rebuff more-or-less in stride, but the fit hit the shan a short time later when he brought dePina around to the clubroom one Sunday afternoon, when a number of fans were there working on fanzines or otherwise puttering around. The reception accorded dePina was not at all what a visiting celebrity should have received, Fran insists; in fact, many of the members were downright rude, he claims.

DePina's reception actually was no more nor less than that received by most strangers walking into the club -- writers or no. The fact that dePina was a writer was of small consequence to most of the members present. After all, better known and more generously talented writers were not unknown to the LASFS -- Heinlein, Kuttner, Bradbury, Brackett, Hamilton, Cartmill, Rocklynn, Williamson, and others had all been either members or frequent visitors to the club. Writers were not novelties around the LASFS. Laney makes much of Ackerman's lack of warmth toward dePina, but Ackerman's reaction was quite understandable if one knew Ackerman in those days. Forry was the Number One Fan Face, the Compleat Activist, and probably knew as many science fiction writers on a first name basis as anyone then in fandom. He was the last person in the world to knock himself out over a second-rate PLANET hack. Forry was polite, but unenthusiastic. Laney blasted Forry for using the excuse of working on VOM as his reason for not devoting more attention to dePina, and accuses him of attaching more cosmic importance to VOM than the magazine warranted. Laney seems to have forgotten the degree of importance he placed on getting his own ACOLYTE out on time. Forry was limited to working on VOM during a few brief hours on weekends, and would naturally feel that under the circumstances VOM was more important than making small talk with dePina.

Laney got disgusted with the fans over this episode because in his mind they were so inwardly directed, insecure, and insular that they refused to accept the presence of an outsider with anything more than grudging acknowledgement. From my experience in the LASFS, and later the Little Men and the Golden Gate Futurians, I have noticed that almost invariably a stranger who walks in cold, or even with another member, is in somewhat the position of a person going through quarantine or probabion until he passes muster and is accepted into the group -- it is up to the individual to prove himself to the club, not for the club to prove itself to the individual. In this case, Laney expected the club to prove itself worthy of Albert dePina, not the other way around; and in Laney's opinion the club fell flat on its face and convinced him it was composed of ingroupish, insecure adolescents.

It has always seemed to me that he made too much of this whole

sorry scene, exaggerated its importance, and reacted in a petty manner to the rebuff by the club of his grandiose scheme. He refused to accept the fact that others might not be as enthusiastic as he about an individual, and excoriated everyone for their lack of ardor.

Silly as this whole thing was it did have a greater significance, because, as Fran says, it crysallized his discontent with the club as it was constituted and decided him to enter into its politics seriously. Up to this point he was just another member of the club (and a very new one, at that, even if unusually vocal and dynamic); but after this he decided the club was travelling in a "revolting groove" and he was determined to change its course if at all possible. It was from this point that the political complexion of the club took on a hue entirely different from what it had been.

The LASFS didn't know what it was in for.

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This episode was also an unconscious confession on Laney's part of the goshwow attitude he had towards professional writers -- a trait, God knows, no true fan is entirely without; but one which is not in keeping with the image of Laney the Insurgent, the Laney who abhors the fannish way of life. This was further amplified in the accounts of the Craig Rice soirees, the Healy and McComas collaboration, and the arrival of A. E. van Vogt in Los Angeles. In each of these instances the impression is given that the pros concerned dwell on some Olympian Height and are a breed apart from common fans, when nothing could be further from fact. I missed out on the Craig Rice soirees, but I knew her a number of years later, under slightly different and less elegant circumstances, and found her a fascinating, earthy woman who preferred to talk about things more basic than literature. I don't question Fran's description of the soirees, which were undoubtedly as pictured; but would like to point out that this was an obvious effort to draw a parallel between the Lipton salon and the LASFS "stye" with the LASFS, of course, getting the short end of the comparison. Fran was always at his best in the kind of gathering that went on at the Liptons', and they constituted his ideal of what he'd like the LASFS to be; that the LASFS failed to come up to this ideal was a source of never-ending despair to him.

Laney's involvement with Healy and McComas (incidentally, for some inexplicable reason Fran persisted in spelling Healy's name with two l's -- an unusual bit of carelessness) had less syco-fannish overtones than the dePina or Rice incidents. He had every right to get excited about the opportunity to help with their anthology, and when I got rung in on it I felt the same way.

My first contact with Healy and McComas took place in the summer of 1945 when one Sunday afternoon I accompanied Fran to McComas's place in Santa Monica to discuss science fiction and the anthology. The enthusiasm generated by Ray and Mick as they outlined their plans (and plied us with Scotch the likes of which Fran and I had seen very little



the common belief in fandom that that house was the focal point of homosexuality in the LASFS, that everyone who lived there was a sexual deviant. I knew that Laney was the major contributor to this canard, but it was only after reading ASI that I found one of the specific origins of the lie. The last paragraph on page 101 relates an incident, in a superficially humorous vein, which undoubtedly served to perpetuate this distorted image of Tendril Towers and its inhabitants. Laney tells how he -- on being informed by Art Saha that he, Saha, had moved into Tendril Towers -- told him that

"all the fans in TT were fruits, and that of course he'd have to pass a novitiate of promiscuity with all of them before being allowed to settle on any one or two of the boys, that they made all the new tenants kick through to them in all sorts of fascinating ways...."

So far this was just a crude put-on, but then Fran added the kicker parenthetically: "(So far as I know, this was just a gag -- the place has had some heterosexual inmates!)" This was a stupid and unfair thing to say in the first place, and it was doubly stupid -- a tasteless and totally uncorroborated piece of scandalmongering -- when printed in ASI.

Now is as good a time as any to dispose of and bury this whole question of homosexuality in the LASFS of the early forties. Up until the winter of 1945 there was in the LASFS, and resident in Tendril Towers, one admitted practicing homosexual, to my certain knowledge. No one in the club ever made much of the fact that this well known fan was homosexual (and the fact of his homosexuality was generally known, and generally disregarded, throughout fandom), except for Laney and, to a lesser degree, Mel Brown. It was unfortunately true that occasionally a "fruity" character would attach himself to this BNF and hang around the fringes of the club for a short time, but he would always be sent packing as soon as his distasteful personality began to show. Such characters were few and extremely far between, and to cite them as evidence that the LASFS was crawling with queers is to strain at gnats.

On page 51 Laney makes the incorrect charge that the homosexual issue was a major one with a number of members -- that the issue was threatening the very foundations of the club because

"...It must be remembered that the club had from two to four active homosexuals in its membership at all times, that one of the most active members of the club was also its most vocal homosexual, and that he was continually bringing other fags around the club."

The kindest thing that can be said is that this is an exaggeration. It may have been an issue with Laney and one or two others, but to say that most of the club was overly concerned with this problem is just not true. And if there were at all times two to four active homosexuals in the club I must have been awfully naive at that time, be-

cause I sure as hell didn't know that many were there.

In order to better understand Laney's attitude toward homosexuals, and sex in general, it is important to realize that Fran was essentially quite provincial and not nearly the sophisticated cosmopolite he enjoyed imagining himself. Until moving to Los Angeles he had spent most of his life in small to medium-sized towns in Idaho and Washington. He reflected the typical semi-rural attitude toward sex, with the concomitant contempt for and lack of basic understanding of the sexual deviant. Manhood, in Fran's mind, was equated with sexual prowess, and anyone who didn't take the same aggressive attitude towards sexual gratification as he did was not a whole man, no matter what his other attributes. And a man who preferred sexual associations with other men, no matter what compensating qualities of character, talent, or personality he might have, was deserving of nothing but contempt -- not pity, not understanding, but raw contempt. Laney gave every indication of being incapable of understanding the complexities and subtleties of sex -- of lacking the sensitivity to appreciate all its nuances, or to empathize with those who favored other nuances of sex than he. All of which made him a very poor authority on sex, hetero or homo.

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and leave the clubroom. This was shortly followed by mass resignations of the Knaves, the publication of issue one of THE KNAVVE, charges and counter-charges between the Knaves and the LASFS, Forry's writing of "Knavve is a Louse", the bitter words that arose over this between Laney and Ackerman, and Bruce Yerke's petition to be made an Honorary Member of the LASFS. At this stage of the game the issue was drawn between Ackerman and Yerke, with Laney still somewhere on the sidelines, but getting ready to charge in at a moment's notice.

Yerke was the physical and intellectual leader of the Knaves and one of the few members of the LASFS who had joined the club in its old Los Angeles Science Fiction League (LASFL) days. By the time of the Knavve blowup Bruce was hovering on the fringes of gafia, but it would still be some time before he took that final step. Phil Bronson was a pale echo of Yerke; Buns Benson was a nonentity; Eddie Chamberlain was a young kid who looked up to Yerke as his intellectual mentor. These three followed wherever Yerke led, were his ever present clique.

the Knaves soon found their self-imposed exile to be something less than the paradise they expected it to be, and began to extend feelers to the LASFS for readmission. Bruce, however, held out for an Honorary Membership, and to this Forry was adamantly opposed. The controversy concerning this in the LASFS was one of the contributing factors to the growing antagonism between Ackerman and Laney, and would eventually lead to the full flowering of the feud. Yerke himself was not a principal in the feud, but served more or less as a catalyst in bringing it about.

Laney's portrait of Yerke in ASI (page 35) is quite good -- so good, in fact, that I can see Bruce just as he was then every time I read it. Personally, I think Fran was a little more fulsome in his praise of Yerke's intellectual ability, and expressed a higher regard for his maturity than the facts warranted. Bruce was intelligent, even brilliant, in some respects, but no more so than several other members of the club. He was typical of the precociously intelligent young fan one finds in any given period in fandom. He was reasonably well educated, read omnivorously on many subjects without fully digesting any of it, and made a great point of displaying his vast wisdom in an arrogant and "I dare anyone to dispute me" manner. He did have a fine mind, though, and one which -- if properly disciplined -- could have been put to use as a constructive force in the LASFS rather than a disruptive one.

The walkout of the Knaves and Laney's election to his first term as Director occurred at almost the same time, so one of Laney's first orders of business was to attempt to heal the breach between the Knaves and the LASFS. A tentative agreement was soon reached and most of the Knaves returned on a semi-probationary basis to the club. Bruce, however, still held out for his Honorary Membership and Forry remained dead-set against it. Events kept snowballing at this point with the issue between Yerke and Ackerman becoming more and more bitter, culminating, finally, in the brouhaha over the article "Knavve is a Louse". The Knaves' insistence that the article be withdrawn from SHANGRI-



its basis -- the term "Daugherty Project" is firmly entrenched in the lexicon of fandom and its meaning is clear to any fan having any knowledge of fanspeak. On what basis does Laney constantly deride Walt about "Daugherty Projects"? It was simply that Walt was irrepressibly enthusiastic; an individual who would constantly come up with a brainstorm of an idea, talk it up big in the club trying to instill some of his enthusiasm in others, and then maybe drop it -- or, more often than not, follow it through. The first LASFS Fanquet\* in 1944 was a "Daugherty Project" that has become a continuing and revered tradition in the LASFS. Perhaps many of Daugherty's "Projects", when completed, failed to come up to the original prospectus, but most of us, alas, have gone through the same thing. Ironically, Laney was as guilty as Walt of "Daugherty Projectitis" at times: his espousal of de Pina's plan to turn the LASFS into a movie stars' retreat, his plan for the Fantasy Foundation, Project M and his whole concept of the role of the Outsiders in LA fandom, and his dream of developing ACOLYTE into a semi-prozine, could all be regarded as "Daugherty Projects".

But what is so odious about enthusiasm? What is the harm in having big dreams, big ideas, and then not being able to fully realize them?

Walter J. Daugherty is one of the most abused and misunderstood fans in the LA fan scene ... largely due to Laney. For years Walt devoted time and energy in over-generous amounts to the LASFS and sparked many of its activities, in the pre-Laney days as well as later. Many times Walt prodded the club into doing things that wouldn't ordinarily have been done by the sheer force of his energy and enthusiasm. Walt took on jobs that others were either too lazy or too disdainful to be bothered with, and always tried to keep the club a dynamic element in fandom. Walt had a great deal of personal magnetism which, in spite of his flaws, and despite Laney's almost constant campaign to make him a pariah in the club, made him a generally well liked individual. He was a good natured character, always fun to be with, urbane and sophisticated in mundane circles, and generous to a fault. I can personally testify to his generosity many times over, but I won't embarrass him by going into detail.

Although the "cosmic" issues of the feud involved Laney's conflict with Ackerman's concept of life, the club, its activities, and fandom generally, Laney's impatience with Daugherty and his refusal or inability to get along with him on an operational level within the club contributed to the almost constant friction and tension that existed during most of the business meetings of this period and guaranteed the continuing of the feud. I'm sure that if it hadn't been for the personal animosity that persisted between these two the feud would have lost a lot of its steam and would eventually have sputtered out. Constantly throughout ASI Laney recounts incidents where he and Walt met head-on over some relatively minor issue on which neither party seemed able to reach accord. The way Fran presents these one would get the idea that Walt was invariably a fugghead and Laney almost in-

\*An annual LASFS banquet for those who have crashed the proz during the year -- RE :

variably correct in his position. It would also seem apparent that all the meetings were nothing but political circuses with Laney and Daugherty providing all the entertainment. To a certain extent the latter impression would be true, too; but there were meetings which were free of political discord and presented programs of interest to the general membership.

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The fundamental differences between Laney and Daugherty rested almost entirely on personal grounds -- the inability of these two men to tolerate each other's personality, and, consequently, an honest and sincere dislike (and, sometimes, hatred) of each for the other. The essence of the disagreement between Laney and Ackerman, on the other hand, was not so much personal antipathy as their antipodal views of Life and Fandom. On a purely personal, non-fannish level Fran, I'm convinced, genuinely liked and in many ways admired Ackerman. Ackerman also liked Fran (with reservations) and respected his intellect. Any liking Forry may have had for Laney, however, was gradually replaced by a dislike so intense that not even the death of Laney could change it, because of Fran's unbending criticism of Ackerman's modus vivendi, and his frequent holding up of the Ackerman image to ridicule in ASI. It must have been particularly galling to Ackerman to find himself characterized as an unhappy man because of his abiding interest in fandom; to read such a presumptuous bit of judgement as this on page 37:

"I do think Ackerman would be, once he was over the hump of making such a drastic change, a far happier man if he quit fandom to quite an extent and lived a more mundane life."

Probably even more than with Daugherty the picture of Ackerman that emerges from the pages of ASI is a distorted one. As with any distortion not wilfully false, there is some basis on which to build; in this case, Laney took relatively minor personal idiosyncracies and character quirks and transmogrified them into something monumental and significant. On the subject of drinking, for instance, Laney makes quite an issue of Ackerman's teetotalism, his disapproval of others' drinking, and his efforts to keep the clubroom off limits for drinking. Elsewhere in ASI he imputes that Ackerman's interest in women is less than his interest in fandom and fans and therefore his masculinity is open to question. These two specifics were cited frequently by Laney to illustrate the dire consequences of eschewing a more mundane life for the fannish.

Laney set great store by the word "mundane": a mundane life was preferable to a fannish one; a fan whose mundane interests equalled or exceeded his fannish interests was, apparently for that reason alone, a better person. There are numerous examples scattered throughout ASI which indicate that this ambivalent view of fandom and the mundane amounted almost to an obsession. The example relating to Ackerman cited above is one; on page 39 he characterizes me as much more mundane (my emphasis) than most fans he'd met, and (because of this, it seems to be implied) by and large his favorite associate;

and on page 38 he admits that Daugherty is definitely fun on a mundane party the not a club party. (Laney's emphasis.) I can recall many conversations with Fran -- both drunken and sober -- which concerned nothing but this object of the ideal life. At the time Fran was going through a somewhat trying period attempting to adjust his domestic life and his fannish life: he was pretty well convinced that fandom was the wedge driven into his life that was forcing him and Jackie further and further apart, and the only thing that could resolve his difficulties would be the abandonment of fandom and embracement of a more mundane existence. Even so, he was reluctant to give up fandom completely -- the friends he'd made therein, his publishing, his writing, the exchange of ideas and opinions within the microcosm which he found so exhilarating. He was convinced that anyone who devoted as much time and energy to fandom as did he at this time (1944-45), who made of it A Way of Life, was actually retreating from life, was building a safe, comforting womb in which to bury himself; and that the only way to save one's self from this schizoid fate was to take a greater interest in the mundane things of life. Fran was a little vague about what constituted his ideal of a mundane life, and a reading of ASI would lead one to believe that his interest in the mundane centered around drinking and fornication. This, of course, would be a great oversimplification.

However, the fact remains that much of his criticism of Ackerman, and others in the club, boiled down to nothing more than the charge that they would, if given the choice, choose fanac over drinking or wenching. As I said, Laney was never explicit in his explanations of the differences between a mundane and a fannish life, or why the one was intrinsically better than the other. Regardless, he knew that the fannish life as lived by Ackerman was unhealthy and fraught with unhappiness -- he knew that Ackerman was an unhappy man, Ackerman's protests to the contrary notwithstanding.

Ackerman was (and still is) a shy and introverted individual around other people, though he enjoys having friends with him. Early in his life Forry found a compensation for this innate shyness in writing letters to AMAZING STORIES and WONDER STORIES in their young days, in the correspondence with other readers that developed out of this, and eventually in the fandom that evolved in the early thirties.

In fandom, microcosm though it be, Ackerman achieved identity, status, a sense of participation and achievement, and a personal satisfaction that he couldn't obtain in a wider milieu. In the early forties Ackerman was the BNF, and in the opinion of most of his contemporaries (regardless of what they thought of him personally) he was the personification of the Science Fiction Fan in all its ramifications. Laney insisted that if Forry were to give up all this for the anonymity of a more mundane life he would be a happier man. This has always struck me as being one of the more awe-inspiring bits of assininity, or sidewalk analysis, ever to come from Laney.

Laney's greatest fault was his inability -- perhaps unwillingness would be a better word -- to respect another's convictions, beliefs,

way of life, or what have you. Ackerman found great personal satisfaction in submerging almost his entire being in, and devoting all his free time to, fandom, and saw nothing intrinsically wrong in so doing; but Laney believed that such devotion to a hobby, to the exclusion of nearly every other interest, bordered on the psychopathic. Fandom As A Way of Life proved to be a disastrous influence in his own life, Laney felt, and was making a shambles of his marriage; therefore, he reasoned, because fandom was the cause of so much unhappiness in his own life, others as involved in fandom as was he must also be unhappy. What applied to him must apply to others -- Ackerman, for instance. Laney, of course, was entitled to his opinion of fandom's importance in one's life and had every right to sound off about it; he had a lot of good arguments to support his opinion and was not alone in his attitude. But where he was out of line was in arrogating to himself the role of final authority on this subject. And in this role he was arrogant and totally intolerant of any contradictory opinions. In declaring that Ackerman was, a priori, miserably unhappy because he was a total fan, Laney blithely ignored the fact that Ackerman just might not feel that he was unhappy; that, on the contrary, fandom had given meaning to his life, and in giving it meaning had made of that life a happy one. In the final analysis it was Ackerman's life; and if it was harmful, it was harmful only to Ackerman and to no one else -- and no one, least of all Laney, was qualified to pass judgement on how Ackerman lived his life.

In all fairness it must be pointed out that Ackerman was frequently critical of other fans who strayed once in a while from the straight and narrow fannish path. But this criticism usually took the form of personal notes expressing surprise and disapproval that one would rather do something mundane than fannish. Contrary to what Laney might have said or implied in ASI, Ackerman never forcefully attempted to impose his fannish will on other members of the club. Forry might disapprove of someone participating in some mundane activity when he could be doing something fannish, but he was resigned to the fact that his attitude toward the fannish life was shared by very few others. He did feel, though, that the LASFS clubroom was sacrosanct and any activity taking place there should be confined to, or primarily concerned with, science fiction or fanac; that it should be used as a bordello or a drinking pad violated his sense of the fitting.

Laney at times got carried away over the issue of smoking and drinking, accusing Ackerman of all sorts of prohibitory acts. Forry neither smoked nor drank, and at no time did he do anything so ridiculous as to attempt to force others to follow his example. The only exception to this was in the case of Morojo (Myrtle R. Douglas). As long as Myrtle was associated with him as she was Forry felt she should (at least publicly) observe the same abstemious habits as he. But as far as others were concerned he couldn't care less, as long as we did our drinking elsewhere than in the clubroom.

Although Laney professed to like Ackerman, by and large he never really got to know him on a genuinely personal level, never fully accepted him as he was with his foibles and idiosyncracies, never found



## CHAPTER THREE

### Historical Note on the LASFS: Revised Version

THE OPTIMISTICALLY IDEALISTIC PRECEPTS on which the Outsiders were founded were laudable, but just as impractical when applied to the Outsiders as they would have been if applied to the LASFS. The fact that the Outsiders were supposedly the intellectual elite of the LASFS made not a particle of difference in the final analysis, because they were each in their own way strong minded, opinionated individualists who were as incapable of prolonged united activity, or passive following of the leader, as they had been when they were part of the LASFS.

Fran frequently remarks, in ASI, that one of the most serious problems besetting the LASFS was the absence of any one interest held by all members which would act as a unifying force in the club, and that this same problem plagued the Outsiders. This is, I think, one of the keys to most of Fran's political troubles with LA fandom. There was, of course, one interest held in varying degrees by all members of the LASFS and of the Outsiders -- science fiction! The LASFS was, after all, by definition a science fiction fan club; but Fran, though he paid lip service to this fact, nevertheless tried to make of the LASFS an intellectual society which would be on a more rarified level than than of simply a science fiction fan club; something on the nature of the present-day Elves', Gnomes', and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder, and Marching Society, I think, which once had a dynamic and dominant interest in science fiction, but which has since become so enchanted with intellectualism that science fiction has almost become a dirty word.

Fran was beating his head against a brick wall in attempting to unify the LASFS and get it to behave in any sort of orderly manner; it was just too clique ridden, too full of prima donnas, too torn by conflicting jealousies to really be anything more than a loosely organized fan club. The worst thing that ever happened to the LASFS was the writing of its constitution, and its continued rewriting, ad nauseam. But the most immediate problem confronting the Director of the LASFS in those days, the thing that made of it a real nightmare as far as any organizational control was concerned, was the number of cliques within LA fandom, and their constant proliferation and changing. This was the thing that eventually beat Laney, is something he doesn't deal



and San Diego and wasn't bound to any particular clique.

One year later, March 1945, the picture had changed considerably. The Outsiders had dissolved and Yerke and Bronson had gafiated, but were spending a good deal of time at Dollens' studio in Culver City, constituting a strong clique which still exercised a fair degree of influence in the fluid LA fan scene. Russell, although still in the LASFS, retained strong ties with Yerke and Bronson and spent a good portion of his free time at Dollens'. Laney was director of the LASFS and was the leader of a strong clique composed primarily of Kepner, Saha, Elmer Perdue, Brown, and -- to a certain extent -- Nieson Himmel and myself. In turn, Nieson and I were pretty much of a two man clique-within-a-clique. And to further confuse things Himmel and I could at times be considered part of the clique made up of Ackerman, Morojo, Daugherty, and Roscoe Wright -- with Laura Crozetti somewhere off in left field. Joquel was out of it altogether, and Burbee was still all things to all men.

Two months later, May 1945, things had taken a turn for the worse with the formation of the Los Angeles Futurian Society, a quasi-formal organization founded by Jimmy Kepner, Mel Brown, Art Saha and myself. This was not separate from the LASFS but within it, with all the members retaining membership in the mother club. The Futurians would continue to be the biggest and strongest clique in the LASFS until dissolution in September. In addition to the four hard core members the Futurians could generally claim support or sympathy from Elmer Perdue, Sam Russell, Nieson Himmel, Myrtle Douglas, and Art Joquel who, although out of the LASFS, showed a modicum of interest in the Futurians. I'll return in a moment to a fuller discussion of the Futurians. The LASFS per se was surprisingly free of strong cliques during this period due mainly to the breakup between Ackerman and Morojo. Ackerman and Daugherty could be considered a clique, although not a strong one; and Laney and Russell another because of their editorial association with ACOLYTE.

Toward the end of the year the arrival of E. Everett Evans in Los Angeles gave birth to a strong Evans-Daugherty clique, to be followed soon after by the invasion of the Slan Shack gang from Battle Creek, Michigan, who comprised a close-knit clique all their own -- Al and Abby Lou Ashley, Walt Liebscher, and Jack Wiedenbeck.

As this outline of the various cliques to be found during certain time periods in the history of the LASFS makes clear, LA fandom was an extremely fluid society, and one which was never at any time really split down the middle into two camps. The emphasis that Laney gives to his personal feud in ASI has tended to perpetuate the myth that the feud was of overwhelming significance to not only himself and Ackerman and Daugherty, but to all the other members as well. Actually, a comprehensive reading of LA fanzines, FAPazines, etc, published during the period of the feud will show that most of Fran's contemporaries regarded the feud as pretty much of a tempest in a tea pot, and of no lasting significance. It became significant almost entirely through the herculean efforts of Laney himself.



identification with the Futurians we proposed to form a somewhat comparable group on the West Coast; and, because the four of us all lived in Tendril Towers, we tended to visualize it as a counterpart to Futurian House in which most of the eastern Futurians lived.

At this time our interest in politics was pretty academic, although decidedly leftward leaning. Because of our interest in politics we set up a long range program schedule for our Sunday meetings in which we would attempt to get spokesmen from all sorts of political and socio-political movements to speak before us and present an outline of their respective ideologies. We hoped to get communists, socialists, Trotskyites, fascists (if possible: remember this was during World War II), etc. Surprisingly, we were quite successful. And in one respect, too much so for our own future good.

I'll never forget the night that Marxism and the CPA (Communist Political Association, the form the American Communist Party assumed during World War II) was so eloquently presented to us by a lady organizer from the party. At the conclusion of her talk she announced that she had applications for membership with her and would be more than happy to sign up any of us who happened to be swayed by her convincing arguments. We four nincompoops looked at each other, nodded, and trooped up like sacrificial lambs to the slaughter. After signing up we looked at Sam Russell and one of us said, "Come on, Sam, why don't you join too? We know you think like we do." Sam looked at us, smiled in what I can only think of as an enigmatic way, and softly announced, "I don't need to; I joined the Party a couple of weeks ago."

We were amazed and delighted because Sam's already joining seemed to give intellectual sanction to our precipitous action. Little did we know, nor were we to know for some years to come, that Sam was in actual fact an undercover agent for the government, and would henceforth be reporting our every word and act to the FBI -- but this is another and sadder story.

We five, then, were the actual Communists in the Los Angeles Futurian Society -- no others. And none of the remaining Futurians could by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as Communist fellow travellers, as Laney implies. I might point out here that Rogers, Kepner, Saha, and Brown have long since seen the error of their ways and dutifully recanted. And speaking for myself I might add that my interest in the party was very short lived and disillusioned. I am now by conviction a moderately liberal democrat.

I wasn't too upset, on first reading ASI, to find myself identified as a Communist; after all, it had never been a secret. What did distress me, though, was that in this book which purported to be a fearless document which would leave nothing unsaid for fear of hurt feelings or repercussions; in which Rogers, Kepner, Saha, and Brown are called Communists regardless of past friendships; in which Kepner is identified as a homosexual; in which Daugherty and Ackerman are ridiculed and calumnated -- not one word was said about Samuel Dav- enport Russell being also (apparently) a Communist. God knows, it

was known to everyone in the LASFS.

Perhaps it is a small point by itself, but it serves to illustrate what I contended at the beginning of this essay: that ASI is factually inaccurate in many instances and invalidated as a completely reliable historical document. If I had the time and the documents to refer to and the opportunity to interview as many as possible of those involved I could come up with countless other verifiable examples of omissions, distortions, and inaccuracies; but I have neither the time nor the inclination.

Regardless of the bias and nonobjectivity of ASI it still serves a useful function in that it provides a reasonably accurate chronology of events during the period it concentrates on and gives us some good profiles of many of the principals involved.

And it is a hell of a good piece of writing.

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## AFTERWORD:

### Sketch of a Fan (II)

I CAN'T HELP FEELING, AFTER several readings of ASI, that as hard and unfair as Laney was with Daugherty and Ackerman (and others) he was even harder and more unfair with himself. I'm not speaking of the self criticism and analysis which is supposed to prove that he was being mercilessly honest in his dismemberment of virtually everyone in the LASFS, himself included -- an argument which crumbles to nothing when fully examined -- but of the unconsciously distorted and unreal Laney that emerges from the book.

Perhaps the incredibly egoistical character that Laney depicts as himself is the true Laney; I'm not sure anymore. I do know, however, that Laney as I knew him was somewhat less than the ogre he is believed to be by some, and certainly a long way from being the fannish demi-god the Laney cultists have made him out to be. He was, believe it or not, a man like you or me with the usual complement of faults and virtues, strengths and weaknesses. Fran did have a strong ego, it's true, but it wasn't as apparent in a day-to-day relationship as it was in his writings -- particularly in ASI. When I knew him as a close personal friend there was never any thought in either of our minds that twenty years later he would be the subject of as much controversy as he is today; that people who knew him personally and people who knew him only through his writings would argue and debate as to his real character; that to some he would be the very model of a model Insurgent, to others the very model of a Grade A-1 son of a bitch; that in some quarters he would be regarded almost in awe as a Priapian deity with a gargantuan sexual appetite; and that in other quarters it would be argued that his obsession with sex was merely a continuing effort to quiet his fears of latent homosexuality.

To me Fran Laney was a good friend and we had a lot of damn fine times together. We had our differences of opinion about various people in the LASFS, and about the LASFS itself. We didn't see entirely eye-to-eye on Life and Its Greater Meaning, or even on fandom. We had our differences on politics, particularly when I became a Communist. But in spite of all this we remained good friends and enjoyed each other's company. I had a high regard for him all the time I knew him and after, and like to think that most of the time he held a high regard for me. And it was precisely because I had such a high regard

for Fran and such warm memories of our friendship that I was so disturbed by ASI. Not because of anything personal he said about me in it, but because I felt it was unworthy of him. So much of it was small and petty; so much talent and effort was wasted on justifying his personal war against Walt Daugherty and Forry Ackerman -- so much unjustified savagery.

Although it is distasteful to me to do so I suppose I must make some mention of the last two pages of ASI. To me it seems obviously the product of a sick mind. When I first read it I was appalled -- not with its contents, but with the evidence it seemed to give of the deterioration of a once fine mentality. It seemed as if Fran had worked himself almost into a frenzy during the writing of the major portions of the book in an effort to demolish the LASFS and all who resided therein, and then, feeling that perhaps his object had not been reached, tried to make sure that his point was not lost by printing as many repugnant illustrations of the general depravity of the LASFS as he could cram into the remaining pages. I think it is worthy of note that of fourteen examples he cites ten of them have to do with sex in some degree of abnormality -- I'll let the Freudians debate the significance of this. The impression given, due to the compression of all these items on two pages, is that this was the way it was all the time, that this was representative of the characters and activities of the majority of the members. Most of what he says, I can testify from personal knowledge, is either greatly exaggerated or related out of context. In a couple of instances Fran himself, at the time, either thought nothing much of it or else thought it was hilarious -- like the drunken stark naked lad under the lady's bed. Hoo haw, you should have heard Laney laugh over that one when he heard about it! In these last two pages Fran seems to have flipped on the subject of sexual abnormality, to have taken a handful of unrelated and isolated instances over a four year span -- several of which he knew only by hearsay -- and put them down on two pages, saying: Look everyone! Look at what an iniquitous hotbed of perverts the LASFS is! It's really rather sad.

I hate to think that so much of Laney's reputation rests on Ah! Sweet Idiocy! Great as the book is as an example of a particular style of writing, it is -- like a distorting carnival mirror -- a misleading reflection of the real Laney. As time goes on, as the Now becomes further and further removed from the Then, the complex individual that was Francis Towner Laney will become increasingly reduced to the one dimensional image that is projected from ASI. ASI was the product of a sour and embittered man who pulled out all the stops, lost all sense of balance and restraint, and forgot that he ever had a sense of humor by the time he got around to writing it. It is not the true measure of the man. I prefer to remember the Laney I knew as a friend before he ever dreamed of writing ASI. And for those who didn't know him personally I would rather his reputation could have rested on ACOLYTE, on his FAPazine FAN-DANGO, and on his always entertaining and frequently thought provoking writings in other journals, than on ASI.

But in-as-much as so great a part of his present day reputation

is derived from ASI I can only hope that this examination of the man and the book will help others to a better understanding of Francis Townner Laney and to a more realistic evaluation of his controversial magnum opus.

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