F A N T A S Y C O M M E N T A T O R

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

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C O N T E N T S

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This-'n'-That

News from Arkham House demands prime attention from all lovers of fantasy fiction. Holding to a hard and fast schedule is made next to impossible by wartime paper limitations, the manpower situation at the printer's and a severe shortage help in the firm itself; the best thing to do, therefore, is to give a tentative schedule of those volumes to be published this year and in 1946 in the probable order of their appearance:

Something Near, by August Derleth	$ 3.00
Witch House, by Evangeline Walton	2.50
The Opener of the Way, by Robert Bloch	3.00
The Hounds of Tindalos, by Frank Belknap Long, Jr.	3.00
Green Tea and other Ghost Stories, by J. Sheridan Le Fanu	3.00
The Lurker at the Threshold, by H. P. Lovecraft & August Derleth	2.50
The House on the Borderland and Other Novels, by W. Hope Hodgson	5.00
Skull Face and Others, by Robert E. Howard	5.00
Mimsy Were the Borogroves, by Henry Kuttner	3.00
Shambleau (tentative title), by C. L. Moore	3.00
a collection by Fritz Leiber, Jr.	3.00

With the exception of those for the latter two (which have not as yet been assigned) the jackets for these volumes will be done by the well-known fantasy illustrators Hannes Bok (who has those for the collections of Long, Hodgson and Howard) and Ronald Clyne (who executes the rest). Of this fine series of books Derleth's Something Near is already in preparation, and is to be published this April. Those who order direct from Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin will receive these limited editions promptly after publication.

New York's Argus Book Store has set April as the publication date of J. O. Bailey's long-awaited critique of science-fiction in literature, Pilgrims of Space and Time; Derleth's H. P. Lovecraft: a Memoir; and the limited edition of Lovecraft's Supernatural Horror in Literature. To appear soon after is a reprint of Finney's Circus of Dr. Lao. The prices are $5, $2½, $2½ and $5 respectively.

Still looking forward: March will see the publication of William Sanson's Fireman Flower (Vanguard, $2½), which appeared in Britain last year. April will bring with it The Best Supernatural Stories of H. P. Lovecraft (Tower, 49¢) and by July Doubleday-Doran's new anthology of fantasy and horror tales, Speak of the Devil, should be ready---this last being under the editorship of the New York Post's book-columnists Sterling North and Clip Boutell. And in September August Derleth's second anthology Who Knocks? (Farrar & Rinehart, $2½) will appear...

And to finish the crop of 1944 fantasy books from Britain: In a merry yet wistful fantasy Titania Has a Mother (Joseph, 8/6) Caryl Brahms and S. J. Simon resurrect many childhood fairy-tale characters; Jane Olivier's In No Strange Land (Collins, 9/6) is a novel of reincarnation; The Heart Consumed, by Francis Askham (Lane, 8/6) deals with a similar theme, venturing into the future in its late chapters; the well-known novelist Robert Graves gives his readers a serious treatment of the quest of Jason and his argonauts in the world of Greek mythology in his Golden Fleece (Cassell, 12/6); The Riddle of the Tower by J. D. Beresford and Esme Wynne-Tyson (Hutchinson, 8/6) traces the adventures of a discarnate mind from an Atlantis-like civilization of the past to a far future where a regimented and mechanized mankind has reverted to the status of insects; and Magdalen King-Hall's Life and Death of the Wicked Lady Skelton (Davies, 8/6) is a full-length ghost story with an unexpected twist. In the realm of non-fiction, J. B. Coates' Ten Modern Prophets (Müller, 8/6) is an intriguing study of the works of several fictional forecasters, Wells and Stapledon and Wells among them.

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The Lord of R'lyeh

A Discussion of the Supreme Contribution of Howard Phillips Lovecraft to the Philosophy of the Weird Tale

by
Matthew H. Onderdonk

I

To the uninitiated, it may appear a curious fact that the most avid readers of supernatural literature usually have no belief in the reality of the categories of human experience therein described. They peruse it for the unique and untold enjoyment obtained: fundamentally it is a medium for entertainment. A few of the best works in the genre may cause a deepening of the spiritual insight, but generally the net result never directly affects their actions or the daily decisions they must make in carrying out the tedium of existence.

It seems equally true that among the host of writers in this field a substantial majority admit to an agnostic attitude towards the verity of these same convictions. These authors are, almost without exception, very sensitive and extremely learned in the lore of the unseen, but they have likewise a strong distaste for the naive and credulous outlook which would accept these credos as the revealed truth.

If we care to seek an explanation for this sometimes perplexing state of affairs, the most likely conclusion that appears would seem to be that those really steeped in the occult, and to whom the nearness of the other worlds is a matter-of-fact daily occurrence, are entirely too close to the whole matter to gain a proper perspective. To these, the supernatural is too <u>real</u> to be a satisfactory medium for mere literary expression. Stories in this domain must of necessity appear insipid and puerile to them; hence, such believers usually have no true critical appreciation of the art.

After all, if you are actually convinced that you can communicate with the deceased via spiritualism, or if you really believe you are able to invoke demons or gods and propitiate them if necessary---all by the use of the proper spells and incantations---it is small wonder that a barley-water version of the real thing provokes only amusement or boredom.

We reach, finally, the rather intriguing paradox that, in the main, the great majority of spectral stories are written by unbelievers for the delectation of other unbelievers---equally fervid in their heretical views. The fundamental problem of why some people since the dawn of time have been obsessed with the unknown and the unseen, and why so many have had such a passionate interest in reciting and listening to spectral ballads and later in history in reading and writing about the supernatural, is a tremendous and profound question. However, since it is clearly beyond the scope of the present article, we regretfully abandon it and concentrate attention directly on the chosen subject-matter.

II

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was a rationalist. There can be little doubt of this, not only from consideration of his own published works, but from the casual testimony of friends and acquaintances. In view of what has been said above, that alone should provide no barrier to our understanding of why he could also be a writer of fine supernatural tales. When we dig deeper, however, and note that he asserted he was a mechanistic materialist in philosophy, we may again wonder a little. For this same man, not content with works of more conventional form such as the superb short story "The Outsider," and the magnif-

icent novel "The case of Charles Dexter Ward," progressed further and created in literary form a new family of gods and associated lore which we have come now to know under the general title "The Cthulhu Mythos."

Here would seem to be a basic contradiction. If "mechanistic materialism" means what it implies, it would indicate a conviction that man's psychical faculties as well as his physical ones---and all the attributes of his world and the universes around him---are uniformly governed by immutable and inviolable mechanical laws, some of which we have already discovered and labeled "science." In short, man and the universe are equally machines; and machines have no power of choice: they must obey the laws which regulate their actions. To such an adherent, it would require an impossible wrench to the intellect to postulate powers of any sort which could modify, reverse, or set aside these blind mechanical laws or any part of them merely to satisfy some whim of the gods or supplication of mankind.

Now, the most immediate conclusion which might be drawn in the case of Lovecraft is that his literary creation of a new pantheon was simply a grim, ironic jest; a bold nose-thumbing at conventional religious concepts; a credo that any man may construct his own family of gods to suit his own tastes and inclinations; a dictum that each man's pantheon has equal validity because in reality none of them has any intrinsic meaning. Those who know anything of Lovecraft the man, however, and who are aware of his genuine erudition, must cast aside immediately such ideas. A man of his character, learning and intellectual integrity was utterly incapable of such shallow posturing, such sophomoric sniping at fundamental and ultimate human questions.

Here was Lovecraft's dilemma as this writer sees it, and here is how he resolved it, according to the best thought and meditations of this same humble seeker after truth: Lovecraft had an innate predilection for the weird and the supernatural since early childhood. Next, he professed an intense nostalgia for the vanished eighteenth century and all it implied (and surely the eighteenth century was a veritable apotheosis of mechanistic materialism in science and philosophy!). Finally, he had a complete awareness of twentieth century science and the speculations arising therefrom: he well knew the terrifying new vistas it had opened up to the human mind. So the query is: how to reconcile these diverse elements?

In the fires of genius flaming in his brilliant intellect he was able to reinterpret eighteenth century mechanism in the light of twentieth century relativity and indeterminacy, and then to <u>integrate</u> these new basic concepts of science with the best elements surviving from age-old supernaturalism. The crowning touch was the added glamour of the weird, which like a gossamer sheen envelops the best of all his tales.

By accomplishing this remarkable feat, he created (as all genius must) something new and unique in the world's storehouse of original ideas. In his case it was a new kind of weird tale that had elements of science-fiction artfully and inextricably woven into the deeper currents of the unseen and the Outside. The result was neither science-fiction, nor weird fiction, nor supernatural fiction, but something different from all of these: in short, a Lovecraftian tale! The supreme resulting achievement? What we formerly called the supernatural was no longer so: it had now become merely the <u>supernormal</u>.

III

The conflict between science and religion is one of mankind's oldest wars. It probably started when one of our earliest ancestors found a new and better way of hunting and killing, or a new kind of food, drink or amusement that conflicted with the authority of the tribal priests. This inevitably led to the

institution of taboo against this particular action. Thus the weight of the supernatural gods (with which the tribal priests were of course on the closest of terms) was thrown behind the ukases of these holy men.

An uninhibited analysis of medieval history inevitably leads to the conclusion that a great deal of the persecution of the so-called "witches, wizards, warlocks and alchemists" by the church and state was prompted by a deadly fear of the unorthodox findings which some of these persons might have chanced upon in their gropings into the unknown.

Of course the classic example of true scientific spirit being throttled by ecclesiastical authority is the case of Galileo, which we all know by heart. No new words need be added to what the verdict of history has finally written on this shameful episode of human stupidity.

With the tremendous upsurge of scientific inquiry and invention in the seventeenth and eigtheenth centuries; the terrific upheavals of our own revolution and that of the French people; the spread of democratic ideas; the breaking up of the family unit of economy through the introduction of the factory system in the Industrial Revolution---is it any wonder that philosophy began to proclaim the Age of Reason? Voltaire and Diderot; Franklin and Paine; Hume, Dalton and Adam Smith were the new prophets. The mechanical principles of Galileo and Newton in astronomy and physics were confirmed in chemistry by Lavoisier. Laplace introduced his famous nebular hypothesis. Malthus capped it all with his essay on population in 1798. Since Lovecraft tried to immerse himself in this eighteenth century and felt he was really an outsider, stranded in space and time, who really belonged in that turbulent era, is it any wonder that he professed himself a mechanistic materialist?

The old conflict reached its apogee with Darwin and the publication of his Origin of Species in 1859. The doctrine of evolution seemed to cut the last props from under the already shaky edifice of supernatural gods and established religion. Darwin, Huxley, Drummond and many others were all participants in that last great battle.

Today, we know that the mechanistic philosophy of life is hopelessly inadequate and outdated. The old-fashioned conception of science indeed made it absolutely irreconcilable with religion and the supernatural. If the universe and man alike are ruled by absolute, immutable laws there is an inevitable clash in any reasonable mind when it tries to envision at the same time the existence of a power which can at will set aside or operate at variance to these laws. Present-day science in its ultimate conceptions spills over into the realm of metaphysics---it is unavoidable. In the last analysis, the complete validity of our scientific knowledge is seriously open to question.

Einstein and relativity; Planck and the quantum theory; Bohr and Compton and the later investigators whose electronic research shows that ultimately the heart of the sub-atomic particle may be only pure energy; Heisenberg and Schrödinger and the principle of indeterminacy; Millikan and the cosmic rays; the modern interpreters like Jeans and Eddington; Dunne, with his serial time and serial universe---all these combine to show us that our final knowledge of the worlds around us is, to say the least, still very incomplete.

The principle of indeterminacy may indicate that our scientific "laws" in their ultimate conception are really mere statements of probability: statistical rules based on averages. The principles of relativity seem to show that while our picture of reality in our own space-time may be accurate enough for most practical purposes, it could be utterly at variance with the reality we might deduce from the same sort of tests and observations in another space-time. What pictures of reality might appear to the inhabitants of other galaxies or other dimensions of space and time brings us to the final conclusion that there may be no such thing as Absolute Reality.

Granting this, there is no reason why we should be slavishly bound to strict scientific law in our broadest conceptions of the universe, and the door is thus left open for a renaissance of personal faith in the supernatural based on our individual intuitions and inclinations.

Now, Lovecraft was cognizant of all that has been sketched in the lines above, but he also realized that we live in a world in which heat, light, gravitation, electricity, etc., do seem to follow definite laws of action that remain quite stable from day to day. Unless we are to abandon all reason, we must take this fact into account. After all, the modern reader of his stories would be bound to have a fair scientific background: this reader couldn't tolerate very many of the old-fashioned Gothic trappings of the ghost, werewolf and vampire per se. It takes a first-rate artist today to make us grant even a half-hour's credence to these relics of yesterday, and after that we dismiss the tale with a shrug and a smile. Clearly, a new approach and wider horizons are required.

Lovecraft was possessed of an enormous spirit of sensitivity and analmost boundless imagination, so it seems quite probable that he shrank from the full implications of a universe governed by mere blind force, particularly with his intuitive feeling for the weird and the unseen. So, therefore, I venture to suggest that his brilliant mind resolved all of these difficulties by a new concept of the spectral tale; a synthetic attitude into which grew inevitably the mythos of supernormal, scientifically-conceived gods and associated lore to take the place in literature of the simon-pure supernatural and more strictly poetical gods of our past days.

I think we can sense this immediately upon the first perusal of his best works, although realization does not come until after meditation and considerable rereading. The atmosphere of a clear rationalism overhangs all of the story-telling; something of the mechanistic belief survives in the concept of Fate as ruling the action of both man and gods. Neither of these, however, subordinate a complete grasp of present-day scientific and philosophical outlook. Mingled throughout is the sense of terror from vast, unseen things and psychological horror of the creeping menace of unimaginable entities from outside.

The objection may be made that the finished product is only pure horror; that the creations of the mythos are almost universally malignant, or, at best, indifferent towards man's fate. This cannot be avoided: all the main currents of the supernatural in the past have had the prime effect of making us uncomfortable. A scientiest of today can conceive the universe as peopled by blind forces which have no concern with the human race, but for the purposes of literature this attitude is too static, too dead: we must have conflict of purposes and emotions to make a story. We must personify these forces in some manner to make them intelligible to the reader, and we are forced to make them inimical to mankind's aspirations and progress in order to have the interesting elements of struggle and survival. If we postulated all the powers of the galaxies as simply united in working towards our objectives, the outcome would be merely a lazy complacency of mind, even granting that we could hurdle the patent absurdity and puerile infantilism of such an idea. It could not be expected that a modern scientific integration with the supernatural would help to flatter us to any extent when we consider the utter vastness of our present conceptions of space and time, and man's paltry insignificance in the midst of it.

IV

Science-fiction had already seen most of its best days when Lovecraft began seriously to write: he was just a couple of decades ahead of the bulk of the writing world in sensing this fact. Of course the reason for this beginning of decadence was, ironically enough, that legitimate science had almost caught up

with the best visions of our "scientifiction" writers. This type of story in the past had always had a punch because it was so breathlessly futuristic: it related of times so far ahead that readers in this ordinary world were filled with heady inspirations and dazzling dreams of the great scientific Utopia to come. Now, the products of research bid fair to outstrip the finest imaginings of our visionaries in literature. Just one instance: we can no longer be expected to read wide-eyed about rocket trips to other planets when modern armies, in conducting military operations, are already on the very fringes of that stage of development. The fictional prophets have been vindicated, of course, but unfortunately they stand in danger of being superceded by the news items in our daily papers! Perhaps not immediately---today---but the shadows are on the horizon, and unless we discover a few new geniuses of the stature of the early H. G. Wells, it would appear that the writing of "scientifiction" will continue its steady decline. We are doomed to be progressively bored and annoyed by the stale rehashing of ideas that once seemed daring and eon-distant in the first quarter of this century, Of course, some may say: What of Olaf Stapledon? Unfortunately, in this writer's present estimation, Stapledon---at least in his two most significant works, Star-maker and Last and First Men---has not written fiction in any true sense of that word. These volumes are crammed with magnificent ideas and concepts, but they read like history texts---albeit very fantastic ones! They will undoubtedly be prime source-books for future writers; granting the emergence of new geniuses to elaborate portions of this material into colorful and dramatic story form, we may yet have a renaissance of science-fiction; let us all hope so! Incidentally, Stapledon's treatment of the superman theme in Odd John is excellent, and may well point the way towards future elaborations he intends to make of his master works. And Sirius, his latest novel, is an able delving into psychological subtleties from a most unexpected viewpoint. Stapledon may well tell the whole tale of cosmic history in readable form if given time.

Another dark portent in the minds of thinkers, however, is the beginning of a sad loss of faith in science as the final arbiter of human progress and welfare. Unless and until war and human greed are conquered, it does not seem that piling more and more gadgets and conveniences on us will help to cure the fundamental faults of human nature. We come inevitably to the distasteful conclusion that a man of the future subsisting on vitamin pellets, week-ending on Venus or Mars, and arming himself with atomic disintegrators or cosmic-ray guns would be even less pleasant to live with than a twentieth century human being unless there were a concurrent improvement in his coöperative abilities and basic nature. The present-day revelation of collectivism in all the horrors of its several forms makes us shrink from the vision of a scientific Utopia, a regimented bee-hive of civilization in which all life would be conducted on the latest principles of research, and wherein we would all have to live as supermen---whether we wanted to or not. Wells must bear a large share of the blame for attempting to foist this unpalatable concept of a brave new world upon us in his later works. The optimists, of course, brush all these doubts aside with light-hearted assurance that man will become better as his world becomes more and more scientifically controlled: but history has thus far not justified their faith. We have made the world infinitely smaller, but the main result has been to bring the other fellow just that much closer to our bomb-sights.

However that may be, in Lovecraft's view the decline and fall of old-time science-fiction seemed not too far distant. He revivified and rescued the best elements of it by marrying them to the older concepts of the supernatural and the weird, and today, of course, we recognize the resulting synthesis as the Lovecraftian attitude.

V

The writer hopes that this discussion will provoke plenty of thought, discussion and controversy; certainly everyone should think for himself on all of the aspects involved. Hence, no attempt will be made at too exhaustive an analysis of any one phase: many of the confirmed Lovecraftians who may have the patience to read this article will have decidedly different opinions, and that is all to the good. If these words can help only in suggesting some new lines of thought on the subject of Lovecraft's genius its purpose will have been nobly fulfilled.

Let us now consider how rational and scientific an aura surrounds much of the apparently wild and fantastic events in his works; and let us note precisely why his stories satisfy our intuitive love of the supernatural, yet do little violence, in their fictional medium, to our scientific background of knowledge.

In "Dagon" we have the most concise and perhaps the best expression of the whole Lovecraftian credo. The account is factual and circumstantial; the idea of a submarine upheaval in the ocean's floor is plausible. That such an event might produce evidence of a lost race does not seem impossible. Our credulity is strained, of course, when we get intimations that the "people" must have been a pre-human race of aquatic men who worshipped a fish-god, but by then the story's spell has captured us. Over it all hangs the awareness of the terrible and acknowledged antiquity of the earth and man's tenuous sinecure thereon. The final horror (if it is not really the narrator's own madness) is certainly little enough license to allow the writer of such a splendid tale.

The whole comment might with even greater certitude be made on that key-stone of the whole mythos: the longer, more definitive, and among the greatest of Lovecraft's stories, "The Call of Cthulhu." Here, a complete city is heaved up from the ocean's floor: unholy and eon-cursed R'yleh wherein lie great Cthulhu and his minions, lord of the waters and his cohorts---perhaps only hibernating for the nonce. In this same story we learn the details from varied sources of the ancient and shocking cult of Cthulhu which has existed in obscure corners of the world since earliest pre-human ages. Since we do know vaguely of mysterious cults that have lurked in the background of human history since earliest antiquity, the evidence as it is unfolded has a certain air of verisimilitude. Cthulhu and his followers are material beings (of a very peculiar sort, it may be granted) and they do not seem to be all-powerful, else they would not remain dreaming in their slimy prison. The air of bland factuality and cosmic horror is nicely balanced; the tale cannot but impress the critical reader.

We hear more of Dagon in "The Shadow over Innsmouth." Clearly, Dagon, one of Cthulhu's entourage, was worshipped by the degenerate aquatic-human hybrids who infested and ruled accursed Innsmouth.

The tremendous adventures of Randolph Carter as detailed in the splendid episodic novel---"The Silver Key," "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" and "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath"---are fine conceptions of events in other dimensions of space and time which are surely not too basic an improbability as fiction in the light of our present-day speculation on relativity and serial time.

In a tale almost as detailed and circumstantial as the works of Defoe, "The Whisperer in Darkness," we have one of Lovecraft's supreme horror stories which yet has a certain amount of quasi-scientific background---enough for fictional purposes it would seem.

It is in that superb creation, "The Shadow out of Time," however, that Love-craft really rose to the heights. Here we have the finest exposition of our planet's terrifying age; we have a rational discourse on relativity; the time-displacement angle is handled in a masterly fashion; and above all we have almost the ultimate zenith in physical terror and psychical horror. This tale is far from being the most popular among readers,

The photograph on the opposite page is that of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, taken at the age of 6½ years. ←

but after long consideration, this writer cannot but place it at the top: it appears to meet all possible requirements and tests.

Dulled a little in effect by its length, perhaps, but almost as great in its own way is the novel "At the Mountains of Madness." The acknowledged evidence of one-time tropical climate at the poles is used to bolster a magnificent and frightening account of the discovery of the ruins of a pre-human civilization of unimaginable antiquity in the Antarctic. Behind hitherto-undiscovered mountains, incredibly high, lurks this vast hulk. Within its dead walls is sculptured the history of a mighty race and its decadence and final downfall. The fact that underground there are---capable of being revived by heat---remnants of the creatures that destroyed this elder race is not too scientifically implausible (as fiction) in the light of what we know today about quick-freezing, hibernation and the innate toughness of some lower species of animal life.

There is even a very thin scientific justification for the events in the series of horror-episodes entitled "Herbert West: Reanimator," although the quality of this writing is definitely inferior to much of Lovecraft's best.

Aside from all that has just been written, however, it would appear that the basic reaction which occurs in the reader's mind is the final and most important point. When we think of Azathoth as ruling all space and time at the center of Ultimate Chaos, we do not experience the same feeling as did we when confronted by the vague, spiritual entities of an older supernaturalism. We feel somehow that Azathoth is explicable in terms of modern astronomy and physics. He seems nearer to our rational, scientific minds than the misty ghosts and purely spiritual forces of a past age. It is perhaps worth repeating that this is the leitmotif of Lovecraft's peculiar art, the core of his philosphy of the weird: that all these vast and mysterious aspects of the universes around us should be regarded in the light of the supernormal rather than the supernatural. It is perhaps even better exemplified by our feeling towards the physical monstrosities, the blasphemous abnormalities of structure, appendage, etc., as encountered in so many of the mythos tales. We feel that these strange and abhorrent creatures are not mere nightmare denizens of the Pit (as in old supernaturalism) but rather conceivable products of a process of biological evolution that might have taken place in an utterly alien cosmos under conditions which an earth-dweller could scarcely comprehend.

Only a few suggestive examples have been given from the mass of Lovecraft's work; whole books could easily be written if and when a definitive critical analysis were attempted. Some of the most popular stories such as "Pickman's Model," "The Colour out of Space," "The Dunwich Horror," "The Rats in the Walls," "The Music of Erich Zann," "The Temple," "The Thing on the Doorstep," and others have not been specifically referred to merely because it is felt that confirmed Lovecraftians, if they feel that the ideas and opinions herein expressed may provide a slight trace of a new and fresh viewpoint, may like the intellectual entertainment of re-analyzing some of these tales for themselves. It would seem that enough has been cited to give those who are interested an opportunity to trace down evidences of confirmation or rebuttal should they feel so inclined.

VI

The importance of Lovecraft's style has been a point of some discussion among its devotees. Of course, the similarity to Poe's was immediate and self-evident: Lovecraft himself admitted that Poe and Dunsany had the greatest influence on his writings. We readily discern the same Poesque elements of morbidity, extravagant phraseology, melodramatics and somber atmosphere. However, while Poe was without doubt an infinitely greater writer in a strict literary sense, we can say that Lovecraft had an imagination equally as fertile; in addition he had the benefit of three generations of scientific research and the philosophical speculation arising therefrom. These same generations an almost complete revolution

in our conception of the universe; they opened up endless vistas for the human mind to explore, and they could not help giving Lovecraft material to draw upon of which Poe could never have dreamt.

Lovecraft's works can be characterized by saying that they are a blend of Poesque style, Dunsanian fantasy and contain a dash of Wellsian scientific realism---but this conveys nothing without a consideration of the catalyst: the genius of Lovecraft's total cosmic viewpoint. This causes all the elements to combine into that superb compound: the Lovecraftian story. This compound gives off the characteristic, peculiar aura that we all recognize: that creeping horror of the menace from Outside.

The Lovecraftian influence is most noticeable in the mood reflected in the reader's mind. That is why his stories can be reread countless times and still appear fresh and interesting. Characterization is negligible; devices and mechanics of plot are far from unique; yet again and again we are drawn back by the description and the atmosphere. Obviously, those who reread him must enjoy the moods engendered: upon each new perusal the old mood is recreated, yet each time it is never quite the same. Sometimes one aspect seems highlighted; sometimes it seems foreshortened and another facet is emphasized. The stories are thus a teeming source of countless, varied moods and never seem stale, lifeless, or too familiar.

What of Lovecraft's influence on the future of the weird tale? We know that so far his work has had a very definite bearing on some of the writings of August Derleth, Donald Wandrei, Clark Ashton Smith, Frank Belknap Long, Robert E. Howard, Hazel Heald, Henry Kuttner, Robert Bloch, Zealia Bishop and others. Certainly we can trace an apparent Lovecraftian influence in the two fine novels of William Sloane, To Walk the Night and The Edge of Running Water; both of which deal with menace from the Outside: the first, of an alien intelligence possessing a human body, and the second, the tremendous, dark forces lurking beyond the barriers of our familiar dimensions.

Lovecraft's brilliant and revolutionary idea of integrating the most worthwhile elements of a decadent science-fiction with the best concepts of the supernatural and the weird would seem to be enough to guarantee an indelible impression being made on the minds of all future writers in the genre. In addition, however, he left the superb concept of the mythos to which several writers have already made additional contributions. When Lovecraft died, the mythos was admittedly incomplete: unquestionably had he lived only a decade longer he would have deepened and widened its scope to a tremendous extent. Certainly no future writer in this domain of literature can afford to be ignorant of the mythos with its pantheon of supernormal gods who are more acceptable to a generation with a modern scientific background than the older, Gothic, purely supernatural deities and powers of darkness and light. Filling in the gaps and extending the sweep of the mythos should provide an inspiration for at least those select few who are capable of carrying it forward.

Finally, as if this were not enough, he left a considerable reservoir of basic plot-material for future writers in the associated lore of the mythos and in the dark portents hinted at in "The Ancient Track" and "Fungi from Yuggoth," which should be limited in development only by the imagination and ingenuity of a generation yet to come.

Think of the stories that yet remain to be written about witch-cursed Arkham, and degenerate Innsmouth! And since R'yleh presumably will not rise again from the ocean floor until eons have passed and the stars are right once more, what is to prevent us from making a submarine expedition to its cyclopean, slimy-green ramparts in the Pacific deep? Inspiration for mythos tales lies all around us: even the writer of this article has a fairly complete mental synopsis of a gripping story based on an unusual local character and his very mysterious

(concluded on page 114)

FAST, Julius, editor

Out of This World: an anthology

New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1944, viii-245pp. 16½ cm. 25¢.

Further information: This is #537 of the Penguin paper-covered book series. The contents: "Evening Primrose" and "Thus I Refute Beelzy" by John Collier; "Laura" by "Saki" (H. H. Munro); "Sam Small's Tyke" by Eric Knight; "Satan and Sam Shaw" by Robert Arthur; "A Disputed Authorship" by John Kendrick Bangs; "Mr. Bergenthwirker's Lobblies" by Nelson S. Bond; "A Vision of Judgement" by H. G. Wells; "The King of the Cats" by Stephen vincent Benet; "The Canterville Ghost" by Oscar Wilde; "My Friend Merton" by Julius Fast; "And Adam Begot" by Arch Obler; "The Club Secretary" by Lord Dunsany; and "The Scarlet Plague" by Jack London.

Review: The avowed intentions of the editor were to produce a volume of pure escapist entertainment, and he succeeded, for the most part, admirably. In fact, it would be difficult to find an anthology that provides more unadulterated, unhackneyed entertainment---or, for that matter, anything ever published along such lines at all outside of issues of Unknown Worlds magazine.

In literary merit, it is a slightly different matter. In this respect, the most important feature of the book is probably its reprinting of "The Scarlet Plague." To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that this excellent Jack London fantasy has ever seen the pages of an anthology; and it strikes me today as a piece of work as fine as when I discovered it at the youthful age of eleven. Certain of the other inclusions, however, are not a discernible improvement over the "fantasies" in such magazines as Amazing Stories and Fantastic Adventures.

But fortunately the good qualities predominate in the long run. The best thing about the collection, perhaps, is that it may introduce the less rabid fantasy reader to a number of neglected authors---London, Benet and Eric Knight, primarily. Further, not more than half of the contents, at most, is obtainable today in other places without ransacking second-hand bookstores.

I have said so many words of lavish praise about "The King of the Cats" elsewhere that I shall refrain from pointing out its sterling qualities and greatness here; and others have sung the merits of the Sam Small stories to such extent that no further eulogies of "Sam Small's Tyke," a yarn complete in itself, are needed. "And Adam Begot" is the script of an Arch Obler radio play---by no means his best, but still a gripping one. Finally, inclusion of the two John Collier tales may serve to raise the quality of his work in the opinion of those who have read only the anthologized "Green Thoughts" or "Home for Christmas"; and it is with unspeakable relief that one sees a Saki story that is not "The Open Window" in a fantasy anthology: "Laura" contains a peculiarly fascinating twist ---the author makes it completely clear how the thing will end by the time the story is half finished, but the reader is yet hypnotized into finishing it.

On the debit side of Julian Fast's collection are the strictly hack work of "My Friend Merton"; "The Club Secretary," which although not intrinsically bad is yet one of the worst Dunsany choices imaginable; and the Robert Arthur devil yarn, which bogs down sadly after a promising start.

Including a Wells yarn not obtainable in the collected short stories of this author, and insertion of a couple of Unknown Worlds' better short fantasies (such as L. Ron Hubbard's "The Room," or the story about the little boy who succeeded in besting Satan by means of holy water in his squirt-gun) would have brought Out of This World perilously close to perfection.

---Harry Warner, Jr.

An Appreciation of William Hope Hodgson

by

A. St. John Adcock

I first met Hope Hodgson in 1909. At that date, his three best novels had been written; two of them, The Boats of the "Glen Carrig" and The House on the Borderland, had been published, and the third, The Ghost Pirates, was in the press. In those three stories he showed himself a writer of quite exceptional imaginative gifts, a master of the weird, the eerie, the terrible, whose strange and grim imaginings were not unworthy of comparison with the bizarre creations of Poe. He had already given himself so entirely and enthusiastically to a literary career that the talk at our first meeting was wholly of books and of his hopes as an author. He aimed high, and, taking his art very seriously, had a frank, unaffected confidence in his powers which was partly the splendid arrogance of youth and partly the heritage of experience, for he had tested and proved them.

There was something curiously attractive in his breezy, forceful, eager personality; his dark eyes were wonderfully alert and alive; he was wonderfully and restlessly alive and alert in all his mind and body. He was emphatic and unrestrained in his talk, but would take the sting out of an extravagant denunciation of some inartistic popular author, or of some pestilent critic, and the egotism out of some headlong confession of his own belief in himself with the most pleasant boyish laugh that brushed it all aside as the mere spray and froth of a passing thought. His dark, handsome features were extraordinarily expressive; they betrayed his emotions as readily as his lips gave away whatever happened to rise in his mind. Always he had the courage of his opinions and no false modesty; it never seemed to occur to him to practise politic subterfuges; and it was this absolute candor and naturalness that compelled you to like him and before long strengthened your liking into a friendly affection.

Only once, and then casually, he mentioned to me that he had been a sailor, but, though there was nothing in his manner or his trim, sturdy figure that suggested the seafarer, one might have guessed as much from his books and from the fact that the ablest of them were all of sailors and the sea. He was the son of an Essex clergyman, and left home to serve for eight years aboard ship, roughing it at the ends of the earth in all manner of picturesque places and voyaging three times around the world. His record as a sailor includes the story of a daring plunge overboard and the saving of a life at sea, for which he received the Royal Humane Society's medal; and much of the rest of his recollections of those eight years have gone to make the characters and incidents and scenery of his stories.

One novel of his, The Night Land, which appeared in 1912, turns altogether aside from the sea and might almost seem to have presaged, in some dim fashion, the coming of the first World War. He ranked it as his greatest achievement and owned he was disappointed that it was not generally regarded as such. The story is told in quaint, archaic language; is by turns grim, idyllic and touched with supernatural horror; it unfolds a romance of the far future when, in the last days of the world, the powers of evil are grown so assertive, so almost all-conquereroring that the last civilized remnant of the human race seeks refuge in an enormous and impregnable pyramid, building their city tier above tier within it, while all around this Last Redoubt stretches immeasurably the menacing Night Land, peopled with primeval and loathesome material monsters and dreadful immaterial things of the spirit world banded together to destroy the soul of mankind. It is a strikingly original piece of work, giving full scope to Hope Hodgson's sombre imaginative power and his peculiar flair for the weirdly horrible and the hauntingly mysterious. But it does not grip and hold one as do those

three earlier novels that, for all their uncanniness, wear an air of everyday realism and never lose touch with the normal elements of actual earthly life.

He introduced some of his verse into his last book of short stories, Captain Gault, which came out a few months before his death; but most of what he wrote in this kind is published for the first time in his posthumous Calling of the Sea. And in his poems, as in his prose, it is the mystery, the strength, the cruelty, the grimness and sadness of the sea that most potently appeal to him. He visions it as a House of Storms, a Hall of Thunders; calm at times, but with such a calm as one sees

When some fierce beast veils anger in his breast,

or raging and heaving and roaring tumultously as though through its tortured waves

Some frightful Thing climbed growling from cold depths.

For him the voices of the sea are the sighing or calling of its multitudinous dead, and there are lines in which he hints that one day he, too, will be called down to them; but that was not the death he was to die.

When the war came, he and his wife had for some while been living in the South of France, but he could not remain there in safety, with the folk at home arming for battle, and, though he was then near forty, he returned to England at once and obtained a commission, in 1915, in the 171st Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery. He put aside all literary work and threw himself heart and soul into his new duties. With characteristic simple frankness, he said his only fear was lest he should feel any shrinking when his time came---a fear that nobody who knew him could ever have had for him. In October, 1917, he went to France with his battery, and was soon in the thick of the fighting. Early in April of 1918 he and a brother officer with a few N.C.O.'s successfully stemmed the rush of an overwhelming number of the enemy who had broken through their line right up to the guns; they fought a gallantly stubborn rear-guard action, under a hail of rifle and machine-gun fire, for three miles across country. A week or two later, on April 17, 1918, Hope Hodgson was killed in action, whilst acting as an observation officer.

It is hard to think of him as dead---he was so vigorously and intensely alive. That vigor and intensity of life pulses and burns in everything he has written; and I think he will still be living in, at least, those three of his novels when we who knew and loved him are passed from remembrance. In the world of letters he had only half fulfilled his promise, but in the larger world of men he left no promise unfulfilled and has an abiding place for ever among the heroic company that the seventeenth century seaman Thomas James commemorated when he wrote:

We that survive perchance may end our days
In some employment meriting no praise,
And lie, forgotten dust, when no man names
The memory of us but to our shames.
They have outlived this fear, and their brave ends
Will ever be an honour to their friends.

---oOo---

The Lord of R'yleh---concluded from page 111

habitation which derives directly from influence of the Lovecraftian viewpoint.

In conclusion, this same writer awaits with the keenest of anticipation that momentous day when some hardy Latin scholar decides to take up the fabled Olaus Wormius edition of the forbidden book, and brings forth to the startled world a translation of the Necronomicon---unabridged and unexpurgated---into English blank verse!

Calling All Crack-Pots!

An Analysis of the Lemurian Hoax in Amazing Stories

by
Thomas S. Gardner

The followers of science-fiction are now witnessing the beginnings of the most extraordinary publication trend in the realm of fantasy fiction that has taken place within the past five years in this country. The only other successful trend there in the last decade was the sudden splurge of fantastic comic-books.

At the present time the more serious, technical and well-written field in science-fiction magazines has been completely captured by Astounding Science-Fiction under John W. Campbell's editorship; the more juvenile field by the Better Publications group (Thrilling Wonder Stories, Startling Stories and the now-defunct Captain Future); and an entirely new field was opened up by editor Raymond A. Palmer with Amazing Stories and Fantastic Adventures. The reader-group catered to by Palmer consists of the average person with a sixth-grade educational level, who wants in his fiction very little plot or characterization, plenty of action, and a love-story ending of a clinch. Amazing has been very successful, too---contrary to the dire predictions of veteran fans. However, it should be noted that there are not enough veteran fans to support any one professional fantasy magazine; in order to survive, therefore, a magazine must cater to other (and larger) sections of the reading public. Charles Hornig formerly tried to capture this same field in his Science Fiction magazine, but made the mistake of "talking down" to his readers, cutting out the writers' theories, eliminating two-syllable words, etc. Palmer, one of the cleverest business editors in the game, shied away from such errors. Instead of eliminating wild theories, he "explained" them in footnotes, thus giving the impression that they had factual basis, occasionally adding pseudo-scientific jargon to give readers the impression that they were learning something. This clever policy cornered for Amazing and Fantastic a large number of enthusiasts who seldom think critically but read for amusement only. It is hard to imagine that Palmer himself actually believes the things he writes for his stories' footnotes, for if this were true it would be necessary to assume that he knows little or nothing about geology, industrial processes, potential theory, anthropology and other scientific subjects. Palmer is probably as well informed as any other successful fantasy editor, but he is clever enough to keep his readers satisfied. And this build-up has laid a perfect basis for a complete change in policy and an attempt to capture hundreds of new readers. Before proceeding further, let us examine these readers' make-up.

The crack-pots, as they are usually called, number at least a million in the United States. They are, in the main, adults, and have educational levels ranging from near zero to those of Ph. D.'s engaged in technical occupations. A great many harbor seriously delusions of ancient civilizations superior to ours, believe in pyramidology and the like. Indeed, there are today in this country several esoteric societies based on Lemuria, Mu, Atlantis, one actually numbering over fifty thousand members. In fact, these groups are in a way semi-religious, since their members have stated that they are not interested in learning anything which would change their beliefs; that they can learn more from their inner consciousness than from without; and some have gone so far as to state that they abhor mathematics and allied modern sciences because these disprove their beliefs. Included also in such groups are those who cling to the idea that the history of the world can be determined by measuring the dimensions of the pyramids---in spite of the fact that the pyramids have been used as a source of rock for buildings for ages, and have steadily decreased in size. Besides, it is

amusing to note that nearly every time the pyramids have been measured a slightly different set of dimensions has been obtained! This, naturally, hampers these believers not in the least; they convert the lengths of the various sides into whatever is their favorite system of units, and then read off the dates of history.

Nevertheless, these crack-pots constitute a large potential buying-power for magazines, and the majority apparently believe in the Lemuria-Mu-Atlantis mythology. Consequently, Palmer must be congratulated on being clever enough to capitalize upon this fact in order to increase his magazines' circulation. An editor need not necessarily believe in his own hoaxes, of course, and such belief or non-belief has little to do with the hoaxes' success. Locke's moon hoax and the Atlantic-crossing hoax were very successful, as a matter of fact, until the true facts were revealed. Here, however, success should be permanent for there is no need of the truth ever coming to light. To capture these readers it is only necessary to publish issues of Amazing Stories containing stories which propitiate these crack-pots' views in fictional guise. And with Richard S. Shaver's "I Remember Lemuria" Palmer has instituted this very trend.

Of course, to make this stick, it will be necessary for both editor and author to maintain---if tongue-in-cheekly---that they are publishing nothing but the truth. But they need not do so long: literally thousands of readers will write in to editor Palmer vouching with personal testimony for the truth of the hoax---because they already believed it, and are too contemptuous, lazy or psycopathic to verify the true position of scientific knowledge in our civilization. A religion is upheld by faith, not by evidence. Therefore, I predict the followers of fantasy will witness the successful operation of one of the biggest hoaxes ever attempted in the field of science-fiction!

Let us consider the first climax in this series of hoax-supporting stories---for that is what it will be---, analyzing its fallacies from a scientific viewpoint. Opinions are not noted, of course. Therefore if our fictional hero uses a "ray-gun" I shall accept it, since at present we have nothing of the sort with which to compare it; but if hydrogen is said to have two valence electrons (implying a nuclear charge of plus two) that is an error which can be easily disproved. False or outmoded hypotheses are also noted. So, buy a copy of the March, 1945 Amazing Stories, and let us go briefly through "I Remember Lemuria." In my abbreviated system of reference the first number refers to the page of the magazine, the second to the column on that page, and the letter following to the position in the column of the context cited (T is top, M, middle, B, bottom). An example: "32-2-M" would indicate the middle of the second column on page 32...

The story's title: Lemuria is utilized here and in Palmer's early "blurbs," but this is transformed to Mu in the body of the tale. This is clever, as Lemuria was the hypothetical name given to a continent that might have existed in the Indian Ocean in prehistoric times. It originated about seventy years ago when scientists postulated its existence to explain the origin of the various races as evolved from the early prototype, the lemur. But as knowledge advanced, this theory was quickly thrown into the discard. Though now forgotten by scientists Lemuria has been kept in usage by the crack-pots. Mu, of course, is in the main Churchward's creation; this work has not been able to stand up in the light of modern discoveries.

The editorial build-up: Aside from its greater-than-average volume, this needs little comment, as it is the usual and expected pattern. I might mention, however, that Palmer remarks (6-2-T) that science recognizes racial memory. I would be very interested just what reputable scientists he refers to. The plain fact is that the theory has been rejected completely by all except those in realms of astrology and similar fallacious pseudo-scientific groups.

16-2-M: Though centuries old, the Titans are "still growing." Clever. But it has been shown that if everyone continued his rate of growth he would be killed by circulation desturbances long before he attained the stature of Mr. Shaver's supersized human "Titans."

17-2-M: Here, weightlessness is said to negate any ill effects due to sudden deceleration. As a matter of cold fact, the inertia of a man decelerating suddenly would be fatal, regardless of his weight. This confusion of mass, weight and inertia shows ignorance fundamental mechanics, dynamics and potential theory.

19-1-M: Genetic studies have shown conclusively that the cross-breeding of different species is impossible, which rules out Mr. Shaver's attempts completely.

19-2-B: "Evil is the opposite of live, the inference being that to be evil is to die. Oddly (or significantly?) evil is live spelled backward." This is childish ---live is derived from the Middle English liven, livien; Anglo-Saxon libbán, lifian; akin to the Old Saxon libbian, etc. No reputably etymologist would ever maintain that a word's derivation is to be found by its inversion.

21-2-M: The theory of the sun's being composed of a ball of glowing carbon dates back some 75 years; it was discarded long ago. Known combustion values for carbon demonstrate conclusively that no such chemical reaction could account for the sun's radiated heat for even a fraction of its age. Palmer certainly should be aware of Bethé's work in this field. Known, measured nuclear reactions were used to calculate and evaluate a system of reactions for main-sequence stars (of which our sun is one). The work is now accepted as the explanation of solar energy, as it checks the measured temperatures we observe, and also because it predicts and explains other stellar phenomena. All evidence we now possess---and that is plenty---denies Shaver's contention, and puts both him and Palmer back into kindergarten.

23-2-B: Not only is an appaling lack of knowledge of the fundamental concepts of radioactivity shown here, but ignorance of the role played by minerals in nutrition is indicated. I would suggest that Messrs. Palmer attempt to live on a demineralized diet for six months! We would hear of their deaths long before that period had elapsed. The experiment would also be on a par with the recent suggestion in Fantasy Fiction Field to demineralize food by means of a cream separator! I would advise our editor and author to spend a year or so in an actual laboratory, where they might learn a few accurate facts on the subject first-hand.

25-1-B: A single reading is enough to reveal this combination of childish reasoning, fallacious logic and semantic nonsense for what it is. It is hardly necessary to state that every statement in this footnote is untrue.

26-2-B: The Titans again! However strong Mr. Shaver would make them, all present-day scientific evidence indicates that beings with bodies of such size could not accomplish locomotion on this planet.

32-1-M: The context reveals a lack of knowledge of dynamics, especially of centrifugal motion, on the writer's part. If a body leaves the earth it must alter its velocity vector relative to the planet in order to maintain the same radial position. For example, if a stone is dropped down a mine-shaft, it will always strike the side of the bore if the shaft is deep enough... The fallacy of gravity being considered a push is due to the 19th century's mechanical conception of the phenomenon. Today gravity is considered to be a characteristic of the space coördinates (relativity) and a field connected with the electromagnetic field (field equations). The two postulates are mutually supporting.

37-1-B: Editor Palmer, have you ever heard of Newton's second law of motion? You still have mass present, even when weight is zero. The analogy with sound is of

course utterly inapplicable. Worse, there is a confusion here between amplitude and velocity, terms which, needless to remark, are scarcely synonymous. The mass of the sun shifts the emitted light toward the red, but has no effect on its velocity, although its electromagnetic and gravitational fields may bend the light. The concept of light starting out with a higher velocity and slowing down to c by constant friction is more amusing than anything else!

45-2-B: Of course it is possible to locate the sites of the lost cities Mr. Shaver claims to have discovered. If found as stated, then every reputable scientist in the world will revise and re-write history in the light of the new findings. But do not be surprised if the usual fictional earthquake, landslide or tidal wave has destroyed the entrance---with, in my opinion, the fictional civilization that was supposedly beyond it...

Editor Palmer could have been more clever in his footnotes and made fewer scientific errors---but of course, as the new reader-group that was to be attracted abhors science, this was unnecessary. I predict that this new policy will be an outstanding success, and that the Lemurian hoax will go on for years, possibly becoming a permanent esoteric feature of Amazing Stories. Frankly, I admire Editor Palmer---up until now, no one in his position has been willing to contact the crack-pots. It shows his wisdom in knowing just what to feed readers: exactly what they want, no matter what it is. Congratulations! and I hope similar analyses of future stories in this series will prove as interesting as I have tried to make this one.

(Editor's note: This manuscript reached me January 2, 1945. I mention this because, in the interim between the date of composition and that of publication, a number of Mr. Gardner's predictions have already been fulfilled. In Fanews #104, January 27, 1945, Editor Palmer has stated that letters then pouring in were indeed confirming the "truth" of "I Remember Lemuria." Mr. Palmer claims also to be in possession (due to readers' help) of "the compilation of the Lemurian language" and that readers' research assures him that "a sensational discovery" has been made. On the basis of this, support from the active veteran fans has been requested in order to help "push this new type of fiction to the top." After seeing the beautiful accuracy with which Gardner has called his shots, I doubt very much if a single important fan will lift a finger in this respect.)

---oOo---

The Dark Cavalier

by
Margaret Widdimer

I am the Dark Cavalier; I am the Last Lover:
My arms shall welcome you when other arms are tired;
I stand to wait for you, patient in the darkness,
Offering forgetfulness of all that you desired.

I ask no merriment, no pretense of gladness,
I can love heavy lids and lips without their rose,
Though you are sorrowful you will not weary me;
I will not go from you when all the tired world goes.

I am the Dark Cavalier; I am the Last Lover;
I promise faithfulness no other lips may keep;
Safe in my bridal place, comforted by darkness,
You shall lie happily, smiling in your sleep.

Tips on Tales

by
Thyril L. Ladd

(Editor's note: Although this column will appear as a regular feature of Fantasy Commentator hereafter, it will not necessarily be limited to any one writer. In order to assure variety of both subject-matter and prose-style its authorship and length will be varied from time to time as submissions to us warrant.)

Chester Brodhay's Veiled Victory (1941): Here is an intriguing concept! A young scientist, in his experiments, establishes television contact with the planet Mars. By means of a code which its inhabitants decipher he instructs them in the construction and operation a television set similar to his. And when their instrument is operated in conjunction with his it is seen that the intelligent beings of Mars are humans of great perfection and beauty. Using these television sets, the scientist meets, and eventually falls in love with a maiden of the red planet---and is faced with the fact that the millions of miles which separate him from his beloved bar the two ever from meeting. Brodhay solves this problem in the novel rather cleverly, I thought.

Norman Matson's Flecker's Magic (1926): She certainly didn't look like a witch, with her neat black bobbed hair, cheery youthful face and charming slender figure---but she told Flecker that she was, and gave him one wish which, if used within a certain time, would certainly be granted, no matter what it might be. Poor Flecker; he ponders and ponders on how to use his wish---he has only one! The story of his decision, not a little complicated by subsequent meetings with his charming benefactor, makes very good reading.

A. B. Cox's Professor on Paws (1927): This time we laugh. Two professors cannot agree---the first claims that if the human brain were removed very quickly after death and transferred to the body of a living animal it would continue to function normally; the second disagrees. But the two agree that if one of them should die, the other will promptly transfer his brain to a living creature. The first professor dies suddenly, and the only animal the second can procure to use in the experiment at such short notice is a little black kitten. The next day professor number one's daughter is much amazed when the family kitten addresses her in her father's cranky voice---the operation has been successful! The hapless pussy-prof's adventures follow fast and furious. He is taken to a lady's boudoir; he is kidnapped by low characters who see in him vast commercial possibilities; a visiting female relative receives from him a great surprise and a mighty shock; and in his feline form he tries in vain to frustrate the marriage of his daughter to a man not of his liking. And just wait until the professor discovers that he is a female cat, and is about to have kittens!

Alexander de Comeau's Monk's Magic (1931): If the themes of black magic and the Elixer of Life appeal to you, by all means obtain this book. The raising of the devil in person; a Black Mass in a ruined chapel; hag-like witches in a somber wood; a dead man raised to be questioned---the author has entwined these scenes with a tender love story and some excellent sly humor. Some of the situations hint of Rabelais; some of the atmospheric effects, of Poe. All in all, it is a rare dish for the feaster on fantasy.

Philip Wylie's Gladiator (1930): A mild-mannered, retiring college professor, under the thumb of his domineering wife, makes a startling biochemical discovery in his laboratory. When his wife is pregnant he slyly drugs her, and then injects a serum. Soon after the child is born, startling phenomena become apparent. The baby shatters his crib with his bare hands, and later on, when a small

(concluded on page 130)

GAWSWORTH, John, editor

Strange Assembly

London: The Unicorn Press, 1932. 334pp. 18½cm. 7/6.

Further information: Contents are as follows: prologue, by the editor; "The Flying Cat," by M. P. Shiel; "The Vivisector Vivisected," by Sir Ronald Ross; "The Black Lad," by Frederick Carter; "The Franc-Tireur's Escape," by Herbert E. Palmer; "The Gift of Tongues," by Arthur Machen; "A Fellside Tragedy," by Hubert Crackenthorpe; "The Mask," by Francis Marsden; "Ilya Vilka," by Stephen Graham; "The Journey," by Rhys Davies; "A Fragment," by Stephen Hudson; "Londoners," by Wilfred Ewart; "The Harrying of the Dead," by Frederick Carter; "A Night in Venice," by M. P. Shiel; "The Rose Garden," by Arthur Machen.

Review: The opening story, "The Flying Cat" of M. P. Shiel, is a typical product of this author's art. Against a modern setting for the old Gothic school type of story---a large, gloomy house in which lives a young girl and the evil old uncle who is planning her murder in order to gain the fortune she is to inherit on coming of age---Shiel brings such modern devices as electric shock condensers and the like. Unfortunately, any merits the story has as a weird tale (hinging on the apparition of the flying cat) are entirely ruined by a rational explanation at the denoument.

The eminent scientist Sir Ronald Ross is represented here by the story "The Vivisector Vivisected." Though written in a spirit of satirical humor, it nevertheless does contain a sufficient measure of gruesomeness to be reminiscent of Poe's "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" or Lovecraft's "Herbert West, Reanimator." The supreme irony of Ross's effort lies in the fact that the victim who is brought back to life temporarily is himself a famous vivisector.

Also in Strange Assembly are two little-known pieces by Arthur Machen. One of these, "The Rose Garden" (which was included only in an expensive and limited edition prior to appearing here) was written at the time of the author's Hill of Dreams, and includes many of the qualities of that delicate fantasia. As Gawsworth remarks in his prologue:

> Without strain or hint of forcing, it contains as much of the authentic Celtic twilight---peace on the wings of morning---as ever a poem by W. B. Yeats. On reading and rereading new profundities of sense are revealed. Each word is significant with a hundred unborn meanings.

In "The Gift of Tongues" Machen speculates on the cases of people who are apparently temporarily possessed, and speaking languages normally unknown to them---a simple German girl declaiming in Hebrew, a Welsh minister who knows only English and his native tongue lapsing into the purest Latin during a service, etc.

Another story by M. P. Shiel is not a very happy inclusion. This one, "A Night in Venice," is nothing but pure melodrama, complete almost to masks, cloaks and daggers. Outside of one good scene in the torture chambers of the Banda---an organization somewhat akin to the Black Hand---this has little to recommend it. Basically, the plot itself is similar to the first Shiel story used in this volume: a scheming father seeking to gain control of his daughter's fortune.

One of the best stories in this anthology is Frederick Carter's "Harrying of the Dead." Like Lovecraft and Edward Lucas White, Carter obtains many of the plots for his stories from actual dreams. "The Harrying of the Dead" is

indeed a remarkable treatment of the dream theme. The hero, home on leave during the last war, decides to spend his time in a lonely and desolate district of England. Stopping for the night at an inn, he hears, as he dozes off to sleep, the other frequenters of the place discussing an old earth-barrow near by, beneath which lie buried together hundreds of men who had been slain in a battle of ancient days.

The next day he starts out afoot on the last stage of his journey. As he arrives at the old burial spot a strange fatigue overpowers him; lying down in the grass, he immediately falls asleep. When he awakens it is already dark, and ghost-fires are playing about the burial mound. Coming to a sudden decision, he resolves to excavate the mound to see what lies below. After digging down some feet he discovers what appears to be the wall of an underground chamber; and breaking through this he finds himself in a room in which a hideous company of long-dead men are grouped around a table, at whose head is seated a king, sceptre in hand. Moved by impulse, he snatches the weapon from the ancient's hand. A frightful struggle ensues, the man desperately trying to beat off the attack of his dead-alive opponents; finally, more through luck than judgement, he finds the entrance, staggers into the sane outer air, and collapses. On recovering his senses in the daylight he finds himself undishevelled, and the burial plot undisturbed---yet in his hand is a curiously carven bone and a twisted sceptre...

Also in Strange Assembly is the same author's "Black Lad," wherein the same general theme predominates. In his preface, Gawsworth quotes a passage from Wuthering Heights, wherein the character Catherine says,

> "I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after and changed my ideas. They've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind...."

Catherine is here echoing the personality of Emily Brontë, her creator; but unknowingly, too, she is describing the prose of Frederick Carter.

Two other powerful tales in this collection are by Francis Marsden---who is introduced by the anthologist as editor of Form; they are studies in illusion and fear, bordering on the realm of the subconscious. The first of these is "The Mask." The character in this story, as Gawsworth puts it, "is obsessed with the fear of nothingness, haunted by the mask and the terror of the blank behind it...forever explaining his fears away, believing he has conquerored them." Paradoxically, the illusion he suffers from is that he has completely rid himself of his illusion. And there is where the diabolical ingenuity of the tale asserts itself.

Marsden's second contribution is "The Captain," which has for its background the unreal atmosphere of London during the first great war. It tells of a woman with a passion for cats, one of her pampered favorites being a huge creature called The Captain. During an air-raid this cat disappears---but at the same time a great negro enters the scene. The woman becomes convinced that a transformation has occurred, as the negro one day disappears suddenly and mysteriously---and the cat is to be found once more in his favorite spot.

The remainder of the stories in this collection are in no way fantastic, and need not be treated here. One, however---Stephen Hudson's "Fragment"---should be of interest to anyone admiring the genius of Marcel Proust, for it relates of an actual meeting with the author of Remembrance of Things Past. All in all, Strange Assembly is undoubtedly a worthy addition to the library of any serious fantasy collector; and I hope that these brief comments may be instrumental in removing it from the place of apparent obscurity where, up until now, it has evidently been resting.

---Harold Wakefield.

"Very Much in Demand"

some interesting statistics

by
Thyril L. Ladd

Quite often one hears the remark "Oh, that fantasy book is very much in demand!" In actuality, just how much in demand is any given title? Within the limits of the source-material used in this article, I shall attempt to give a definite answer to that question.

The source I have used is a weekly periodical whose subscribers consist of booksellers---many of them exclusively dealers in second-hand volumes---some of whom carry on their businesses entirely by its means through the mails. This trade publication reaches every state in the union, and in its pages, every issue, dealers list the titles of books which have been asked for by their customers---books they cannot themselves supply (usually because the titles are out of print) and which they therefore wish to buy. Other booksellers who may have the volumes needed quote their prices to the ones requesting them.

Among the thousands of books advertised for each week appear many that are fantastic in fictional theme. I have carefully checked twenty-six consecutive issues of this periodical---from the July 24, 1944 number to that of January 15, 1945---representing a half-year of book wants. And from each number I have tabulated all requests for fantasy fiction volumes. The data to be given later in this article are totals covering this period.

The greater the number of times a book is advertised for, of course, the greater is the relative countrywide demand indicated. Naturally, the choice is in each case up to the individual customer, showing what volumes readers and collectors of imaginative fiction actually want to own---those for which they are willing and ready to pay. Thus it seems to me that a check-up such as this, being a veritable national poll, may be considered not only important, but a reliable index of any novel's popularity.

This survey, then, covers all fiction of the imaginative or bizarre nature known to me. Thus the list below includes novels of the supernatural; of "pure fantasy"; of horror, the weird and the occult; fantastic adventure; stories of lost races; tales of mental or physical travel into the past or the future. Some titles, it may be argued, are but lamely members of this class: but a few of the non-fantasy works of H. Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs have been included in order to compare their showings with the authors' usual imaginative efforts. And there are also three titles of non-fiction which have been retained because they are so closely allied to the field being considered, as well as because they have proved of considerable interest to fantasy readers: Donnelly's Atlantis, Rohmer's Romance of Sorcery, and The Books of Charles Fort.

Here, then, is the score at the end of six months. The numerical figure following each title represents, of course, the number of times it has been requested during this period. If you like, divide each figure by twenty-six, as this will tell you how many times, on an average, a book has been advertised for in each issue...

The Outsider (Lovecraft)	114	Dream's End (Smith)	31
The Circus of Dr. Lao	77	Swords of Mars (Burroughs)	29
The Ship of Ishtar	56	After Worlds Collide (Balmer & Wylie)	28
Brother of the Third Degree (Garver)	48	Life Everlasting (Corelli)	28
Atlantis (Donnelly)	46	Beyond the Wall of Sleep (Lovecraft)	27
The House of Fulfillment (Beck)	45	Gladiator (Wylie)	27
Out of Space and Time (Smith)	45	She (Haggard)	25
Om (Mundy)	36	To Walk the Night (Sloane)	25
The Face in the Abyss (Merritt)	35	The Ghost Kings (Haggard)	23

Ayesha (Haggard)	22
[illegible] Such Things Be? (Bierce)	21
[illegible]y Face (Mundy)	21
[illegible]nce of Peril (Kline)	20
W[illegible]ing Ghosts (Crawford)	20
The Worm Ouroborus (Eddison)	20
The Romance of Sorcery (Rohmer)	19
The Room in the Tower (Benson)	19
Brave New World (Huxley)	18
Collected Ghost Stories (James)	18
Collected Ghost Stories (Onions)	18
Widdershins (Onions)	18
The Lady of Blossholme (Haggard)	17
The Mucker (Burroughs)	17
Spook Stories (Benson)	17
Carson of Venus (Burroughs)	16
The Celestial Omnibus (Forster)	16
The Garden of Vision (Beck)	16
Melmoth the Wanderer (Maturin)	16
The Mysterious Stranger (Twain)	16
Some Ghost Stories (Burrage)	16
Uncanny Tales (Crawford)	16
Darkness and Dawn (England)	15
The Night Land (Hodgson)	15
Presenting Moonshine (Collier)	15
Someone in the Dark (Derleth)	15
House on the Borderland (Hodgson)	14
In a Glass Darkly (Le Fanu)	14
Last and First Men (Stapledon)	14
The Openers of the Gates (Beck)	14
The Outlaw of Torn (Burroughs)	14
The Star Rover (London)	14
The Treasure of Ho (Beck)	14
The Apache Devil (Burroughs)	13
A Dreamer's Tales (Dunsany)	13
Etidorhpa (Lloyd)	13
A Fighting Man of Mars (Burroughs)	13
The King in Yellow (Chambers)	13
More Spook Stories (Benson)	13
The Planet of Peril (Kline)	13
The Smoky God (Emerson)	13
Dracula's Guest (Stoker)	12
Dwellers in the Mirage (Merritt)	12
House by the Churchyard (Le Fanu)	12
The House of Sounds (Shiel)	12
The Maker of Moons (Chambers)	12
The Moon Maid (Burroughs)	12
The Ninth Vibration (Beck)	12
Out of the Silence (Cox)	12
Starmaker (Stapledon)	12
Visible and Invisible (Benson)	12
The War of the Worlds (Wells)	12
Tanar of Pellucidar (Burroughs)	11
The Way of the Spirit (Beck)	11
When Worlds Collide (Balmer & Wylie)	11
The Moon Pool (Merritt)	11
Prince Zaleskie (Shiel)	11
Red Eve (Haggard)	11
The Soul of Lilith (Corelli)	11
The Sword in the Stone (White)	11
Alruane (Ewers)	10
The Banshee's Warning (Riddell)	10
The Ghost Pirates (Hodgson)	10
The House of Souls (Machen)	10
Land that Time Forgot (Burroughs)	10
Lest Darkness Fall (de Camp)	10
King Solomon's Mines (Haggard)	10
The Place Called Dagon (Gorman)	10
Tarzan and the Leopard Men (Burroughs)	10
Tarzan and the Lion-Man	10
Weird Stories (Riddell)	10
The Boats of the "Glen Carrig" (Hod'n)	9
The Bride of Fu Manchu (Rohmer)	9
Dr. Arnoldi (Thayer)	9
Ghost Stories (Heron)	9
Girl in the Golden Atom (Cummings)	9
The Ivory Child (Haggard)	9
Looking Backward, 2000-1887 (Bellamy)	9
The Monk (Lewis)	9
The Metal Emperor (Merritt)	9
Out of the Silent Planet (Lewis)	9
Pirates of Venus (Burroughs)	9
Sinister House (Hall)	9
Synthetic Men of Mars	9
Tarzan Triumphant (Burroughs)	9
The World Below (Wright)	9
Back to the Stone Age (Burroughs)	8
Carnacki the Ghost-Finder (Hodgson)	8
The Chessmen of Mars (Burroughs)	8
Children of the Pool (Machen)	8
Dr. Therne (Haggard)	8
The Edge of Running Water (Sloane)	8
The Elixer of Life (Ransome)	8
The Hill of Dreams (Machen)	8
Judas and other Stories (Metcalfe)	8
Lukundoo and other Stories (White)	8
Montezuma's Daughter (Haggard)	8
Nada the Lily (Haggard)	8
The Pale Ape (Shiel)	8
The Time Machine (Wells)	8
The Way of Power (Beck)	8
When the World Shook (Haggard)	8
After Many a Summer Dies the Swan (Huxley)	7
The Brook Kerith (Moore)	7
Child of the Storm (Haggard)	7
Creep, Shadow! (Merritt)	7
Dawn of Flame (Weinbaum)	7
The Devil-Doctor (Rohmer	7
The Ghost-Ship (Middleton)	7

The Gods of Mars (Burroughs) 7
The Ill-Made Knight (White) 7
The Incomplete Enchanter (Pratt-de Camp) 7
The Line Unknown (Mundy) 7
The Mahatma and the Hare (Haggard) 7
Perelandra (Lewis) 7
The Sea Girl (Cummings) 7
The Supernatural Omnibus (Summers) 7
Tales of the Uneasy (Hunt) 7
The Tarzan Twins (Burroughs) 7
The Warlord of Mars (Burroughs) 7
Weird Tales (Hoffmann) 7
Wieland (Brown) 7
The Wind in the Rosebush (Freeman) 7
The Yellow God (Haggard) 7
Someone in the Room (Burrage) 7
Barrabas (Corelli) 6
Black Light (Mundy) 6
Brood of the Witch Queen (Rohmer) 6
Cave Girl (Burroughs) 6
Door of the Unreal (Biss) 6
Dreams (Schreiner) 6
The Eternal Lover (Burroughs) 6
The Frozen Pirate (Russell) 6
Ghosts and Marvels (Collins) 6
The Hampdenshire Wonder (Beresford) 6
In the Midst of Life (Bierce) 6
The Jungle Girl (Burroughs) 6
The Lair of the White Worm (Stoker) 6
Last Men in London (Stapledon) 6
Lost Horizon (Hilton) 6
Lost on Venus (Burroughs) 6
Madame Crowel's Ghost (Le Fanu) 6
Men Like Gods (Wells) 6
The Mighty Atom (Corelli) 6
One of Cleopatra's Nights (Gautier) 6
The Purple Cloud (Shiel) 6
The Secret Power (Corelli) 6
Shapes in the Fire (Shiel) 6
A Tale of Three Lions (Haggard) 6
Tarzan and the Lost Empire (Bur- 6
Tarzan the Magnificent roughs) 6
They Return at Evening (Wakefield) 6
Thuvia, Maid of Mars (Burroughs) 6
Time and the Gods (Dunsany) 6
The War Chief (Burroughs) 6
A.D. 2000 (Fuller) 5
Allan and the Holy Flower (Haggard) 5
Allan and the Ice-Gods (Haggard) 5
Dracula (Stoker) 5
The Dweller on the Threshold (Buchan) 5
The Empty House (Blackwood) 5
Eric Brighteyes (Haggard) 5
Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery (Le Fanu) 5
The Invisible Man (Wells) 5
Jorkens Remembers Africa (Dunsany) 5
Lilith (Corelli) 5
Lord of the World (Benson) 5
Loup Garou (Philpotts) 5
The Maracot Deep (Doyle) 5
Maza of the Moon (Kline) 5
Moods and Tenses (Harvey) 5
Mysteries of Udolpho (Radcliffe) 5
Night Fears (Hartley) 5
Omega (Flammarion) 5
Pellucidar (Burroughs) 5
People of the Mist (Haggard) 5
Perfume of the Rainbow (Beck) 5
Sam Small Flies Again (Knight) 5
Sardonic Tales (de l'Isle Adam) 5
The Shadowy Thing (Drake) 5
The Short Stories of H. G. Wells 5
Some Chinese Ghosts (Hearn) 5
The Sorrows of Satan (Corelli) 5
The Stolen March (Yates) 5
The Unholy City (Finney) 5
The Venetian-Glass Nephew (Wylie) 5
The Amber Witch (Meinhold) 4
Anthem (Rand) 4
The Bandit of Hell's Bend (Burroughs) 4
The Beetle (Marsh) 4
The Book of Wonder (Dunsany) 4
Brigands of the Moon (Cummings) 4
Burn Witch Burn! (Merritt) 4
The Dragon (Shiel) 4
The First Men in the Moon (Wells) 4
Ghost Stories (Arlen) 4
The Haunted Omnibus (Laing) 4
The House of Darkness (Scoggins) 4
The Isle of Lies (Shiel) 4
John Silence (Blackwood) 4
The Lost World (Doyle) 4
The Magician (Maugham) 4
Marion Isle (Haggard) 4
The Master Mind of Mars (Burroughs) 4
Midnight House (Harvey) 4
The Monster Men (Burroughs) 4
Others Who Returned (Wakefield) 4
Phra the Phoenician (Arnold) 4
The Rajah's Sapphire (Shiel) 4
The Red Napoleon (Gibbons) 4
A Romance of Two Worlds (Corelli) 4
A Princess of Mars (Burroughs) 4
The Second Omnibus of Crime (Sayers) 4
Seven Famous Novels of H. G. Wells 4
The Sorceror's Apprentice (Ewers) 4
The Tales of Algernon Blackwood 4
Tarzan at the Earth's Core (Burroughs) 4
They Walk Again (de la Mare) 4

The Third Omnibus of Crime (Sayers)	4	The Wanderer's Necklace (Haggard)	4
Three Go Back (Mitchell)	4	The Way of Stars (Beck)	4
The Travel Tales of Mr. Joseph Jorkens (Dunsany)	4	The Weird O't (Shiel)	4
		Wisdom's Daughter (Haggard)	4

Lack of space precludes the listing of titles which were requested fewer than four times during the period of this survey.

It might be well to comment briefly upon the results. First of all, although a high count usually indicates that a book is scarce and therefore difficult to obtain (with a few exceptions such as She and Atlantis) the reverse is not necessarily true. Novels such as The World Below, The Earth Tube, The Monk, The House by the Churchyard and others of equal or greater scarcity are requested less often than are To Walk the Night, The Prince of Peril, The Celestial Omnibus, et al., which are relatively easier to locate. This may show that some books are more widely publicized than others---or else simply that the average reader's preferences are operating to produce such an effect.

It is not a very surprising fact that Lovecraft's Outsider leads the list, since the book is of high quality and received but a limited printing. The other Arkham House volumes also showed up well---all now out of print receiving fifteen or more requests apiece. The popularity of The Circus of Dr. Lao is understandable, such a truly unique novel well meriting such attention. Somewhat surprising to me, however, is the number of requests for Om, The House of Fulfilment and Brother of the Third Degree. Also it seems a bit odd that only one of E. F. Benson's four collections of ghost stories should be in demand, and, (aside from the omnibus volume) but one of Oliver Onions' three.

Several Haggard novels rate quite well---which is a just tribute to an old master, a proof that a half-century of time has not dimmed his popularity. Burroughs' Swords of Mars is seen to be his novel that is most in demand, with Carson of Venus not far behind. And such masters as William Hope Hodgson, M. R. James and Olaf Stapledon still command attention. Merritt, of course, is in as much demand as ever, his "Metal Emperor," which never was published in book form except in Russia (where it appeared under the title "The Lightning Witch") being requested several times.

To comparative newcomers to the fantasy field this listing may also be of interest as source-material---giving the titles of books which might not be otherwise recognized as fantasy. To them, and to others as well, I therefore leave it, each to follow his own train of thoughts during perusal. It would, however, be interesting to see how the coming six months affects the position of various titles. Would there be any important alterations? Only the next twenty-six issues of our bookdealers' trade-journal will tell!

---oOo---

This-'n'-That---concluded from page 102

In this country, meanwhile, 1944 saw the appearance of many titles of imaginative fiction. The End of All Men, by C. F. Ramuz (Pantheon, $2½) tells of the earth falling into the sun. Marjorie Fischer and Rolfe Humphries have edited a bulky anthology of short fantasies entitled Pause to Wonder (Messner, $3), now in its second printing. Memorable for its Salvatore Dali illustrations---as well as for its beautiful format---is Maurice Sandoz' Fantastic Memories (Doubleday-Doran, $5), a collection of fifteen short narratives of the strange and the macabre. Thumbs down on W. Kreupp's Extraordinary Professor (Colt, $3); this is heavy allegorical satire, usually coarse, and too often crudely offensive... And although there are more books to note, insufficient room prevents their listing here; the remainder will be in Commentator #7. ---A.L.S.

Forgotten Creators of Ghosts

by
A. Langley Searles

II - Ralph Adams Cram

While Ralph Adams Cram is today remembered as an architect of no small eminence, he may be recalled by a few as an author---and by an even smaller group as having written supernatural fiction. His output in the latter field is small: six stories, these having been collected under the title Black Spirits and White: a Book of Ghost Stories (1895). This slim volume contains also a postscript by the author, which, being brief, quoted here in its entirety:

> There seem to be certain well-defined roots existing in all countries, from which spring the current legends of the supernatural; and therefore for the germs of the stories in this book the Author claims no originality. These legends differ from one another only in local color and in individual treatment. If the Author has succeeded in clothing one or two of these norms in some slightly new vesture, he is more than content.

However much Cram may be indebted to his Gothic predecessors for the plots of his tales, no one could ever accuse him of emulating their style. Careful and unhurried though it is, his writing is forceful and realistic; and although his treatment may be sympathetic, it is never unnecessarily sentimental. Cram's stories are far more reminiscent of those in the next century than those of the author's own. Like most Americans in his time he looked forward, and the style of the fiction he wrote shows this both by its verisimilitude and its abundant use of forthright materialistic detail.

Best known of the tales in Black Spirits and White is "The Dead Valley," one of the two stories of the book to appear in later anthologies of supernatural fiction. It tells of the adventures of two Swedish boys on a cross-country walking-trip. The youths encounter on the homeward lap of their journey a strange valley, utterly silent and devoid of life, its very air stagnant with death. It is dusk as they are about to cross it, and with the disappearance of the sun an ashy-white, faintly phosphorescent sea of velvet fog fills the hollow like motionless water, so thickly that it seems almost capable of sustaining weight. And as the darkness walls them in they hear from the depths of the silence

> "...a cry, beginning as a low, sorrowful moan, rising to a tremulous shriek, culminating in a yell that seemed to tear the night in sunder and rend the world as by a cataclysm."

They are all but petrified with fear; yet to escape the place the two---the narrator and Nils, his companion---must pass through the dread ocean of milky whiteness just below...

> "I put one foot into the ghostly fog. A chill as of death struck through me, stopping my heart, and I threw myself backward on the slope. At that instant came again the shriek, close, close, right in our ears, in ourselves, and far out across that damnable sea I saw the cold fog lift like a water-spout and toss itself high in writhing convulsions towards the sky. The stars began to grow dim as thick vapor swept across them, and in the growing dark I saw a

great, watery moon lift itself slowly above the palpitating sea, vast and vague in the gathering mist."

The two flee in desperate fear, keeping as far from the rising whiteness as possible, and at length gain the brink of the surrounding foothills, and reach the outward path leading to safety. The effect of the strange phosphorescent mist is to inflict both youths with a severe brain-fever, from which Nils recovers with a memory completely blank as far as his part in the strange experience is concerned. Because of this the narrator himself is beset with doubts as to the authenticity of the supposed adventure. Was it indeed a dream, some vivid nightmare born of the delirium of illness? Determined to answer the question, he decides to revisit the fateful valley.

This he sets out to do in the late summer some weeks later. After wandering along the familiar paths of the countryside he at length comes upon the place in the late afternoon. It lies before him, a smooth oval depression, the grass on the surrounding hillsides fading from green to brown and then to ashy white as the ground dips downward. The valley itself is utterly barren---a vast stretch of dead earth, glistening here and there with pale alkali-crystals. In its very center rises the gaunt skeleton of a great dead tree; and driven by an overwhelming curiosity he trudges toward it, noticing that as he walks over the hard earth the woodland noises of birds and insects die away completely, leaving an all-pervading ominous silence reminiscent of the horror of the night he shared in the valley with Nils...

> "As I drew near the skeleton tree, I noticed the glint of sunlight on a kind of white mound around the roots, and I wondered curiously. It was not until I came close that I saw its nature.
>
> "All around the roots and barkless trunk was heaped a wilderness of little bones. Tiny skulls of rodents and of birds, thousands of them, rising about the dead tree and streaming off for several yards in all directions, until the dreadful pile ended in isolated skulls and scattered skeletons. Here and there a larger bone appeared,---the thigh of a sheep, the hoofs of a horse, and to one side, grinning slowly, a human skull."

Horror overwhelms him, and a strange numbness; and then, seeing that the sun is sinking redly behind the near-by hill-tops, he quickly sets off for the distant valley-wall whence he came.

> "...my feet seemed clogged as in a nightmare. I could hardly drag them over the barren earth. And then I felt the slow chill creeping through me. I looked down. Out of the earth a thin mist was rising, collecting little pools that grew ever larger until they joined here and there, their currents swirling slowly like thin blue smoke. ...The silence pursued me like dumb ghosts, the still air held my breath, the hellish fog caught at my feet like cold hands."

And not a moment too soon, he crawls up the desolate slope on hands and knees, the fog undulating pallidly just behind; and in the growing twilight he hears, as before, the same ghastly cry, unmistakable in its horrible intensity. But by now the brow of the friendly hills is at hand, and he leaps down the far slope just as total darkness shuts down on the lifeless gray silence of the Dead Valley.

This story is considered by many to be Cram's outstanding contribution to supernatural fiction, and was indeed noted by Lovecraft as achieving "a memorably potent degree of vague regional horror through subtleties of atmosphere and description." The aura of desolation that pervades it makes "The Dead Valley" a tale that is not easy to forget.

Less artistic and slightly tinged with sentiment is "Notre Dame des Eaux," which describes the return of the spirit of a mad artist to the church of his native French village, and of how it threatens the life of a girl who has befriended the man during his lifetime. Some of the description is beautifully executed; especially memorable is the delicate word-painting of the tiny church itself which the reader encounters early in the story, this being no small contribution to the general atmosphere of the tale.

"In Kropfsberg Keep" tells of the fate that befell two young men, who, in defiance of local superstition, spend the night in the keep of a ruined and haunted castle. Forty years before their coming Count Albert, master of Kropfsberg, gathered together a score of his reckless and wicked friends for a riotous debauch; and at the height of celebration, when all were dancing in the great ballroom, he barred the doors and set the castle afire, then sat in its donjon, listening to the revellers' cries of fear and terror, and watching the red sheets of fire sweep above the battlements. And finally he committed suicide, hanging himself in the ruins of the once-mighty structure. Those who have been luckless or foolhardy enough to brave the night within the crumbling walls of its ruins since that time have always met with death.

But Rupert and Otto---the two youthful travellers---deride such superstitious beliefs. The two sit up before an open fire in the keep, whiling away the night hours at chess until well past midnight. Nothing unusual having occurred, they decide to retire. Otto falls asleep immediately; Rupert sits drowsily smoking, eying the iron hook on the overhead beam from which the wicked count reputedly hanged himself. A melancholy two tolls from the village clock. Suddenly faint music, as of a near-by dance, fills the air; the opposite rends in a jagged line of fire and he sees Count Albert, mailed, standing before him. The count beckons, and Rupert, pistol in hand, follows the mailed figure to the olden ballroom where a concourse of skeletal horrors---the dead of forty years before---dance once more in a dismal light to strains of music that seem to come from nowhere. The count bids him join the charnel throng; and Rupert, in fright, fires his pistol at the spectre, who leers at him with eyeless skull through the armor-visor... Outside, the clock tolls three; and he finds himself in the keep once more. Has he but dreamed? Not so; for searchers the next morning discover him kneeling beside his companion: Otto lies quite still, a bullet through his throat...

The second story in Black Spirits and White to be anthologized is "Sister Maddelena," which appeared in J. L. French's Ghost Stories (1922). This tells of the wandering spirit of a murdered nun which haunts the corridors of an ancient Sicilian convent until it leads a chance visitor there to the site of her unmarked grave. Cram's descriptions are deftly executed, and the opening of Sister Maddelena's walled-up tomb is a powerfully portrayed scene in the tale.

"The White Villa," also in this volume, is an excellent description of a ghastly murder's spectral reënactment. Though its peak falls somewhat short of those in other tales in this collection, it is yet a memorable example of the supernatural, and reaches a potent emotional level in the depiction of the crime itself.

Although as a whole it is not as artistic as "The Dead Valley," and while it has an admittedly slow beginning, nevertheless "No. 252 Rue M. le Prince" rises to Lovecraftian heights near its ending, and must therefore be rated as an equal to the former story. The narrator---for like much of Cram's work this is told in the first person---is visiting a Parisian friend who has but recently

inherited a house that is reputedly haunted. His aunt, the former owner, is said to have practised black magic; and neighbors say that strange sounds are still to be heard there, even though it is now empty.

D'Ardeche, the owner, is persuaded by the narrator and two friends to spend a night in the place, that all may verify for themselves the truth of the neighborhood rumours. D'Ardeche agrees, and after a brief exploration of the place, the party splits up, each man going to one of a group of rooms opening on a common corridor. They shout back and forth to one another from time to time as the evening wears on, finally desisting, since the sound echoes unpleasantly in the rooms. As the hours pass the group becomes silent. The narrator becomes ever more drowsy and numb, as though with cold. Suddenly he discovers that he has lost nearly all the power to move---or, even, to cry out. Then gradually, little by little, the flame in his lantern grows dimmer...dimmer...and is extinguished...

> Then the end began. In the velvet blackness came two white eyes, milky, opalscent, small, far away,---awful eyes, like a dead dream. ...I could not have moved my eyes had I possessed the power: they devoured the fearful, beautiful things that grew slowly, slowly larger, fixed on me, advancing, growing more beautiful with white flakes of light sweeping more swiftly into the blazing vortices, the awful fascination deepening in its insane intensity as the white, vibrating eyes grew nearer, larger.
>
> Like a hideous and implacable engine of death the eyes of the Unknown Horror swelled and expanded until they were close before me, enormous, terrible, and I felt a slow, cold, wet breath propelled with mechanical regularity against my face, enveloping me in its fetid mist, its charnel-house deadliness.

Immovable, the luckless man strains every physical and mental fiber in a vain effort to cry aloud, to be freed of this utter terror of the mind...

> Suddenly a wet, icy mouth, like that of a dead cuttle-fish, shapeless, jelly-like, fell over mine. The horror began slowly to draw my life from me...as enormous and shuddering folds of palpitating jelly swept sinuously around me...the wet sucking mass closed over my face...

The man awakens in a hospital bed. His friends, when he did not answer their repeated calls, went to his room---and discovered the door shut and bolted from within. Battering it open,

> ...they leaped into the room and fell over my body in the middle of the floor. They lighted one of the lanterns, and saw...that the floor and walls to the height of about six feet were running with something that seemed like stagnant water, thick, glutinous, sickening. As for me, I was drenched in the same cursed liquid.

Yet the cause of this horrible happening is destined to remain a mystery forever, as the house in Rue M. le Prince is that very night guttered by fire, and the chamber where doom so nearly overtook the narrator is destroyed with it...

This tale seems a trifle less artistic than "The Dead Valley," yet it is more powerful, and represents the high-water mark of Ralph Adams Cram in the realm of supernatural fiction as a forgotten creator of ghosts.

Acknowledgements

Margaret Widdemer's "Dark Cavalier" appeared in her Old Road to Paradise, and is reprinted here through the permission of the publishers, Henry Holt & Co. A. St. John Adcock's appreciation of Hodgson is slightly abridged from his introduction to that author's first posthumous book of verse, The Calling of the Sea, published by Selwyn & Blount; thanks are due also to H. C. Koenig for the loan of this volume. Our staff is likewise indebted to N. S. Rogers for the photograph of H. P. Lovecraft used in this issue. In the last number of Fantasy Commentator, reprint acknowledgements to "As I See It..." and "Little Men, What Now?" were inadvertantly omitted. Thanks are due to Julius Unger, for permission to reprint the first from the Denvention number of Fantasy Fiction Field, and to H.C. Koenig for the latter, which saw print in his first Reader and Collector.

---oOo---

Sudden Light

by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti

I have been here before,
  But when or how I cannot tell:
I know the grass beyond the door,
  The sweet keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

You have been mine before,---
  How long ago I may not know:
But just when at that swallow's soar
  Your neck turned so,
Some veil did fall,---I knew it all of yore.

Has this been thus before?
  And shall not thus time's eddying flight
Still with our lives our love restore
  In death's despite,
And day and night yield one delight once more?

---oOo---

Tips on Tales---concluded from page 119

boy, his amazing strength becomes the talk of the small college town. His father takes him aside and tells him that in order not to be thought a freak, he must conceal his powers---and, being apparently of normal build, this he finds not difficult to do. But in some degree he cannot do so: in college days he becomes the greatest football player the world has ever known; and once, in the excitement of a game, forgets himself, utilizes his full strength, and kills an opposing tackler. He leaves college because of this, and for a brief period becomes a circus strong man. In World War I he becomes a legendary figure, machine-gun bullets rippling harmlessly off his bronzed skin, shells causing but slight cuts when he is struck by them. Only the armistice prevents him from winning the war single-handed by kidnapping the enemy's high command. The war over, he returns to this country, and is instrumental in foiling certain foreign agents. Throughout the entire novel this superman's life, despite his physical and mental prowess, is dominated by an undercurrent of tragedy, for he realizes that he will ever be alone in spirit, his very success intrinsically handicapping him. And in the end he does die a tragic death, albeit a highly dramatic one.

Thumbing the Munsey Files

with William H. Evans

All-Story magazine for April, 1905 presented a semi-humorous story of passable quality by T. Z. Chiswick. "A Kansas Tornado Trust" tells of a device ---its principles unstated---which one Horatio Binney invents to detect the approach of tornadoes. This he proceeds to rent to Kansas towns for nominal fees. Finally he discovers a way to control these storms, and tries to use this knowledge for blackmailing a town; but his control backfires, and he disappears into a tornado... May of the same year presented a much different type of story when it reprinted Garrett P. Serviss' "Moon Metal." This is a classic---and will bear rereading even today. I greatly enjoyed it on first reading it in Amazing Stories magazine, and once again when Famous Fantastic Mysteries reprinted it for the third time. The tale tells of a mysterious Dr. Syx, who perfects a process for getting a new metal from the moon. This metal is at first supposed to be mined on earth, and most of the tale is devoted to the revelation of its secret source; it is intensely interesting throughout.

The June, 1905 All-Story offered no less than three fantasy tales. "A Dip in the Fourth Dimension," by F. J. Knight-Adkin shows one of the earlier uses of a theme made popular in later years by Bob Olson---the ability to reach around a container and thus take an object from inside without opening it. Here, Andrew Manchester discovers a means of operating through the fourth dimension to reduce the solidity of objects, thus making them almost non-existent. His adventures follow in the lighter vein of Gernsback's Wonder Stories. The tale is slightly more than fair... T. Z. Chiswick's "Wet Weather Vendor" is a sequel to his "Kansas Tornado Trust"; this time we encounter a rain-making device---but it eventually turns out to be a hoax. This tale is the poorest of the three... "A Visitation of Voices," by George Halifax is so off-trail that it is difficult to review. In this story strange voices affect certain people strongly, making them good; it is unusual and well above average.

Argosy magazine for April, 1905 concluded William Wallace Cook's serial "Adrift in the Unknown." In this final installment Professor Quinn foils the plans of a Venerian king to conquer the earth by remaining on Venus while his friends escape in his space-ship. While old stories like this cannot match the classics of today, they should be recognized as having paved the way for modern novels of the genre and read with an open mind and a few grains of tolerance. If this is done, they are frequently found to be quite good.

Argosy for May of that year contained a rather poor effort, "The Crimson Blight," by Frank L. Pollock. In a summer resort a strange red light drives residents insane; the resort is nearly bankrupt when it is discovered that an old recluse who hates the town because it was built on land he once owned is using a giant burning glass equipped with a red filter to cause the trouble. He is finally killed by his own device.

In May of 1905 also The Monthly Story Magazine was born. This, in a few years, reverted to the title of The Blue Book Magazine, and remained a prime source of fantasy fiction for decades. It is the only non-Munsey magazine to be considered in this column. The initial issue sets its pattern with Charles F. Willcut's "Enchanted Ring," which tells of a strange ring that predicts good or bad fortune for its owner; it is an interesting and well-told tale.

The April 24, 1915 issue of Allstory-Cavalier weekly presented Allan Updagraff's "Gentleman from Jupiter." A dwarf, supposedly from the planet Jupiter, comes to earth to build magnets that are supposed to move it to his mother world. Despite the hoax at the end, the story is a good one... The old master Edgar Rice Burroughs on May 1st began his sequel to "At the Earth's Core." In "Pellucidar" David Innes returns to the center of the earth to rescue his sweetheart Dian; and all sorts of adventures follow in profusion during the five in-

stallments of the novel. Good if you like Burroughs---I do... Several stories having a minor tinge of fantasy appeared in the next few issues. "The White Gorrilla" of Elmer Brown Mason (June 5) deals with an aboriginal tribe which has a giant albino ape as its god; J. U. Giesy's "House of the Hawk" and "Mr. North of Nowhere" by Frank Blukton are probably of interest only to rabid completists. If you should have the opportunity, though, read them.

Argosy for May of 1915 (still a monthly) offered two fantasy tales. One of these was Edgar Franklin's "Hawkins Auto-Blaster," the first of a new series of tales about this backyard inventor's humorous adventures. Judged by the other Hawkins stories yet to appear, this one would be labelled only average. Accompanying this was Garrett P. Serviss' full-length novel "The Moon Maiden." It tells of Antinous Smith's discovery, using new telescopic light-filters, that the moon is inhabited, and of how communication between the two worlds was effected. Serviss---himself an astronomer---avoids the pitfalls of inaccurate science, and this novel, like his others, is an undoubted classic.

The June Argosy had H. Bedford-Jones' "Seal of Solomon," a novel wherein the efforts of a group of Moslems and Christians, aided by John Solomon, to locate a lost city are told. The city's inhabitants, descendants of the crusaders, are said to possess documents proving that Mohammed embraced the Christian faith before his death; in the end, though, these papers are destroyed. Although not a classic, this novel is an excellent one... In the same issue is "'I Want to Know!'" by Frank Leon Smith, a tale of a pet dinosaur not worth reading.

The 1915 Blue Book was featuring an eight-part Rider Haggard novel of Allan Quatermain's African adventures, "The Ivory Child." This is better than Burroughs' work---in fact, a minor classic... The April number also had a quaint Irish folk-fairy tale by Seumas MacManus: "The Princess Suil-Dubh." If you like Dunsanian fantasy, you will find this excellent.

By 1925 All-Story had of course combined with Argosy, and early April saw the finish of Ralph Milne Farley's "Radio Beasts" serial in the author's usual rosy fashion; and Cabot---the hero---returns suddenly to Venus at the finale which of course paved the way for still another sequel. The only other fantasy to be noted in the Munsey magazines of the period was B. Wallis' "Tiger Weed," a tale of a strange animate New Guinea plant; it is of only average quality.

Blue Book's sole fantasy for the entire year appeared in this period: Hugh Thomason's "When England Was Jungle"; this furnishes the reader with a brief glimpse of dawn-age man in Britain, and is fair entertainment.

Another decade passes, and we arrive at 1935. Argosy for April 6th offered one of Loring Brent's stories featuring popular Peter the Brazen, whose adventures often bordered on the fantastic. "Over the Dragon Wall" finds Peter engaged in trying to capture a dragon that is held as a god by a remote Indo-Chinese tribe. In the process he encounters his sweetheart Susan O'glive, who had supposedly died in the last Brent story. All ends happily of course; and if you like Pete as I do, you'll find the yarn an enjoyable one. (Incidentally, somewhere in the course of this series Peter has abandoned his love of the 1918 Argosies, Aileen Latimer. Ah, fickle youth!)... The April 13th issue gave readers Ray Cummings' "Polar Light," a tale of smugglers in 1977; it follows the expected Cummings pattern... A seven-part serial novel by Theodore Roscoe, "War Declared!" began two weeks later. Its plot was laid in Europe for 1936---making it fantasy by a bare year---and like most stories in its genre it dealt in the main with spies and counter-intrigues behind the political scene... J. Allan Dunn's "Goblin Trail" appeared in the June 15th Argosy. It tells of a mounty in the Canadian northwest who discovers a lost race of Vikings in a hidden valley. An earthquake finally destroys all of its inhabitants---with the exception, of course, of the beautiful girl who escapes with the hero.

And in Blue Book magazine, Burroughs brings John Carter safely back from the Martian moons in the concluding installment of "Swords of Mars."