

VAGARY

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THIS AND THAT

I have numbered this magazine 30A, as I cannot find a No. 29 anywhere and have assumed I skipped from 28 to 30. Members may have noticed that in recent issues I have been pointing out that Vagary is copyright. As a copy goes to the Keeper of the Printed Books, copyright is automatic, but some people do not seem to realise this. I noticed that Rosemary Pardoe also had something to say about copyright in WARK. Is the pillaging of fanzines (usually without the editor's knowledge) more widespread than I thought?

I start Vagary not knowing whether this will be the last mailing of OMPA or not. I hope not - if Keith Walker is willing to take over perhaps his energy and enthusiasm will help to build up the membership again. Perhaps he may be able to persuade ex-members to return to the fold and others from leaving it. I know that in recent years my own contributions have been erratic - I did not want it that way, but for various reasons I could not be in every mailing. I was hoping to get in the summer mailing, but somehow or other I managed to crack my ribs badly on the left side, and for a while it was too painful even to swing a typewriter carriage back and forth. They are still not right, but much better than they were.

Should Keith take over I suggest the Constitution is cut down as much as possible. We are not, after all, the Rank Organisation (thank God!). I think all we need are a few simple guide lines - it should be enough for an amateur association. And if fans want to put genzines in as part of their membership, let them. After all, if they want to do reviews of OMPazines, they could do the same as Terry Jeeves did with Erg, and add the reviews at the end of the magazine.

It is not just OMPA which has succumbed to apathy - h'm, join OMPA, the APathy - the whole country seems to be suffering from the disease. There may be some recovery - not a lot - this autumn, then possibly a relapse until next June, when things may start slowly to improve. I hope OMPA will be there to take part in the recovery. A pity if it falls by the wayside, especially when it means the disappearance of zines like Brendan Common and Owlhoot. And Mike, Pat, Darroll - do you really have to leave?

I have tried to persuade one or two members to come back, but to no avail so far. It seems that one of the reasons for gafia is the unnecessary crudities which spatter a number of fanzines - mostly four-letter words. Though the plural one just sounds comic, most of them are so confoundedly ugly. There are swear words and swear words, some of which seem to be casually accepted, and others which are not really acceptable as their main purpose seems to be to denigrate the human body or emotions. But out of it all has come one phrase. When it is merely a matter of relieving tension, is no longer "Let's make love" but "let's have sex". This is a more honest phrase - at least it does not devalue the word love, which should be kept for more genuine emotions. As usual, I have digressed. I did start the paragraph commenting on one or two reasons for gafia. I quote from a letter I received from Beryl Mercer some time ago:

"It's nice to feel needed, but I'm afraid I can't work up any enthusiasm for re-entering OMPA. Archie still gets a few fanzines and sometimes I take a look at them, but so many of them these days seem to spatter their ~~spatter their~~ pages with four-letter words, and I think it's both stupid and slovenly. I'll accept such words when they are right in their context, but too often they are just a means of showing off. Little boys scribbling on lavatory walls....."

Yes, Beryl, it is stupid and slovenly. It is also ill-bred, ill-mannered, ignorant, and discourteous - and shows a sad lack of imagination (oh, that marvellous speech in King Lear!). But other times, other manners. Sadly, many girls have now taken it up, too. For that remark I'll have the Imitation Men's - sorry, Women's Lib after me. A while back I was putting out some milk bottles when two attractive girls of about fifteen strolled past. They were well spoken, but every other word was the usual four-letter one. Incidentally, it is not Angl-Saxon - it was Icelandic and percolated into England via Scotland in the 14 or 1500s. I suspect the girls did not know what it meant. My comment "Good Lord! I thought only sluts used that sort of language" went completely over their heads.

Yet there are some funny-sad moments. Because of Bill's arthritis and my badly cracked ribs, we found it more comfortable to sleep separately. I moved into the room fronting the street, mainly because once I'm asleep I can sleep through any noise (unless it is a suspicious one). On this particular night I was late going to bed and before I was off to sleep there was a row between a young man and woman, who must have been in the service road at the back of Tesco's and Sainsburys. The girl - who sounded somewhat hysterical - had a limited vocabulary of oaths. One word was "bastard" and the other two obscenities. The chap tried to quieten her down, but she had really got going and finished up screaming: "Bastard! bastard! bastard! You f----- c---" repeated several times. I was about to open the window to tell them to shut up, but at these remarks of the girl, the chap shouted: "That's it, that's bloody it! If you're going to use that f----- language, I'm f----- off." And he went. By which time I was too busy laughing to say anything myself.

But they were carrying on in the same strain the following night, with the hysteria in the girl's voice getting stronger. However, enough is enough. I looked out of the window, but could not see where they were. Perhaps the fact they had disturbed someone shut them up because there was no more noise. But they were at it again the night after that and the hysteria in the girl's voice had reached alarming proportions - she sounded as though she was about to have a mental or nervous breakdown - spewing obscenities is one of the symptoms. After five minutes, I thought about ringing the police and asking them to bring a doctor or nurse with them, but at that moment some friends must have turned up and they took the girl off in a car.

Nothing happened for a few nights after that, then there was a fearful barney at the top of the road. It turned out they were a young married couple with a very young baby. On this particular night they had the baby with them - nearly midnight too. Once more the girl had started shouting obscenities at the man, and something must have snapped inside him. They proceeded to have a stand-up fight, with the girl snatching the baby from the pram and using it as a shield. A couple of alarmed householders ran out and snatched the baby, while someone 'phoned for the police. It must have been some scrap as I was told the pram was a write-off. I do not know who the couple were as they did not live in the street, but I hope someone had the sense to get the girl into a hospital instead of a court. There is probably a sad story behind it all.

Some people may say that it did the girl good to release her inhibitions. It did not sound like that to me. I cannot help

wondering how much damage certain types of psychiatrist have done by persuading people to release their demons, instead of teaching them how to keep those demons controlled or chained. I use the word "demons" in the context of mental health, not from the religious view. But mention of demons brings me to

THE EXORCISM MADNESS

This, of course, reached its frightening climax with the "exorcism" of a man who, a few hours later, barbarously murdered his wife and killed a pet dog - mercifully, the children were staying with their grandmother. There is no need to go into detail about this case as no doubt members have read the reports in the newspapers. I do not blame that crummy film "The Exorcist", as I doubt whether any of the participants had seen it. But they may have watched one or two exorcists on television - and if bishops are going to give licences to exorcise, they should make it a rule that no exorcisms should be carried out on T.V. and no exorcists should be allowed on the google-box either. If a person really needs exorcising, all he has to do, the local priest should be informed, who can then get in touch with an exorcist if necessary. Very occasionally, there may be a genuine need for exorcism, but in most cases what is needed is medical treatment or a swift kick in the pants. It is not that possession cannot happen - I once saw a mild case of it myself, but once the person concerned was told what was happening he exorcised himself. Sometimes it may be neither possession or sickness, but "flashes" from a former life.

But in that shocking case earlier in the year, it seemed to me not so much a case for exorcism, but a case of exhibitionism and desire for publicity which led to fatal results. It should have been obvious from the beginning that the man being exorcised was really in need of medical treatment. (The Roman Catholic exorcists do check medically first). At 6 a.m. at least one of the would-be exorcists realised this, but the others would not listen. Three ministers and their wives were concerned. One minister was an anglican priest who had not obtained a licence from his bishop to perform the exorcism - which took place in the vestry of a church. Halfway through the night a curious cat jumped in through the window - probably homeless and starving and hoping for a handout - was regarded as a demon and hurled out of the window. These loving Christians! As the "exorcised" man himself said, he did not understand half the words which they said were demons, such as "incest" and "bestiality". I suspect that some of the so-called exorcists did not understand them, either, but thought that they sounded good.

In any case, if they had understood exorcism properly, they would have realised that first they should rid themselves of all mental and emotional hang-ups - bad thoughts, vengeful feelings, etc. It was a pity they didn't, as a few moments meditation might have forced them to have second thoughts about exorcising a man who was obviously in a bad mental state.

It seems his problems started when he became unemployed and were compounded by his joining some so-called Christian sect which - if the papers are to be believed - sounded downright peculiar. A twenty-two year old girl belonging to the sect did not seem to help matters either. During the inquest on the murdered wife, the girl was interviewed and a friend who was watching T.V. told me that the girl said she was "Just a normal Jesus freak." Oh, Jesus!

It is a pity those exorcising idiots were not charged with being accessories to manslaughter - it would have at least made other self-appointed exorcists think twice in the future. I believe the Church has started to work out rules for exorcism, and the sooner they are enforced the better.

Later on I read about something called the charismatic movement, or is it Pentacostal, or both? who are holding meetings which include exorcism. There are crowded meetings at which the "gift of tongues" occur and there are also mass exorcisms. This bothers me - it seems only a step to mass hysteria, which is only a step from attacking people who disagree or who belong to entirely different cults. What about the harmless, but misinformed people who call their drawing room occultism "witchcraft" - which it isn't - how long before some of the other lot decide to have a few witch burnings? And do not say it cannot happen. What about the murders and bombings in Ulster and the bombings in this country? and what of the fearful slaughter in the concentration camps of the last war? Or the idiotic hysteria which is sweeping most of the world because it looks as though Spain is going to execute five murderers. Yes, murderers - since when has adhering to a political creed made murder legal? It was only last year that in this country there was a movement to bring back the death penalty for terrorists. So do not put it past these religious movements to turn into a mob. Funny thing, Christianity - I should say Churchianity - always seems to turn nasty when it realises it is losing ground. Look at that young Innocent III who brought back torture after one of the earlier Popes had forbidden it - and that fanatical sadist Dominic (why wasn't that ~~that~~ nasty jerk desanctified?).

Earlier on, I made a criticism of psychiatrists, but I realise this does not apply to them all. Not all of them are

Freud eggheads who turn out to be Adlered. The American one we met briefly wasn't, for instance. Those who follow Jung seem to have a much wider view and some at least realise that, though possession is rare, it can happen. For those interested there is a booklet called "Beyond Jung" by Dr. Arthur Guirdham, which costs 25p and is published by the Village Press, 131/141, King's Road, London S.W.3. It is refreshingly free of what I call sociological gobbledegook, and also honestly admits there are some things which, in our present state of being, appear inexplicable.

But when religious fanaticism or over-enthusiasm, or any other enthusiasm or fanaticism (Ulster, for instance) gets too much of a grip, if not murder we get

DOTTY - OR WORSE - PAMPHLETEERS

A young friend of ours went to one of the mid-West States on a teacher exchange. One day we received a letter from him with an enclosure which he thought might amuse us, particularly as Bill writes occultbooks and I am an astrologer. I claim no copyright for what follows, but cannot acknowledge the author. The leaflet starts off with a round face surrounded by balloons which variously say:

"Unpredictable Impulses; Fear; Restlessness; Suicide; Depression; Uncontrollable Passions; Sexual Perversion; Enslaving habits: Gluttony, masturbation, nicotine, drugs, etc." It goes on to say:

"The above are common consequences of occult involvement which include;

Clairvoyance, Reincarnation, Telepathy, Fortune telling, Astrology, Crystal gazing, Palmistry, Seances, Witchcraft, Communication with the dead, Yoga, Mediation, ESP, Voodoo, Water divination, Sorcery, Table tipping, Ouija boards, Black Mass, hypnosis, Horoscopes, Tarot cards, Automatic writing, White magic, Astral projection, Parapsychology, tea leaves, dream analysis, metaphysics, Eastern religions, the cults of Rosicrucianism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unity, Theosophy, Mormonism, Unitarianism, Spiritualism, Christian Science, Bahai, and Teachings of Edgar Cayce, Jeanne Dixon, Arthur Ford, Rith Montgomery and other psychics."

He, she, or it, has forgotten to mention Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Quakers, and other assorted sects, but I am assuming that he, she or it is the worst type of Calvinist. In Ulster, we have seen to where this sort of fanaticism can lead. The leaflet goes on:

"How to receive help.

If you have taken part in any forms of the occult, this must be confessed as spiritual adultery ((I shall do no such thing - RG)) and renounced ((certainly not - RG)). God's word speaks of two sources of power: Christ and satan. When one participates in the occult, consciously or unconsciously, he becomes subject to the Powers of Darkness. This is mockery and abomination to the one living God, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ condemned all such practices of divination and sorcery, and stated: "They who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of GodBut shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." (Gal. 5.21, Rev. 21.8). //It was Paul speaking in Galatians and St. John in Revelations - there is nothing like this in the Gospels - RG//. "The Bible specifically condemned fortune tellers, astrology // What about "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera"?// magic, sorcery, hypnotism, and those who consulted the dead in Deut. 18. 9-12." // Of course - the people who did this were crabbing the priests' own acts and ruining their monopoly - R//.

There is more of this leaflet, but I think I have quoted enough. Despite the author's claim that Jesus said this and that, all the biblical quotations are from the Old Testament, Revelations, or the letters of that mouthy Paul. The originator of the leaflet has carefully avoided giving a name, of course, perhaps wondering if Jeanne Dixon or other living psychics or astrologers would sue him. This fanatical nut must be a spiritual (!) descendant of the crusader against intemperance who, in 1682, was ready to condone piracy to secure a cargo of rum. This in a letter to "Ye Aged and Beloved Mr. John Higginson. Thus:

"There is now at sea a ship called the Welcome, which has on board an hundred or more of the heretics and malignants called Quakers, with W. Penn, who is the chief scamp, at the head of them.

'The general court has accordingly given secret orders to Master Malachi Muscott, of the brig Porpoise, to waylay the said Welcome, slyly, as near the Cape of Cod as may be, and make captive the said Penn, and his ungodly crew, so that the Lord may be glorified, and not mocked on the soil of this new country with the heathen worship of these people. Much spoil can be made by selling the whole lot to Barbados, where slaves fetch good prices in rum and sugar, and we shall not only do the Lord great service by

punishing the wicked, but we shall make great good for his ministers and people.

Master Muscott feels hopeful and I will set down the news when the ship comes back.

Yours in ye bowels of Christ,

Cotton Mather."

I always thought the crumb was nasty, but I did not realise he was that nasty. But the letter makes it clear it was not only black people who were sold into slavery. In fact, when so-called petty criminals were transported from this country to America before the revolution, captains of the convict ships often used to sell the transportees to slave traders when they landed. And Barbary pirates used to raid the coast of this country and take whole villages of people to be sold as slaves in Africa. The bonded servants sent to the West Indies after the Monmouth Rebellion were treated far worse than the slaves - after all, the merchants had paid for the latter so were not going to ruin them. The bonded servants were worked to death. And, as a Nigerian journalist ^{wrote}, the Africans had their own chiefs to blame for slavery - chiefs who used to raid other territories to capture men and women to sell as slaves. It could not have been done without their connivance. During the Civil War in this country, whenever Cromwell's army captured Welsh or Scottish soldiers they were sold into slavery. In fact, the Scots were most indignant because their price was a shilling a head and the Welsh were selling for five shillings a head. So isn't it about time we stopped behaving as though only one race in the world had ever been enslaved? It might also be remembered that when freed slaves in America were given Liberia, one of the first things they did was go out into the bush and capture the locals to use - or sell - as slaves. There are some things in human nature which unfortunately seem common to all races.

But let us go on to something else.

THE SCENT OF SUMMER

One day last year I was walking along College Road. This is a main road, but for some reason or other there was no traffic in either direction, and for a few brief minutes the air was free of petrol or diesel fumes. The result was that as I was walking past a large house set back from the road - I think it was one where the boys from the college slept - I suddenly got a whiff of scent which transported me back over the years. The scent of flowers so often seen

in little country front gardens. Not your snobby roses or anything like that, but the little flowers which made such a brave show - and which were some compensation for the ghastly thirties. If anyone wants those times back they must be stark, staring bonkers. Perhaps because there was so little money to spare ~~that~~ some of us tried to appreciate what money could not buy.

The scent in College Road sent me back to childhood days in a Hampshire village where, on a warm still evening, the perfume from the pinks, the sweet williams and night scented stock was so strong. And in the water meadows behind the house was the clover, the cowslip and buttercups - a country side does not consist only of farmyard smells - and along the hedge rows were the wild roses in June, and after them came the honeysuckle. There was much to see, especially when a trip to Winchester, seven miles away (it may as well have been seven hundred - bus fares cost money and necessities came first when your mother was a widow) may happen only once a year and was an event to be talked about for a long time. And so many birds and butterflies which I never seem to see now, not even when we are out in the country.

The infant Itchen ran through the village (a collection of houses round a crossroads), feeding the water cress beds on the other side of the road, then ran under a little road bridge to gurgle past the willow tree. It was a very special tree. Sometimes, if we had the patience to lay in the long grass and keep very, very still, we would see a brilliant flash of colour swoop from the tree to the water. It was a kingfisher, and even then it was not all that common a sight. And we could watch the frog spawn become tadpoles, and the tadpoles gradually turn into baby frogs.

Once, when we visited London (a highlight of the year) a friend of the family bought me a little wooden steamer with tin funnels for sixpence from Woolworths. Back in Hampshire we were playing with it on the Hinton side of the village when it got away from us. We tried to get it, but river and steamer disappeared through a hedge into some private gardens and we gave it up for lost. A year later I was by the special tree when I noticed something caught in the weeds. It was the steamer, with all its blue paint gone, and its funnels rusty, but still bravely floating. Ken, an older boy from Portsmouth who visited the village sometimes, cleaned it up and refurbished it. Who would have thought that the next time I saw him would be a dozen years later when he was a fitter sergeant on an R.A.F. station in Scotland.

Halfway to old Cheriton the river widened a little (to

about four or five feet!), but remained very shallow. It was beautifully clear and one could see the springs bubbling up through the gravelly bed. Small trout could be seen here, as the river ran alongside the road, and we had very illegal ways of catching them. A length of chicken wire doubled over to make an open bag, dropped one side of the bridge while kids jumped into the river on the other side of the bridge shouting and splashing and scaring the fish out from shelter. We would sell them for sixpence or ninepence, depending on size and mother, being a widow, was always glad of a bit extra. Once, when we were searching another part of the river for one of the petrol drums we used as ballast for the raft and which had been lost a year or two before, we caught something else. A hatch had been placed in the river so it was a few feet deep in this part, but one or two of the older boys groped about in the thick black mud which was the river bed in this area. Finally they located the drum and hauled it to the surface. Then we realised there was something thumping about inside it. With much effort the boys managed to break the drum open and the girls leapt back screaming at the monster which came thrashing out. None of us were sure what it was, but one of the boys with a "sorry, fish" brought a large rock down on its neck. We already had five trout which we had nicked from the clearer part of the river, though I am afraid I was a dead loss on these excursions as I could not bear to kill the fish. I remember one of my three brothers was with us on that occasion. We strung the trout and the monster on a pole and when we reached the road old Mrs. Giles (old! I doubt if she were sixty) who was bringing Daisy, her cow, from the field (Mr. Giles kept the watercress beds), saw us and cried "Oh, how lovely, I haven't had baked pike for years - I will give you five shillings for it." Five bob was a small fortune in those days when pocket money was practically unheard of, and some children were lucky if their parents could spare a halfpenny or a penny a week for sweets. So our monster was a pike! It must have got into the drum when quite small, then stayed there welcoming the minnows in with gently smiling jaws until it was too big to get out again.

And always the colour. The flowers starting off with snowdrops, then wild violets, some of which were actually scented, then on to the crocuses and wild daffodils. In Old Cheriton Mrs. Egerton's gardeners tended her grounds carefully and in the spring the crocuses would come out, spelling a text from the Bible. The fields became sprinkled with daisies, buttercups, cowslips and clovers - and dandelions, of course. Perhaps there are some parts still like that, but in those days flowers had a chance, as the sprays which came later killed the flowers as well as the insects.

It was not all sweetness and light, of course - try living in a village where you are a "foreigner" and therefore "fast" - if you did not belong you were never too young to be a victim of clacking tongues. Maybe that was when I started to go off people. And the school was hateful. The education was good, but the headmaster was godawful. I was in one of the three classes he took, divided from another three classes by a curtain down the middle of the room. He treated boys and girls alike as though they were in his own public school or a reformatory. You did not only get thumped if you misbehaved (that the kids would accept), but also if you could not work out a problem or know the answer to a question the first time, which is no way to make kids remember what they learn. But kids have ways and means of getting their own back, and one morning we entered the school to be informed by the junior schoolmistress that the headmast was very ill in the school house next door, and would we be as quiet as possible. The next day a temporary headmistress arrived to keep the senior classes going while the headmaster got over his nervous breakdown, which we privately hoped would last forever. Miss Hill, our new headmistress, was whitehaired and, children being what they are, we were all quietly wondering how far we dare go with her. During her first lesson with us one of the boys, Bob, thought he would suck up to her and brought a cane down from the top of the cupboard, which he offered her. She eyed him up and down, then said, "Take that out of my sight, you horrid boy, I do not need that!"

Everybody brightened up at once - if we had someone here who did not believe in corporal punishment we were going to run rings round her - and how! It was not like that at all. Within a day she had us eating out of her hand - not by being easy-going, but by being kind but firm. Quite suddenly lessons were a joy, the subjects we usually dreaded became fun to do and we all seemed to grasp them so much more quickly, even the kids who were usually regarded as thick. Then one Friday afternoon three weeks later, she said "Well, children, it is time to say goodbye - this is my last day here." There was a shocked gasp and all the girls started blubbing. Then the toughest boy in the school stood up and said, "Please, miss, don't go. We love you," and collapsed howling across his desk, which was the signal for the boys to join the girls in weeping. I can still remember her standing in the front of the class, trying to say something, finally managing to get out "I'll be back in a few minutes, children," and hurrying out of the classroom. Dear Miss Hill. She probably died long ago, but there are probably still middle aged men and women in the village who still remember her as the teacher who gave them the happiest three weeks they had ever had in that school. For

me, she will always be one of the happier memories of the dreadful Thirties.

And all this brought back by the sudden scent of flowers on a summer's day.

We moved to London for a couple of years and then back to Hampshire. Nothing had changed much, apart from the fact we were all a little bit older, and there was dreadful tension in the air - it was the time of the Munich crisis. But the river still ran and with the spring came the flowers, and in May the woods wore a carpet of bluebells. Lilac and rhododendrons rioted along the roadside - altogether it was a beautiful summer. Then suddenly it was September, 1939; the long childhood ended and the bright days died.

Small birds on ploughed land,
A man sowing seeds.
Soft wind bringeth rain.
God grant they remain,
Till I come again. (Old English poem).

CAT CHAT

Some members must have been wondering when I was going to get round to the cats. Omission now remedied. We have three cats really, two we can see and one we can't. Once or twice I have felt a cat jump on to the end of the bed, but when I have looked there has been no-one there. So our dear Selina must still be around occasionally. Sometimes the other two cats have appeared to be playing with an invisible playmate who they can see, but we can't.

A couple of Vagaries back I described trying to give Snowflake - or Snowy - a bath after he had hidden up a chimney and got covered in soot. A few months ago he came in covered in oil and tar - god knows where he had been. This meant another bath, but this time I called Bill - I didn't see why I should be the only one to be scratched to pieces. I got the animal shampoo, ran some warm water and dumped our ginger and white (mainly white) cat in the kitchen sink and grimly set about getting off the muck. We were both prepared for a fearsome battle, but to our amazement, Snowy let me wash him and purred his head off when I shoveed him under the tap to rinse off the shampoo. He likes being combed, too.

Snowy likes to find out how things work. Apart from

teaching himself to use the bog (which he will not do now in case the other cat is watching and copies his best trick) he uses the hinged doorstop on the middle door as a knocker - which Claud Duval promptly copied. When Bill was using a tape recorder one day and Snowy heard a voice coming from it, he examined it carefully, then followed the lead to the plug in the wall. He knew it had something to do with it. Then there were the mirrors. He peered into the wardrobe mirror one day and caught a reflection of Bill in bed. He looked at Bill, then back in the mirror where he could see the room reflected. He tried to push the mirror to get into the duplicate room. It did not work, of course, so he leapt on to the chest of drawers to examine the mirror over the mantelpiece. He has now worked out some theory which he keeps trying to test. If only Snowy's front paws were little hands instead I would buy him a set of Meccano to see just how much engineering ability is locked up inside him. He has figured out that doors open by depressing the levers, and once he has worked out how to hold down the handles we will have to keep the outer doors bolted.

The other cat, Claud Duval, who was the wounded, straying stray we took in and had doctored, has changed considerably. At first he was a compulsive eater and before long was being called Fatso Catso. He has such a short, thin tail, but can use it very expressively, a short fat body, and a large head (which is not so noticeable now he has put on weight). When he scrunches himself up in ecstasy he looks like a fur football with legs. He and Snowy now play together and have invented all sorts of games, one which is probably called "ambush" or "gotcha". They wrestle, but are careful not to hurt each other, but when they get up on their hind legs and box it is like watching a ballet. It was when they first did this that we noticed Claud was a short fat cat, and Snowy a tall thin one.

Claud Duval tried so hard to please us when he realised he had a home again. Anything Snowy did which seemed to please or amuse us, he carefully copied - much to Snowy's annoyance. He may not have Selina's superior intellect or Snowy's mechanical ability, but what he gives is love. And if anyone says cats can never be loving I've Claud here as evidence that they can. In many ways he has told the dreadful story of the time he was stray. (I suspect his previous owners were old people who died within a short space of one another and Claud was afterwards thrown out to fend for himself). He still flees whenever I pick up a mop or broom. One day He was near the kitchen sink when I accidentally splashed some water on him - he was gone in a flash. The first time Bill ever used a walking stick he cringed in the corner, and did the same when I picked up a strap to fasten round a case. What I found most

horrifying of all was the night I was reading in bed. He tentatively came and parked himself on my tum and just after that I reached for a cigarette. The moment it was lit, he recoiled with a look of terror and rushed out of the room. I can only conclude he had been badly tormented and hurt, possibly by the drunken bums in the churchyard, where Claud spent some of his time when he was a stray.

But he has turned out to be such a loving old thing. As one of our friends said "A grateful cat is positively unnerving." He was humble, too, which was even more unnerving. The first few weeks he was with us I kept getting a feeling radiating from him which could be translated, I suppose, as "I'm so happy." Sometimes he looks anxious - as though he expects to wake up and find it was all only a dream. He is not only loving, but the sappy cat fell in love with me. Really and truly! One day I heard a strange sort of thumping and when I looked round he was beating his back paws on the floor, making little growling purrs in his throat, and yearning at me with his eyes. All I could say was "Sorry, Claud, it is not only immoral, it is illegal, and for you now, I fear it is impossible."

There came a day when I told him off for something - I've forgotten what it was now, but he crept away with his tail drooping. A few moments later I heard some odd little noises, and when I looked round I saw Claud sitting on the chair in my study. He was sobbing and when I looked closer there were tears running down his face. Until then I had always thought cats could not cry (I have found out since that some can, but it is very rare), so I had to pick him up and make a fuss of him. Now I have to be careful how I speak to him in case the silly cat starts crying again. He has just come into my study and yearned at me - he must have sensed I was writing about him.

What I have noticed with cats is how expressively they can use their tails. Selina's used to bush right out when there was a special treat in the offing. Snowy has a very thick and handsome ringed ginger tail and when he bushes it out it looks more like a fox's brush. (Digression - please, what do Americans mean by a calico cat? Is it what we would call a tortoiseshell cat?) Even Claud does his best with his thin short tail. The thought of liver seems to cause a real bushing out of tails. In fact, it moved me to produce the following which, unlike the quotes in this magazine, is my copy right. Members may think I am harping on about this, but I am actually wondering if I should harp about it on every page. But back to those expressive cat tails.

TAIL PIECE

"I'm going shopping - what shall I buy for you?"
Tail erratic.
"What do you want. Shall I get some liver?"
Tail emphatic.
"There. Shopping's done, but I forgot the liver."
Tail pathetic.
"No, don't be sad - I was only teasing."
Tail frenetic.
"I think I will cook it lightly for you."
Tail dramatic.
"There. Cooked, cooled, and ready for you to eat."
Oh, shivering, quivering tail ecstatic.

BOOKS

I do not seem to have read many memorable ones lately. And most I have read have been reviewed by Terry Jeeves in Erg, anyway. I remember reading a John Brunner book which had me chuckling. It had time in the title (I think it was Time Scoop) and was about something which could bring copies of things and people out of the past. I recall the computer in the book blew up when faced with an unanswerable decision. The book amused me, which was surprising as sometimes John Brunner's books are inclined to irritate me. Can't he, just once, stop crusading and write a straightforward story?

I also got round to reading Heinlein's "Time Enough for Love" - or maybe I should call it In Praise of Incest. It struck me not so much as science-fiction in places, but a series of stories which could have been set on this planet. "The Adopted Daughter", for instance, could have been a tale of the American West being settled. The book irritated me in places, but Heinlein is so confoundedly readable I had to go on the end. I have not read his Methuselah stories, so maybe it was like coming in in the middle of a film. But it looks as though Heinlein has jumped on the sex bandwagon just when a lot of bored writers are beginning to get off it.

The other day I found a paperback of Nostradamus' prophecies, translated and edited by Erika Cheetham. I remember reading a book of his prophecies once before, translated by someone who claimed to be a reincarnation of Nostradamus, and I was not at all impressed. Erika Cheetham has translated them as literally as possible, but has pointed out that to avoid trouble with the Church, Nostradamus mixed his quatrains and seomtimes even split them and joined them to others. His ten centuries had nothing to do with years, but the fact that

each section contained one hundred quatrains, except for one unfinished one. He also wrote them in a mixture of French, Provencal, Greek and Latin, which does not make it easy for someone having a go at translating them. What Erika Cheetham has done in some cases is to give the literal translation and then her own suggestion as to what incident may have been indicated. As the blasted man also used anagrams and even then altered or added one letter it could not have been an easy task. Many of the quatrains are extremely obscure or referred to local matters in France. But one verse - which the translator said was too obscure to explain - did strike me. Here is Nostradamus' quatrain:

En lieu d'espouse les filles trucidées,
 Meurtre à grand faults ne sera superstite.
 Dedans le puy vestules inondées,
 L'espouse estraincte par hauste d'Aconite.

Erika Cheetham has translated espouse as "bride", but it could mean either partner of a marriage. Or Nostradamus, to compound obscurity, may have gone back to the Latin root sponsus, meaning a promise. Here is the literal translation:

"Instead of a bride the girls are slaughtered, murder with such wickedness, there will be no survivors. The vestals are drowned in the wells, and the bride killed by a draught of aconite."

Now suppose "promise" (or safe conduct) is substituted for "bride", the quatrain could apply to a frightful incident which happened last Century. During the Indian Mutiny (which was helped along by agitators from an eastern European country - no prizes for guessing, there was a cold war even then) the European men, women, and children in Cawnpore were besieged in the useless redan built on the site of the old Redcoat Hopsital on the orders of General Wheeler. If the old fool had got everyone into the Magazine they could have held out for months, but he didn't and nearly every life was lost. After the siege had been going on for some weeks Nana Sahib, whom Wheeler trusted, then promised the Europeans could go free and said he would arrange for boats to take them down the Ganges. When the Europeans reached the boats (carefully grounded by the sepoys) the sepoys opened fire and also set fire to the thatched roofs of the boats. The women and children who survived this holocaust were taken ashore to a place afterwards known as Babi Guhr, the House of Women. There were over two hundred in this group, consisting of wives, sisters, daughters, and children, including boys, of the British soldiers and East India Company employees. If espouse in the

quatrain is regarded as promise (or safe conduct) or, figuratively to adopt, support or defend, it could refer to Nana Sahib's promise to these women that he would ensure they were safe, and although not allowed out they were given a guard of sepoys. But as the British relief force approached Nana Sahib decided he wanted no witnesses to the mass murder which had taken place on the grounded boats at the ghats. He hired five ruffians to do his dirty work - the sepoys were not responsible for the slaughter which took place, although they had done their share of killing helpless people at the ghats. The women and children were in a very weakened state, otherwise the five thugs could never have done what they did which, apart from other mutilations, included impaling a child by its chin on a meathook. When this dreadful deed was over, the women and children were thrown into a dry well, some still living. These either suffocated or drowned in their own blood. There were no survivors to this slaughter. Even the sepoys were sick, and when the relief force arrived tough, hardened soldiers were vomiting all over the place. A fearful vengeance took place - and it is no use holding up our twentieth century hands in horror - it should be seen from the attitudes of the times. Even so, General Neill was going to be called to account for some his actions, but was killed with the first relief force in Lucknow. But for ever after, Cawnpore poisoned relations (although atrocities also took place elsewhere) between the British and India, and held back plans for working towards an equal partnership, which perhaps what was meant by the last line of Nostradamus' quatrain.

Not that all his quatrains worked out, but there is a residue which cannot be explained away. He did forecast that one day someone would find the key to his quatrains, but that person has not yet turned up, although Erika Cheetham has done a reasonably good literal translation. But I will dispute with her that L'Armorique means America (especially when he uses l'Americh elsewhere). Armorica was the old name for Brittany and when using this word he may have meant either Brittany or Britain.

There is always the thought, of course, that anybody can prove anything if he, or she, can set the mind to it.

Last year Bill brought a book from the library which I could hardly bear to be taken back again. Have you ever had that feeling that here is a book you must have? With me, it was that sort of book. The problem was solved by Bill buying it for me as a Christmas present. It is called the "Age of Arthur" and deals with the British Isles from 350 A.D. to 650 A.D., by John Morris, published by Widenfeld and Nicholson. The book must have been a labour of love as well as a fine

piece of scholarship. It gives probably one of the truest pictures of those years which have so far appeared. The research for the book must have taken years and I sincerely hope it does not go out of print. The Author makes it clear there was no Saxon conquest immediately after 410 A.D. and that, in fact, the Saxons were a subject race for a long time and only had a few scrunched up corners of Britain, though they called them kingdoms. Sussex, for instance, did not extend as far inland as Chichester, and Wessex was only a small part of east Hampshire - and was led by someone with the Celtic name of Ceredic, in any case. And that afterwards, many Celts did not move off their land when a Saxon leader came, but as the latter would never learn another language the Celts lost their own within three generations and started thinking of themselves as Saxons (there is a Welsh triad about the Lloegyr's losing their language and becoming Saxons). Saxon - or Saesnach or Sassenach were British words for "foreigners". Welsh or Wallensis were English words for "foreigners". The Saxons, Jutes, Angles, and others gave themselves the generic term Englysc - Anglo-Saxon is a hybrid word thought up in the nineteenth century.

What did for the British was the plague of 547-8 A.D. It killed many Celts and some of their leaders, including Maelgwn, King of Gwynedd (North Wales). As the Saxons did not trade with the people who brought the plague (it never reached north of the Rhine) they were not affected, but it was the signal for the second Saxon rebellion, which lasted for many years and was finally successful. The lowland parts of Britain were the first to fall, the last lowland British victory (the battle of Luitcoet) taking place about 655, and this was soon avenged. The king of the area round Wall-by-Lichfield was Cynddylan (try pronouncing it Cunthullan) and he lost his life when the English returned with a larger army. In his book, John Morris quotes from a poem of the time - which, if we do not pull ourselves together and also do something about the subversives and fifth columnists in our midst, may apply to modern Britain. It is very moving, perhaps because it was written so soon after the Celtic King lost his life.

Cynddylan, hold thou the hillside
Where the English come today.....

Cynddylan, hold thou the ford
Where the English come through Tren.....

But the English came and left red ruin in their wake. As John Morris points out, other poets mourned for a leader, but Cynddylan's requiem was the epitaph of a nation. The poem is not quoted in full, but what there is of it is enough to

describe the desolation of a lost king, a lost battle, and a lost land.

Cynddyllan's hall is dark tonight.
There burns no fire, no bed is made.
I weep awhile and then am quiet.

Cynddylan's hall is dark tonight.
No fire is lit, no candle burns.
God will keep me sane.

Cynddylan's hall. It pierces me
To see it roofless, fireless.
Dead is my lord, and I am yet alive.

Cynddylan's hall is desolate tonight,
Where once I sat in honour.
Gone are the men who held it, gone the women.

Cynddylan's hall. Dark is its roof
Since the English destroyed
Cynddylan, and Elvan of Powys.

High may the mountain be.
I care not that I herd my cattle there.
Thin, thin seems my cloak.

Hard is my goatskin bed.
Yet once I was drunk
On the mead of Brynn.

Gone are my brethren from the lands of the Severn
Around the banks of Dwyryw.
Sad am I, my God, that I am yet alive.

No more the well-trained horses, no more the scarlet cloaks,
No more the great golden plumes.
Thin, my legs, bare, uncovered.....

Brothers I had who never lost heart,
Brothers who grew like hazel saplings.
All are gone, one by one.....

The dykes endure. He who dug them
Is no more.

This poem, which probably sounds even more heartbreaking in the original British tongue, is attributed to Llywarch Hen, one of the greatest of a group of bards who flourished then.

I would like to go on about this book, which covers literature, religion, industry, agriculture, war, peace, and the many things which made up the lives of men and women in those days. But space is running out and time has already run out.

The other day I was looking through one of my books on Celtic mythology and came across the story of the cursing of Tara, which I had almost forgotten. Dermot, the Ard Righ, or High King of Ireland heard that one of his officers was murdered by a chief called Hugh Guairy, who was the brother of a bishop who was related by fosterage to St. Ruadan, with whom the murderer took refuge. King Dermot haled him forth whereupon the ecclesiastics ^{curse} who had dared to take justice on a criminal under clerical protection - this was in the sixth century A.D. - and they solemnly assembled at Tara and fasted against the king. The king's wife had a dream about a tree being knocked down by eleven men, but which would not fall until one man came with a final blow. The tree was the Irish monarchy, the fellers were the twelve saints of Ireland and the one who laid it low was St. Ruadan, who cursed the land and said "desolate be Tara for ever and ever." The king pleaded for his country thus

"Alas for the iniquitous contest that ye have waged against me; seeing it is Ireland's good that I pursue, and to preserve her discipline and royal right; but it is Ireland's unpeace and murderousness that ye endeavour after."

But the priests refused to listen and the great days of Tara were over. The clergy did not have it all their own way and some wars resulted, but the damage had been done, even though Columba (very near the throne by blood) was sent into exile for backing Ruadan. Dermot's cry of despair was:

"Woe to him that with the clergy of the churches battle joins."

With the clergy, not the actual church, one notes. But Dermot's words are as true today as they were then.

And this is the end of Vagary for this time round, unless OMPA does fold and it may be the end of Vagary altogether. And I have only just realised that I am the "oldest inhabitant" of OMPA. I hope that OMPA keeps going and that it is not

VALE!

Bobbie.