

Bookman's Galley

FOR the time being, let us wind up discussion of Howard Phillips Lovecraft; for the dangers of turning even interesting subjects stale by over-production are very real dangers. Today I turn the column over to Sonia H. Davis, the one-time Mrs. Lovecraft, whose reminiscences of H.P.L., published here last Aug. 22, have inspired so much pro and con correspondence.

W. T. S.

Through the columns of the Providence Journal, I would like to thank the many letter writers for their kindly and interesting remarks regarding my article on H. P. Lovecraft.

As to Mr. Derleth's cutting and insolent remarks, it were best to ignore them. But, lest some of his remarks be given credence (of course even a "gentleman" is privileged to call a lady a liar even when she tells the truth) I must insist that everything in that article is as stated; on this I take my solemn oath. For the sake of the kindlier critics, let me say that, to the best of my knowledge, Mr. Derleth never even met Lovecraft. So he could not have known H.P.L. as I did.

Since I do not wish to involve anyone else, I shall not mention the name of the best witness I have—out of his own friends and correspondents—that upon many occasions Lovecraft would become livid with rage," (even when not in my company) when anything was said or when meeting or seeing people he didn't like, especially foreigners.

Mr. Derleth's own admission, "It is the considered opinion of all others who have known H. P. L. that though he resented the infiltration of foreign elements into old areas of the cities he loved and the often consequent despoiling of those places particularly of their antiquities and charm, he was not in fact guilty of any actual anti-Semitism" etc. does testify that he was more than unfriendly toward most foreigners except the English, i.e. the British born.

I reiterate, again on my solemn oath, that when he became "livid with rage" at the foreign elements in the streets of New York, I would try to calm his outbursts by saying "You don't have to love them, but hating them so outrageously can't do any good." It was then that he said, "It is more important to know what to hate than it is to know what to love." He many times said even worse things which I dare not state lest I be deluged with Mr. Derleth's abuse.

Again I quote Mr. Derleth: "We have evidence to show in the Lovecraft letters that he was often in the habit of making disparaging remarks about Jews, Orientals, Portuguese, etc., but these remarks cannot be construed as racial prejudice in the vicious sense in which it exists today. Furthermore, these views were tempered and vanished in his later letters." What else is this but hate! I had hoped that time and my absence would mellow his temper, but it did exist 20 years ago.

Another quotation of Mr. Derleth's: "Mrs. Davis writes of how much money she gave H. P. L. The impression she makes that she contributed largely to his support and that Howard earned nothing and that his aunts sent him nothing." Mr. Derleth should re-read the article. Perhaps he failed to notice that I said he did work for many clients, revising their work, but was paid very little; and that his aunts sent him \$15 a week when he lived in Clinton St. This \$15 a week was hardly enough for him to live on. His studio room was

ten dollars a week—that made about \$45 a month. The balance of \$22 dollars or so a month was not enough for food and incidentals, that is why I would send him some each week, and give him still more while I visited Clinton St. for the few days each time I came on buying trips, from out of town.

When we lived in Parkside Avenue he became quite stout. He still showed some avoirdupois in Clinton Street, until he used much of the money for books, sightseeing and what not. His photograph after returning to Providence indicates that he was starving himself. If he had earned as much on those 22 stories Mr. Derleth says H. P. sold, most of them written after he returned to Providence, why did H. P. die of starvation as some one has said?

He left Brooklyn, I think, late in 1925 or '26. I was still his wife then. On my trips to N. Y. while he was in Providence, I paid for his trips to N. Y. C. and sent him gifts to Providence and extra money besides what he was supposed to have earned from those many stories.

It was in 1928 when he visited me that he was again beginning to look better, but when he finally returned to Prov. and I saw him again in 1932 for the last time, I noticed how very thin he was. What could have happened?

As to H. P. not knowing that I was a Jewess until I told him, that was very natural. I saw no need to broadcast it to the universe. I thought that many of my friends, in fact all of them knew it; I never tried to hide the fact—may have told him of it at the Boston convention 1921. Certainly I told him very soon after we met, especially when he remarked that it was too bad that Samuel Loveman was a Jew.

During the less than three years of our correspondence I reminded him of this. When he decided to ask me to be Mrs. Lovecraft I reminded him once more. And in his last letter to me before we were married, I reminded him once more and gave him a chance to retract the offer of marriage if he wished. But evidently he didn't wish to retract, since he came post haste to N.Y. to marry me, which he did that very day.

Here, in the following, I am sure it is Mr. Derleth who exaggerates. "One of the things in H.P.'s married life that disturbed him from the beginning was the way in which his wife often talked in longer conversations on the telephone in Jewish, so that he never knew what she talked about, whether of him, their life together or what, and the incidence of these long talks often persuaded him that he was the subject of the conversation." This is only partly true. Such a conversation was held exactly once, with my mother, and it was not a "longer" conversation nor was it of a disparaging character concerning H. P. I never disparaged him, as my article will attest.

To sum up, such claims as that no gentleman ever gets angry, etc., are completely ridiculous; nor is it impressive to "refute" statements of mine by merely saying they can't be so, and no more impressive either to say there is evidence but not to produce it.

SONIA H. DAVIS.

LONA HANSON, by Thomas Savage (Simon & Schuster, \$3): intelligent novel of an heiress and what adversity did to her and those around her. Savage wrote "The Pass."