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A MEETING OF THE TOLKIEN SOCIETY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1968

by Bernie Zuber

Meetings of the Tolkien Society are usually held on the East coast, but this particular one was held at the Claremont Hotel in Oakland, California, during BAYCON, the 26th World Science Fiction Convention. Since I haven't been back East in years this was my first opportunity to attend one of these meetings. For the benefit of those readers who have never attended a science fiction convention, I would like to point out that any meetings that are scheduled in the morning are looked upon with apprehension by those of us who are familiar with conventions. Why? Because convention parties are notorious for their late hours. 5 A.M. is the hour exhausted but happy fans collapse into bed, most of them assured of a hangover the next morning. When Glen woke me up for the meeting that morning at 9:30 I was bleary-eyed indeed but, as a dutiful member of the Mythopoeic Society, I had to find out what the Tolkien Society was doing. Somehow managing to pull myself together I staggered downstairs.

The meeting was held in the Gaslight Room, the hotel's version of an old-fashioned theatre, complete with pillars that block your view. Due to the early morning hour, however, it wasn't hard for me to fall into a chair in the front row. After focusing my eyes on the stage I began to jot down notes (without which this report would have been impossible). A long table was set on the stage for the panel members. Conducting the proceedings was Ed Meskys, head of the Tolkien Society. Others seated at the table were Molly Titcomb, a Tolkien fan from Nevada City, Calif., Peter S. Beagle, author of The Last Unicorn and of the preface to The Tolkien Reader, Dick Eney, a well known science fiction fan, Dave McDaniles, author of Man From Uncle novels and also one of the earliest Tolkien fans in L.A. several years ago, and...sitting right in front of me...Ian Ballantine, whose Ballantine books did so much to spread Tolkien's fame in this country.

As I began to take notes Ed Meskys was saying that C.S. Lewis had said Tolkien was a perfectionist and also a procrastinator. Obviously a remark about the long-awaited Silmarillion. Ed then introduced Dick Eney as being the first fan to have mentioned Tolkien in a fanzine. Eney's topic was the strange appearance of Sauron's Eye as a battle emblem in Vietnam. It seems that a Captain Murray of the special forces, while teaching English to the Montagnard tribesmen, happened to mention Minas Morgul. This reminded the Montagnards of their own fortified villages, they became interested and promptly flipped over the orcs. This particular tribe, the Gerai, use stout spears and large round shields. one of them decided to paint the Eye of Sauron on his shield and then paraded with it in Saigon in 1966. Photos were taken of it and the word spread from Vietnam to England and to Tolkien himself. After the meeting Dick Eney showed us slides and, even though the tribesman in question was some distance from the camera, the Eye of Sauron was quite visible on his shield.

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Before continuing the program, Ed Meskys announced that all were invited to Poul Anderson's pavilion during the Medieval Tournament that afternoon for a continuation of the Society meeting. (To the best of my knowledge that never did happen). Ed then introduced Glen who proceeded to describe the Mythopoeic Society and to announce the Bilbo and Frodo Birthday Party picnic in Los Angeles on September 22nd. Ed announced another such party to be held in Chicago. He then introduced the featured speaker, Peter S. Beagle. Beagle began by saying that he feels a lot of people in this world are lying to him but not the fiction writers. J.R.R. Tolkien tells more truth than Hubert Humphrey. Beagle told us that he met Tolkien in 1964 and then wrote an article about him which he tried to sell to Holiday magazine. The editors of Holiday had never heard of Tolkien. They weren't interested. Meanwhile Ian Ballantine read it and it was not after the Ace book controversy that Holiday changed its mind. The article, "Tolkien's Magic Ring," was later used as the preface for Ballantine's The Tolkien Reader. Beagle then went on to describe types of writers. He placed Tolkien in a group with Mark Twain and Dostoevsky, describing such writers as monoliths. They are not necessarily perfect writers but they are there. There are holes in Mark Twain's writing big enough to drive a truck through yet this did not diminish his fame. E.R. Eddison was another writer Beagle would place in that group. Eddison got so excited about the world of The Worm Ouroboros that it took him pages and pages to describe it irregardless of his readers. Peter S. Beagle isn't fond of societies. He would ^{prefer} to meet individual readers of Tolkien. Although he admitted that fan clubs keep the money coming ((? -ed.)) he said he preferred the private visions of both Tolkien and his readers to illustrations, maps, etc. Those orcs don't look right and Galadriel wouldn't look like Joan Greenwood. Upon hearing this Ian Ballantine couldn't resist saying that he would love to be there when the Peter S. Beagle Society has its first meeting. Beagle then concluded by announcing that his books, A Fine and Private Place and The Last Unicorn will be out in paperback in 1969.

It was Ian Ballantine's turn to speak and he evidently did not agree with some of Beagle's remarks. He said it was wonderful that Tolkien had inspired so many people to create their own impressions. Tolkien's success also spurred the re-printing of other adult fantasy by writers such as Eddison and Mervyn Peake. As an unintended blow to Beagle's "private visions" he announced that Ballantine Books will soon print a 72" paper mural consisting of the three covers of the Ballantine Ring editions reproduced as one continuous painting. Ballantine also mentioned an unpublished children's picture story, Mr. Bliss, by Tolkien which may be published after The Silmarillion, whenever that will be. In answer to the fans' curiosity about Tolkien films, Ballantine said that a contract to film The Hobbit had existed for quite some time. The contract was about to lapse so a rough animation film was made to establish the legality of the contract, but not for popular release. A major studio has a contract for a full-length feature three to four years from now but Ballantine would

not say which studio was involved. He even mentioned that the Beatles had expressed an interest in doing the music. Whatever results from all this, Ballantine feels that the Tolkien Society could have a good influence on the producers, the same way that science fiction fans showed their concern for Star Trek. In conclusion Ballantine talked about a 26 minute interview with Tolkien filmed at Oxford by the BBC. He hoped that it could be shown in American schools or on educational TV.

After showing the audience a beautifully illustrated Japanese edition of The Hobbit, and the latest British edition of same with added color plates by Tolkien, Ed Meskys introduced Dave McDaniels. Eight years ago Dave had participated in a radio dramatization of The Lord of The Rings. He, Molly Titcomb and other members of the panel became involved in discussing the possibilities of Tolkien films or other dramatizations. At this point, however, my attention was distracted by the fact that there was a question I wanted to ask of Ian Ballantine. Interrupting my notes on the meeting I wrote a hasty note, which I wanted him to read before the meeting broke up, and handed it to him. My question was this: "Since the colorful covers on Ballantine books have done so much to help sell fantasy and science fiction stories why aren't the artists allowed to sign their names and receive proper credit in most cases?" The panel discussion didn't last too long and as the meeting broke up, Ballantine gave me his answer. According to him, publishers feel that revealing a cover artist's name would allow rival publishing firms to woo him away from his employers. A somewhat logical but not very satisfactory answer in my estimation.

The Tolkien Society meeting was ending and, as the audience drifted out of the room, I acted as a true fan. I brought out my BAYCON program book and asked for Ballantine and Beagle's autographs. Their names were added to a growing list of writer's signatures that I collected during those enjoyable four days of convention.

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C.S. KILBY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
by Glen GoodKnight

C.S. Kilby, Professor of English at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, author of The Christian World of C.S. Lewis, and editor of Letters To An American Lady and A Mind Awake: An Anthology of C.S. Lewis. is probably the leading authority on Lewis and Tolkien in America. He was in Southern California in October 1968, visiting several colleges and universities in the area, speaking on Lewis and Tolkien. October 24 and 25, he was at Westmont College in Santa Barbara. Having heard of his coming, I went up for the two days. Westmont is surely the most beautiful campus I have ever seen, with acres of trees, flowers, lawns and winding paths. The first talk Kilby gave that I was able to record was a short one on "The Oxford Christians." This was given for the faculty only in the Faculty Lounge - a beautiful, tradi-