

the shores of England—having lived on board the good little vessel nearly five years.”

The *Space Beagle* of Van Vogt's imagination is a “vessel” of vast cathedral-like proportions, carrying a thousand men, roaming galactic space “at an ever-increasing velocity through a night that had no end.”

Yet the purpose of each voyage was the same—exploration! But there the similarity ends.

Darwin's purpose was to add to the knowledge of the real world, which he did by sharp observation carefully documented. Van Vogt's purpose is merely to entertain us with fantasy which he does superbly well, and most of all because he takes us by surprise. If we think, when we start to read of the voyage of the *Space Beagle*, that we are going to read of a dramatic take-off from earth and a happy return with presents for all the children, we are mistaken. Before we know it we are enthralled by a struggle between the members of the expedition and strange creatures of distant suns.

The *Space Beagle* tells the story of a human expedition into outer space; we are absorbed by the conflicts between the occupants, one between the military command and the scientific, another among the scientists themselves. We witness the terrifying slaughter of some of the members by strange inhabitants of space, and the final triumph of Grosvenor the exponent of “nexialism”—a new science coordinating all other sciences. When we compare the creatures of Van Vogt's imagination with those of Darwin's reality, such as the cocoa-nut eating crabs of Keeling Island, we find it hard to say which is the more fantastic, as far as queerness of instinct is concerned. If Darwin's work can be called the most instructive of its kind then we can safely claim for Van Vogt that *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* is one of the most imaginative of its own particular kind.

The next choice is
PLAYER PIANO
by KURT VONNEGUT
(Macmillan 12/6; SFBC 6/-)



“Yes, but we only publish science fiction.”

from *The New Yorker*

train journeys in America that she took before the war; during the war, when it was sent over as ballast, she had found it in “a place at Victoria”; she was given access to a vast collection when she visited Hollywood soon after the war. And then on her return to this country she found that it was no longer something to be ashamed of.

Having searched for a suitable passage to quote as an example of what was *not* present-day science fiction, she had resorted to the traditional pin method used to find inspiration at random in the Bible. She had found this passage at once: “She had saved him from the Dinosaur who was eating him. Anyone would.” Many people, Miss Dane said, imagined that science fiction still meant that sort of thing. On the other hand, she disagreed with those who were snobbish about the subject, and who tried to invent for science fiction a long pedigree, beginning immediately with