

I am particularly pleased to be able to publish the following article, by the Research Officer of ASSAP, and the past President of the Royal Photographic Society. It is the product of a lifetime of investigation and consideration, and discusses a number of the key issues within psychical research. It is an article which I hope, and expect, will provoke thought, discussion, and your letters. A selection will appear in CG5.

CREDO by Vernon Harrison.

I shall not, because I cannot, attempt to give a summary of one hundred years' work in psychical research in the space of a single article. Nor do I wish to write about the Society for Psychical Research in particular, even if I were competent to do so. However, it is the SPR centenary year and we may recall that the founders of this Society, impressed by the spectacular advances made by the physical sciences in their time and interested in many of the reported phenomena of Spiritualism, expected to find by diligent application of scientific method, a positive answer to the problem of survival of human personality. They thought they would have that answer within a generation. One has to say at once that this has not come to pass.

I joined the SPR on leaving University in 1937. I had been interested in psychic phenomena ever since I could remember, partly because of childhood experiences; and I hoped that the work of this Society would help me to solve the basic problems - the Whence, the Whither, the Why - of human existence. Now that I am approaching the end of an earth life, I feel much sympathy with Omar Khayyam who, you will recall, lamented:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
About it and about; but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

The Two and Seventy jarring Sects still wrangle and argue, not only about the interpretation of psychic phenomena, but even about the very facts themselves. It is a curious position. Why is this? No other branch of human investigation appears to be in such a muddle and to have made so little progress. Is it because we do not survive and paranormal phenomena do not exist? This is the simple answer; yet experience tells me that it is too simple. Very well, then: are we asking too much of science? Are we asking for assurances, for certainty, which it is not within the power of science to give? It is this last question that I shall try to examine.

There are those who ask: does it matter what the answer is? Is it of any practical importance? Such queries leave me aghast. Victorian optimism and belief in the steady advance of civilisation have gone sour. The technological paradise promised us over the past fifty years has not come about, and shows little sign of doing so. All our vaunted industrial progress leaves untouched the terse, stern reminder of Alcuin's epitaph:

What thou art now, traveller, world-renowned, I was;
And what I am now, so shalt thou also be.

Rudyard Kipling reminds us that Cities and Thrones and Powers stand in Time's eye, almost as long as flowers, which daily die. What applies to individuals applies equally to nations and civilisations. They have their birth, rise in maturity to a high level of culture and material prosperity, decay and vanish without trace save those poor clues which the archaeologist may be able to find and interpret. Verily

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.

The importance of psychical research is that the phenomena it studies suggest that this life may be only one page in a much larger volume, most of which is kept hidden from us at present; and if we become convinced of this, then life can never be the same again. Our views, our sense of values, must change drastically. Let us then have a look at science.

The popular idea of science is that it is based on repeatable, undisputed facts from which it draws conclusions with complete certainty; yet science is really a constantly changing system of thought, based on faith just as much as is religion.

As a man of science I assume that those laws of nature which we have established so far are valid over the entire universe and at all times, however remote. Just as a churchman may affirm: I believe in One God, maker of heaven and earth, so the Scientist asserts: I believe in an ordered Universe, obeying eternal and universal law. The one is as much an Article of Faith as the other. What a fantastic, impudent leap into the dark the scientist's credo is! Recorded, systematic observation of the heavenly bodies goes back a few thousand years at most. Science as we know it has been going for barely four hundred years, most of it in the last hundred and fifty, and much of it in the past fifty. Laws have been established which appear valid over this brief period. Extrapolations are always dangerous, as economists and politicians know to their cost: yet the scientist extrapolates his limited data to periods involving thousands of millions of years and over distances measured in megaparsecs! He cannot possibly prove that this extrapolation is valid. For all I know the Universe (horrid thought!) may be run on party political lines with a change of government and complete reversal of the rules every ten million years or so. The scientist believes in universal, unchanging law because it is the simplest scheme he knows, and he accepts it as an act of faith until it is shown to be wrong.

One finds also that many of the great generalisations of science cannot be formally proved - they can only be disproved. Newton's Law of Gravitation states that every particle of matter attracts every other particle of matter in the universe. Direct measurements of the gravitational attraction between masses have been made in only a few special cases. We cannot possibly test all the matter in the universe. The justification of Newton's law is that, apart from minor modifications resulting from relativity theory, it has never been disproved, and celestial mechanics, based on Newtonian gravitation, has proved to be one of the most exact areas of physical science. But for all I know, there may be maverick pieces of matter in this vast universe that do not respond to gravitation. There may be whole regions where gravitational effects are reversed or obey different laws.

In selecting a hypothesis, we generally take the simplest and most economical, until it is shown to be false. We recall that Ptolemy, in his scheme of the universe, placed the earth at the centre as a fixed reference point and caused the moon, sun, known planets and fixed stars to rotate around it. Now mathematically we are quite entitled to take the earth as reference centre if we so wish. The Ptolemaic system does represent the universe as we see it and it can be made to represent the motions of several planets with satisfactory accuracy. However, the Ptolemaic system gave way to the Copernican, in which the earth moves around the sun, for two very good reasons. The first is that the equations of motion of the planets are much simpler in the Copernican system. Scientists prefer the simpler equations partly because they are lazy and do not want to spend more effort in calculation than they need, and partly because there is an elegance about simple laws that relate a large number of observed facts, which complicated laws, devised *ad hoc*, do not possess. The Ptolemaic system is a botched-up job compared with the Copernican. The second reason is that in order to keep the Ptolemaic system together one has to postulate vast forces, crystalline spheres and other machinery for which there is no other evidence. Space travel has given us no hint that the Ptolemaic spheres of the Moon, Mercury, etc. exist, and if we wish to preserve them we must invest them with extraordinary and unverifiable properties. We have in effect to dye our whiskers green and always use so large a fan that they can not be seen. We believe the Copernican system because of its simplicity and elegance compared with the alternative, not because the Ptolemaic system cannot account for the observed facts if we push it far enough.

Mathematical physics does not explain why things should be so: the equations express as accurately as possible how things behave in given circumstances. There is no finality in science. It does not give certainty. It gives only working hypotheses which must be developed, extended or rejected as our knowledge grows. In the magnificent language of Sir Edwin Arnold's poem, The Light of Asia:

The Books teach Darkness was, at first of all,
And Brahm, sole meditating in that Night,
Look not for Brahm and the Beginning there!
Nor him nor any light.

Shall any gazer see with mortal eyes,
Or any searcher know by mortal mind;
Veil after veil will lift - but there must be
Veil upon veil behind.

Psychical researchers seem all too often to assume that, before you can accept a hypothesis, you must first disprove all alternative hypotheses, however far-fetched they may be. This is never done in other branches of scientific enquiry as far as I am aware. They also search for that Philosopher's Stone, the final, crucial, fraud-proof, fool-proof, knock-down, ninety horsepower experiment which shall establish beyond all doubt, nay, which shall compel acceptance, that such and such is so. It is hard to see how physical science could develop if such a strait-jacket were imposed upon it. In my view, the crucial, fraud-proof, fool-proof, knock-down experiment is a will o' the wisp, an ignis fatuus; and I am reminded of some very wise words: "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

This brings me now to the matter of experiments. It is often believed that unless one can perform repeatable experiments, with the same result every time, one is not being scientific. Repeatable experiments are devoutly to be wished; but there are large areas of science in which experiment in any form is impossible. One of these is astronomy, where one can only observe as accurately

as possible, record faithfully, search for patterns and relations in the recorded data and if possible predict future behaviour on the basis of the findings. We cannot do a single experiment; yet, despite this limitation, the equations predicting the sun's longitude, for example, are expressed to eleven significant figures, which is a precision matched in only few other cases in physical science. Another area in which experiment is impossible is geology.

I dwell on this to show that the repeatable, fraud-proof experiments so often insisted on by psychical researchers are not available in several highly respectable branches of science. We have to make do with what we have, not with what we would like to have. Psychical phenomena are sporadic and notoriously hard to control or initiate. The conditions in a laboratory may inhibit the very phenomena you are trying to examine. You don't get pandas to mate by locking them up together in a cage and poking them with a stick. As scientists our first duty is to observe and record as faithfully as we can. Human testimony, though suspect and unreliable, cannot be ignored.

Although survival has not been proved, there is now an impressive body of evidence to suggest that earth memories and mannerisms do persist, at least for a time, and can be picked up by suitably attuned individuals. These earth memories need be no more than psychic debris, or what Theosophists would call Kama-rupic shells; and such shells have a very low order of intelligence. However, the mere fact that something seems to persist is significant.

The best communicators, whoever or whatever they are, do seem to show intelligence and awareness of what is going on. They can display a sense of purpose. The cross-correspondence cases reported by the SPR in its earlier years are a classic example. In more recent years, the most impressive cases to my mind are the "drop-in" cases, where the communicators are unknown to both medium and sitters. Some interesting examples have been recorded, of which those collected by Dr. Alan Gauld in Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, vol.55, part 204, July 1971, p.332 et ff. are in my view one of the most important contributions the SPR has made to our subject in the last decade.

Here we have, inter alios, the case of a communicator, Harry Stockbridge, "second loot", Tyneside Scottish, killed in World War I, who "dropped in" at a circle of sitters to whom he was, as far as it is humanly possible to ascertain, unknown. He gave detailed information about himself which was only verified, after much effort, by an independent investigator some twenty years later. It is possible that no living person knew all this information at the time of the sitting. The information given was found scattered among several records, all old and difficult of access: it could not be obtained as a whole from any one of them. In the important detail of the date of death, the communicator was right and the official War Office record was wrong. To dismiss the evidence of this case out of hand as fraudulent, mistaken, or fortuitous seems to me neither intellectually honest or science.

The value of this and similar cases is that they force us right into a corner. We can dismiss at once the possibility that the medium was guessing from minimal cues offered by the sitters, 'fishing' for information, or reading the sitters' minds telepathically. The sitters were emotionally uninvolved, and could not be accused of finding unwarranted significance in vague general statements. Quite the reverse: the statements made by Harry Stockbridge were clear and unambiguous; they could only be right or wrong; and they had no meaning for the sitters.

We must also dismiss, in my judgement, cryptomesia. This is a blessed word which brings comfort to parapsychologists as the word Mesopotamia brought comfort to the old lady. It is established that certain people can read

documents quite casually, and apparently forget the contents, only to reproduce them with complete accuracy many years afterwards. However, the information given in the best of the "drop-in" cases does not come from any one source. Church registers, War Office files, years-old back numbers of local newspapers, the rare books section of libraries, university archives - all these are by no means easy of access. Their shelves are not open to casual browsers and one visits them only with good reason. My own experience is that one enters these places only by permission and often by appointment, having stated clearly what book or document it is that one wants to consult. Removal of books from shelves by the reader is not allowed. Archivists do not encourage handling of their irreplaceable documents.

I just do not believe that the medium in these cases happened at some time to enter archives rarely visited by the general public, happened to request from each of them just those documents touching on the life of an undistinguished person of many years ago, memorised the information and happened to transmit it years later to sitters who were unable to verify it and to whom it meant nothing - and all this for no reason. If this be so, then the universe must be more idiotic than ever Macbeth imagined.

Parapsychologists fasten with glee on cases where information supplied by a medium can be traced to a book which is afterwards found to be wrong. They assume, maybe correctly, that the medium must have read the book at some time and is quoting unconsciously from memory. In the Harry Stockbridge case this argument has boomeranged with a vengeance, for the communicator was found to be right and the official records wrong. How, pray, was the medium able to make this correction?

As far as I can see, we are reduced to only three possible theories. The first is that the communicator is what he claims to be, a human being who has shed the physical body, but who is otherwise much as he was on earth. The second is that the medium has somehow picked up the information through the minds of living (i.e. incarnate) people who had once known the communicator. This theory may be plausible in the case of a communicator who "passed over" quite recently; but as one recedes in time, the number of people living who might be involved dwindles rapidly and disappears altogether. A theory that can only explain some of the "drop-in" communications, but certainly not all, is an ill-favoured thing and I am not inclined to entertain it.

The third theory is the "Super-ESP" theory which assumes that the medium has extra-sensory perception on a practically unlimited scale. He or she is supposed to have access in some way to the archives of every library and record office under the sun. It assumes that the medium has the power to select, out of the stupendous mass of printed and written records in the archives of this country alone, just those facts pertinent to a particular case. It assumes, further, that the medium's unconscious is able at times to identify and correct errors when these occur in the records.

If these astonishing powers exist, there ought to be some slight evidence of them elsewhere. I turn first to laboratory tests of ESP using Zener cards and the like, and I find no convincing proof that ESP exists in even the most rudimentary form. All tests of this nature seem to turn out either inconclusive suspect, or negative. How do you reconcile these results with Super-ESP? You cannot have it both ways! (I should add in parenthesis that I believe from qualitative evidence that ESP of a sort does exist, but everything goes to show that it is sporadic and unreliable.)

If Super-ESP existed, the pressure to use it for commercial, political, and military espionage would be overwhelming. One of the functions of an industrial research laboratory is to find out, by all legal means, what your

competitors are trying to develop. You have to do this to survive, because if your rivals bring out a new product which renders your own range obsolete, you can easily go out of business. Practitioners of Super-ESP could violate all boardroom minutes, all laboratory notebooks, all engineers' drawings. Think on these things.

What I have said applies even more to the political scene. Governments would not hesitate to use Super-ESP if it were available to them. One of the astonishing facts of history is that details of Operation Overlord and the D-day landings in World War II were successfully concealed from the German High Command right up to the time of the invasion. Notwithstanding the fact that involved in the preparations were hundreds of firms, every available small boat and men and women by the hundred thousand, not one practitioner of Super-ESP managed to tell Hitler when and where the invasion would take place. If one had done so, the course of history might have changed. Super-ESP is on a par with the primum mobile of Ptolemy: it might explain the facts if there were the slightest evidence that it existed.

I have not yet done with the Super-ESP theory. My experience is that the communicators from time to time give explicit warnings of the unforeseen and undesirable outcome of a course of conduct that one is contemplating. Even more, they can foretell, up to a year in advance, events that shall surely come to pass even though the sitter at the time has no knowledge of them and thinks the prediction most unlikely. I have had this experience myself; my wife has had it; and it is clear from letters that are now finding their way to me that others have had the experience too. If this is Super-ESP, it must apply to records as yet unwritten.

If we are to make any progress, we must adopt some working hypothesis and see where it leads. We cannot sit on the fence waiting for Godot. At the beginning of this article I asserted that scientists usually take as their working hypothesis the simplest and most direct that is capable of explaining the facts. To me the Super-ESP hypothesis is as unwieldy as the Ptolemaic system of the universe. To my way of thinking, the simplest and most direct hypothesis that is capable of explaining the facts we have been discussing is that of survival of the human personality in some form.

Having selected survival, I must stress that it is a working hypothesis. Like any other, I must be prepared to modify it, extend it, or even discard it altogether if new evidence so requires. It is only a working tool, but I shall use it as long as it is of service. It will be necessary to try to discover exactly what survives; and to do this we must surely enlist the help of the communicators themselves. This is an exciting quest, probably the most important that man has ever contemplated.

I think it fitting to conclude with some words attributed to Arthur James Balfour, one time president of the SPR, man of letters, philosopher, politician, and for three years Prime Minister:

"Our highest truths are but half-truths.
Think not to settle down for ever in any truth.
Make use of it as a tent in which to pass a summer's night,
But build no house of it, or it will be your tomb.
When you first have an inkling of its insufficiency
And begin to descry a dim counter-truth looming up beyond,
Then weep not, but give thanks:
It is the Lord's voice whispering,
'Take up thy bed and walk.'"

THE BIGFOOT-UFO INTERFACE

Janet & Colin Bord

While researching Alien Animals we found ourselves becoming particularly involved in and fascinated by the field of Bigfoot research, an involvement which has resulted in our book Bigfoot Casebook, a chronological survey of the 'best' sighting reports from the early 19th century to 1980, chosen from the 1,000 reports we collected. In its way, the Bigfoot is as puzzling as the UFO, and the searches for both have many features in common. The close parallels between the two subjects are not generally remarked upon, perhaps because, except for a few rare and usually insubstantial cases, their paths have not actually crossed. However, the parallels are intriguing, and might tell us something about both phenomena.

1. Most Bigfoot hunters believe they are chasing a physical creature; many UFO fans believe the UFO's to be physical craft.
2. However, in both fields there are many reports which suggest that the quarry is, sometimes at least, non-physical.
3. Both sometimes leave physical traces - footprints, hair, excreta/holes in the ground, damaged trees, burnt grass, ejected material - but these physical traces, despite analysis, are usually controversial and ultimately prove nothing.
4. No Bigfoot has ever been caught (except in vague, unsubstantiated rumours) nor do we have a UFO to examine (despite rumours of crashed saucers, equally unsubstantiated).
5. There are photographs of both phenomena, but these are technically poor, inconclusive, and their validity is disputed.
6. Just as UFO's are seen and reported all over the world (including recent reports from China), so has the Bigfoot shown itself to have a much wider territory than was originally thought, encompassing not only the Himalayas, USA and Canada, but also all areas of relatively untouched mountain and forest, i.e. USSR, China, Australia, South America, Africa.
7. Despite their wide spread, and thousands of reports, both Bigfoot and UFO have proved totally elusive.
8. When considered objectively, both phenomena seem incredible and unlikely. Plenty of factual explanations are put forward by non-believers to explain how the faulty reports have arisen, and yet
9. The eye-witnesses of both phenomena are apparently sincere, and they surely can't all be deluded or hoaxing (although cases of both have indeed been proved).
10. Many hunters/investigators/researchers who accept that the Bigfoot/UFO is a real phenomenon support one or other of the current beliefs as to their nature, and these people separate into camps based on these beliefs. Each camp tends to waste too much time and energy feuding with the others.

The searches for the reality behind Bigfoot and UFO reports have clearly followed similar courses, and there has so far been little success in either field. Despite the fact that impartial study has shown that much of the evidence in both fields is open to doubt (usually because of witness unreliability and investigator incompetence), open-minded students who have immersed themselves in the case studies in both fields nevertheless find it difficult to discard all the evidence. There is something out there - but what?



I have ignored the handful of journal listings that should have appeared in this issue, as they will appear along with all the others that are to hand when CG5 is compiled in late April. That issue will contain details of all the journals we have found suitable for abstract over the last year, with details of how and where to obtain them, and something about their nature. If there have been any changes since the original listings, or if any editor or eager reader feels that a journal we have not mentioned ought to appear, I would be very grateful if they would let me have details, and if possible a sample copy, as soon as possible. I do have evidence that the listings in CG have led to a number of subs to other journals, so it's probably worth the effort!

The following abstracts are, variously and jointly, the work of Kevin McClure and Jenny Randles.

Christian Parapsychologist Winter 1981.

A 'reincarnation' issue, led by an impressive piece by ASSAP's David Christie-Murray. CP's reviews, long and short, are particularly valuable, and this issue features one by the actual David Bellamy of TV fame; some enterprising editorship here! (What next - a review by Lennie Henry?).

EVP News. November 1981.

Alan Cleaver (ASSAP Secretary) launches a new research programme into the Voice Phenomenon, which should be under way soon. Also, an intriguing profile of the remarkable Philip Rodgers, a quiet anomaly all by himself, and a man who clearly commanded considerable respect.

Flying Saucer Review. Vol.27. No.4.

Perhaps it's just the lack of good quality, high-strangeness British reports, and the consequent absence of lively and imaginative UFOIN reporting, but FSR seems somehow to lack heart and originality these days. In this issue, almost all the material is foreign in origin, much of it translated, and while it is, of course, wholly competent and reasonable in style and presentation, including M.I.B. reports and a Soviet sighting, none of it seems to take us anywhere. The only speculative article is either intended to be humorous, or is a ludicrous piece, made more so by its illustrations, tracing the similarities between some dinosaurs and some humanoids. Has Dr. Bernard E. Finch fallen under the influence of Frank Johnson?

If it is lack of sightings that is causing these problems, then there is little that we can do about it, except work harder to secure reports. If it is not that alone, then consideration must be given to some new blood at FSR.

Journal of the Australian Centre for UFO Studies. Vol.2. No.5.

Mark Moravec examines the similarities between UFO cults and prophetic religious movements, whilst John Prytz explores "the science of UFO prediction" (can future trends in UFO reports be predicted by extrapolating from past events?)

Junior UFO Club Newsletter. November 1981.

Aimed like 'Magic Saucer' at the young, JUFOC is rooted in the nuts and bolts scene - it worries me a little that kids should be subjected to such polarised views. The most troubling thing is that there is an incredible lack of consistency, particularly over the case of the death of Mr. Adamski, which it both says has nothing to do with UFO's, and deserves a full-scale investigation!

The Ley Hunter. No.91.

It is not easy publishing a journal unpaid, but it is even more difficult to do it between writing books, running the remarkable Dragon Project, working in London to make a living, and having that living in the wilds of Wales! Added to this, TLH has had its financial problems; clearly this issue has come out against the odds, printed by Paul, Family, and Friends at home on the printing equipment they have recently acquired. However, its content is as fine as ever, and the cost of a sub. has actually gone down. This issue has original material on Carnac, Nasca, and the 'Oregon Vortex'. Paul now has printing and stencilling facilities that could prove invaluable to all you would-be editors out there. Any enquiries to Paul Devereux at P.O.Box 13, Welshpool, Powys, Wales.

Magonia. No.8.

Another good issue. Part 3 of Roger Sandell's 'From Conspirators to Contactees', Jenny Randles on how she more or less manages to make a living from writing about UFO's, INTCAT, reviews, and three excellent pieces by Hilary Evans, doing us the service of presenting foreign-language material to us in an interesting way, and replying to Peter Rogerson. (Actually, I have this dream in which I pick up a major UFO magazine, and find that not only is every article by Hilary Evans, but the book reviews and the guest editorial, too. Then I turn to the back cover and there, beneath a picture of the Evans visage at its most gentle and Shroud-of-Turin, is an advert for Hilary Evans Sweatshirts, Badges, and all-purpose hand-luggage. It'll happen one day - wait and see!)

NUFON Case Histories. No.1.

Yet another new, and worthwhile venture from the hand of Jenny Randles. A most intriguing subject for the first issue, a complex and rumour-riddled supposed CEIII said to have involved lengthy sightings and cover-ups by both the RAF and the USAAF. Thoroughly confused by secretive and incompetent local investigators we will probably never know what happened at Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk. A case that has lessons for all of us.

Pegasus Late 1981.

This is a local journal published by SIGAP, but the chief value of these issues is a reproduction of the paper given by Joaquim Fernandes and J.M.Andrade at the 1981 BUFORA Congress. This is based on their Portuguese book and is an impressive consideration of the classic Fatima Miracle/Vision experience. If you have always scoffed at attempts to force-fit historic phenomena into modern UFO contexts this should set you thinking. With personal investigation, interviews with (very old) witnesses and a dash of speculation, the authors make out more than a plausible case. This was certainly the best of the Congress papers . . . well worth reading, as Fatima typifies the complete impossibility of pigeon-holing certain phenomena.

The Probe Report. December 1981.

Only 7 issues, but this is unquestionably one of the best UFO journals in the world. It has the flavour of a serious UFO house-journal coupled with a hard-headed scepticism almost unheard of among most so-called ufologists. Their superb 'case closed' section each issue (two full reports here) treat in depth on the investigation of an UFO. Here, for example, is a pseudo-physical traces report and a brilliant expose of a LIITS report . . . showing just how to identify the source of a UFO case. Also here are considerations of wind-vortices, effectively destroying the 'saucer-nest' sightings which have abounded for years, and a piece by sceptical journalist Ian Ridpath on the Travis Walton abduction. It is sad that 'Probe' feel the need to apologise for their scepticism - this must, surely, be the approach for the eighties!

Sangreal. Vol. 5. No.1.

A really mature and complete journal, as satisfying in its own calm and intriguing field of interest as is Probe in ufology. It has a genuine love for the British mysteries and for lost knowledge and lost understanding, and an ability to relate them all to real life. Anyone who used to enjoy 'Seed' or 'I.T.' at their best will love Adrian Flick's 'Mordred Under the Mask'. (Talking of 'Seed' and 'I.T.', and lost knowledge, it amazes me how much we have lost just since 1969 or so!)

Scottish UFO Bulletin. No.4.

Nicely laid out, as is its companion newsletter, this publication appears regularly and the two editors (Tom O'Neill and Bill Gibbons) maintain a good standard. It is produced by the Scottish UFO Network, an attempt to emulate NUFON, yet it is virtually unknown, comprising a mere handful of individuals, and none of the well-known Scottish UFO personalities such as Stuart Campbell or Peter Hill. This is a shame, but probably reflects the low population density of Scotland. I hope SUFON succeeds - it deserves to. This issue, published in December 1981, chiefly intrigued me by announcing a ginormous UFO conference at the Wembley arena in August 1984! (Buy your tickets now, or it may be too late!) Also an interesting American article on the attempts to obtain CIA data via lawsuits.

UFO Insight no.10. MAPIT Skywatch 41.

The last issue of both these established journals as they, and their respective organisations, merge to form the 'Organisation for Scientific Evaluation of Aerial Phenomena, with its two new journals (more details in CG5). We would like to wish OSEAP the very best of fortune, and a wider audience for the high technical standards it will undoubtedly purvey. The last edition of Skywatch is not worthy of its predecessors, but Insight has Mark Tyrrell on 'Rumours and Publicity - Their Causes and Effects', including some useful statistical material, more info. on the Wiesbaden 'Mr.X.' photo, and a case commentary by John Rimmer. Incidentally, FUFOR has also produced an excellent 'Night Observation Exercise Manual', with sample tabulated report forms. Any group should at least have a copy for reference and example.

UFO Research Australia Newsletter. Vol.2. No.6.

In this issue, John Prytz reviews Aboriginal mythology and possible references to extraterrestrial intelligence; William Spaulding and Fred Adrian look at computer enhancement of UFO photographs. Also timepiece interference effects.

Zetetic Scholar. No.8.

Better than ever, if almost too long and information-packed to survive in a world that wants short, smart, snappy articles. Dialogue on 'The Schism within Parapsychology', doubts about the psychic detective Peter Hurkos, 'Psychic Surgery; Hoax or Hope?', Temple writes to Sagan about the Sirius mystery; replies on the UFO dialogue, and oodles more. It seems there is some danger of ZS ceasing to publish through lack of funds; that would be serious indeed.

I do not doubt that there are readers of 'Common Ground' who would rather not see it dealing with UFO's and ufology; particularly, perhaps, in its role as journal of record to ASSAP. But if we are to reflect current research, then it must not only be dealt with, but, as it represents much the largest number of active investigators within any subject in our field, its lessons and achievements must be made public for the benefit of all investigators of reports of the paranormal.

The one journal that, over the past ten years or so, has contrived to keep ufology alert, active, and sometimes annoyed, has been MUFOE, more recently known as MAGONIA, and as such always reviewed in CG. I don't suppose that its editor has ever been on a skywatch in his life, but that has not prevented him becoming one of the most respected figures in what has been called 'The New Ufology'. His work, and that of his compatriots Peter Rogerson, John Harney, Roger Sandell, and Nigel Watson, is to place ufology firmly in the course of real life, and of real history, too. It is all very well to compile sighting reports, but out of social and psychological context they often have only minimal meaning. For anyone who has found ufology immature and simplistic, MAGONIA might be a very good starting-point for learning why those of us in the subject do what we do, and what we make of, and learn from, the results of our investigations.

LOOK AT ME!

by John Rimmer.

Some recent events have given cause for consideration of the circumstances surrounding media accounts of disturbing and traumatic events.

Many readers will have been following the BBC TV series Police, a close examination of the work of the Thames Valley police, using 'cine-verite' techniques of unnarrated documentary. Many more will have read of the controversy surrounding one particular programme, which recorded the police interrogation of an alleged rape victim. The hard and unsympathetic questioning of the woman concerned has led to a public outcry, and a review of police methods, both in the Thames Valley force, and generally. Less has been remarked on the media's role in this case.

Another episode in the series showed a police officer (one who was involved in the rape interrogation) appearing at a disciplinary hearing in which he was reprimanded in the most severe terms and demoted back to the beat. In this case too, not the least interesting part of it is the role of television, and the officer's apparent willingness to allow a moment of personal humiliation to be displayed to many millions of people.

In both these cases there are a number of factors we can only guess at. It is quite probable that the woman in the first instance was too upset and disturbed to fully understand the significance of the cameras present at her

interrogation. Subsequently she may have willingly released the film for public viewing in an attempt to expose her rough treatment. The officer may have had pressure put on him to consent to the filming by senior policemen anxious to demonstrate an open and candid attitude to the media.

In both cases, and in whatever circumstances, however, here were two people who consented to have what were probably the most humiliating experiences of their lives examined publicly on TV. And although these are extreme examples, they are by no means unique. Any glance through the tabloid press reveals ordinary people who are prepared to discuss the most embarrassing details of their personal relationships, sex-lives, or financial dealings. Indeed, one of the great stand-bys of a popular radio show of the 50's was the question, in a broad Yorkshire accent: "Tell us thi' most embarrassing moment!" As far as I can recall, no-one ever refused!

So what is the hold that the mass media has over ordinary members of the public, which causes them to tell millions of people things which they would not dream of telling their next door neighbour, or a stranger in the supermarket queue? Are some people more prone than others to appear in sensationalised news stories? And what has all this got to do with UFO's?

As far as TV publicity goes, I think there is a feeling that the airing of a problem or opinion on the air somehow legitimises it. The broadcasting authorities are seen as part of the governing establishment of the country (in the U.K. at least) and it is legitimate to take problems and confessions to them, as one might to an M.P. or social worker. The fact that millions of people are going to be entertained or outraged by your fear or embarrassment may not be immediately apparent.

There also appear to be many people who are in an almost constant state of conflict with a variety of agencies, such as the local council, the Gas Board, the National Health Service, etc., and who attempt to legitimise these struggles by engaging press and TV as weapons. (This is without making any judgement on whether their case is reasonable or not - in most cases the media also avoids this judgement, which serves to confirm its role as a legitimising agency.)

There are also many people who can best be described by the perjorative term 'media-freak'. In many cases these are the people I have described above; who, having had experience of using the media in a personal battle with authority, have either found the experience stimulating, or have become increasingly convinced of the value of such media coverage, and have begun to apply it to other aspects of their own lives. In some cases this takes the form of almost obsessive letter writing to the press. In my own area, one person has a letter in most local papers most weeks. Over a period of a year he must have had 150 - 200 letters published, on every conceivable subject from snowfall records in 1963 to the Social Democratic Party! His accolade came when one local paper made him the subject of a feature article because he had written them so many letters - a by no means unique case of publicity actually becoming news! (Ufologists and paranormal researchers will have great sympathy with this type of self-publicist, being themselves compulsive letter-writers, and seldom if ever resisting a chance to legitimise their activities on TV, radio, or in the press - and seldom being slow in regretting the consequences.)

So what has all this got to do with UFO's? And paranormal research? I think it challenges some of the assumptions that researchers make about the people they have to meet, interview, and work with in their investigations. We are constantly told in case reports that such-and-such a person would be unlikely to have invented or embroidered a particular experience, because they had nothing to gain by it, or would be subject to ridicule or ostracism. But is this a valid

judgement? The experience in small-town America may be rather different, but certainly I can find no evidence in Britain that ridicule and persecution is likely to follow even the most bizarre reports of strange phenomena. Indeed, the experience of some UFO flaps, like West Wales in 1977, suggests that the media and writers often treat alleged percipients with almost total reverence. Reports of other recent UK UFO cases show no evidence of witness harassment by neighbours, employers, or workmates. Indeed, the only harassment that has occurred has been by some researchers over-anxious to report on the incident, totally within the witness' own frame of reference. So we cannot say that the fact that the person involved is willing to 'stand up and be counted' publicly is any guarantee of probity. In view of the desire evidenced in many people, to gain media publicity for themselves for almost any reason whatsoever (running half-naked across a rugby pitch, for instance), one might be suspicious of any 'witness' who does not insist on anonymity - and certainly of any who insist on publication of their identity. It is also a fallacy to say that an alleged percipient "has nothing to gain" by publicising, or even fabricating, an experience. As we have seen, many people seem to find media notoriety as satisfying (or more so) as financial reward.

I propose, therefore, that any judgement about the sincerity of a witness based on assumptions about their 'courage' in risking public censure in publicising the 'facts of the case' are totally spurious. But where does this leave the investigator? I suggest a few elementary precautions which may provide a better perspective on percipients' motives for publicising a particular experience. If the subject has had a genuinely puzzling experience, it is natural to assume that they will seek some sort of explanation for it. If they are not involved in the field of anomalous phenomena research their first approach will probably be to the media. There is certainly nothing sinister in a person making a UFO report to a local paper. But any investigator wishing to make a judgement on the validity of that experience would do well to look at what else the subject may have reported to the press over the years. Examine the files of the local paper - is your witness a regular letter-writer? Not necessarily on ghosts or psychic phenomena, but about the local council, the economic situation, the price of fish, snowfall records in 1963, or the SDP. Is this person involved in disagreements with neighbours or public bodies, which have reached the pages of the local paper? None of these are proof that the person involved is hoaxing, but it may cause you to pause and wonder if this person does have 'anything to gain' from the publicity such a report might bring.

This is a difficult and sensitive area. I would not like to see investigators browbeating witnesses like the police officers in the rape case. But those policemen justified their actions by saying that false and malicious rape allegations are made, and that they have to try to sort them out. There are, however, better ways of doing it, and there are better ways of sorting out false and not-so-malicious anomaly reports. I would not like to see investigators acting like shady private eyes, going around questioning neighbours about the personal foibles of a witness; but a person's reputation and self-image in a community can have an important bearing on their propensity to seek or avoid media exposure, and on their willingness to discuss publicly otherwise 'hidden' aspects of their life. (By this I do not mean that a person must be telling the truth if they are a bank manager or airline pilot, as some ufologists believe). (Wasn't Norman Tebbit an airline pilot? KM).

We must accept the knowledge that some people are willing to lie, or at least embroider the truth, for what they see as personal gain. The gain need not be monetary, and if it is it need not be a great sum (the lies that some people will tell to avoid paying a 10p fine on an overdue library book, or 15p fare on an over-run bus journey are remarkable - yes, bank managers, too!)

These are facts that many researchers are unwilling to confront. Either because they fail to realise that such dissembling can occur, or because of the atmosphere of trust that must exist between investigator and investigatee. If it is the second case, such loyalty must not be used as a cover for the neglect of thorough research. If a situation develops where researchers feel they cannot expose the truth because of a personal relationship built up between themselves and the subject, they must be prepared to terminate the investigation without making a report, labelling it 'insufficient evidence'.

More than anything else, this problem must be confronted and discussed, and I hope this article may help stimulate this discussion.

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HYPNOSIS

There has been much discussion in recent years about the use of hypnosis in paranormal research, particularly with regard to the use of regression in UFO and reincarnation/past life cases. Not surprisingly, much doubt has been cast on both the method and its results, though this has at no time centred upon criticism of the hypnosis itself; its existence as a separate state, that can be specifically called into use, has seldom been questioned in the literature available to most of us working in the paranormal field.

In an article entitled 'A cool look at nothing special' in 'Nursing Mirror' of 20.1.82, Keith Hearne MSc. PhD. of Hull University challenges this attitude, among others, and also raises some important points concerning our own attempts to establish the true nature of claimed experiences through the use of hypnosis. He concludes his article as follows, coming to conclusions that I, from my own experience of the use of investigative interviewing techniques, would support.

"Items we read in the press on hypnosis often appear to lend respectability to the topic. For instance, we have seen articles stating that the police are interested in using hypnosis in the interrogation of witnesses. The whole idea is mistaken. It is not surprising that people remember more details about an incident in the quiet, relaxed, atmosphere of the psychiatrist's office.

Hypnosis is not necessary for better recall. Recent work shows that hypnosis is no better than calm reminiscence - in fact, what that tells the police is to soften their interrogation techniques and conditions. Hypnotic retrieval of forgotten information could be positively counterproductive. If witnesses are encouraged to image the events and describe details, in a condition of social compliance, those with good imagery will inevitably make up or substitute items, which may then become assimilated into the genuine memory of the events.

As has been shown, controlled scientific studies have cast the gravest doubts on the whole notion of hypnosis as being a distinct special state . . . In fact, hypnosis would seem to be an umbrella term covering a whole range of known psychological phenomena In the absence of any single, definite characteristic of hypnosis, it would be scientifically sensible to abandon the term hypnosis. Possibly, we should call the collection of behaviours "compliance/suggestion effects".

* * *

If everything goes according to plan, then CG5 will see a more extensive review section, covering a wide range of material relevant to paranormal/anomaly field. However, this will be in addition to this feature, a longer type of review, developing on ideas presented in the book or books to hand. This issue, John Grant comments on two books of considerable significance; one because of the actual importance of its content, and the other, in part at least, because it denotes a marked shift in opinion in one of the leading commentators in our subject, a shift that may well influence others who are accustomed to accepting his word as authoritative.

The books in question are THE OCCULT ESTABLISHMENT by James Webb, Richard Drew Publishing, pp vi + 535, £9.95p; and POLTERGEIST by Colin Wilson, New English Library, pp xi + 371, £7.95p.

THINGS THAT GO CRANK IN THE NIGHT. JOHN GRANT

At last - at very long last - a British publisher has seen fit to bring out James Webb's The Occult Establishment, the companion volume to his impressive earlier book The Flight from Reason (published in the USA as The Occult Underground). In the five years since the American publication of The Occult Establishment, Webb has died, by his own hand; it is deeply tragic that he is not alive to see the publication of this major work in his own land.

It's unfortunate that its title should be in many ways so misleading. Readers buying the book in the expectation of finding wonder tales of ghosts and ghost-hunters will be disappointed, for Webb takes the word 'occult' to mean, in essence, 'alternative knowledge'; in other words those theories and knowledge systems created as an antidote to the unpalatable rationalism of orthodox science. The scope of the book thus runs from crank theories and pseudo-science, on the one hand, to theories of spiritual evolution and even unorthodox sociology and Utopianism, on the other. Webb's aim is the investigation of the relationships and interactions between these theoretical structures, and the march of materialism (in all senses of the word) and rationalism.

In so doing, he has written what must be seen as the definitive history of this type of thinking in the 20th. century. Indeed, the book almost suffers from an embarrassment of riches: not only is the research both impressive and extensive, there are so many intriguing ideas and theories studding its pages that it has to be read in small doses for fear of missing something. Certainly I found that, if I attempted to read it consecutively for more than a couple of hours, my mind began reeling, so that I had to take a break, to go off and do something totally numbing like watch 'Crossroads', or read the 'Sun'. That this should be so is, of course, quite the opposite of a criticism of the book.

I do have one or two carps about this edition. Since it has been reprinted directly from the American one, it retains an index which has certain idiosyncrasies - for example, most of the book-titles indexed appear

under 'A' or 'T', as in 'A Modern Utopia' and 'The Golem'. And, while it is reasonable that American spelling be retained, it is irritating that references to 'The Flight From Reason' call it 'The Occult Underground'. Moreover, the style on occasion interferes with comprehension, and the misprints in the original edition have not been corrected; a very basic subediting of the text would have been extremely valuable.

But these are all minor points. Suffice it to say that this book is one which should be used as a yard-stick by all future historians of the pseudo-sciences or of paranormal research; in addition, it should be required reading for anyone interested in a rational discussion of the irrational - while £9.95 may seem a lot of money, this book is a bargain at the price.

If Webb is on occasion heavy going, the same can never be said of Colin Wilson, whose new book, Poltergeist!: A Study in Destructive Haunting, is every bit as gripping as you might expect. As someone else once remarked of Wilson, he could make the telephone directory exciting. But the contrast with 'The Occult Establishment' is not just one of readability: where Webb adopts an essentially agnostic approach to the paranormal, Wilson seems to be working as hard as he can to accept it. For example, Wilson acknowledges the work of Trevor Hall and others, who have proved that many of Harry Price's results were fraudulent; yet almost in the same breath he makes a great deal of them. Surely, since so much of Price's material was invented or faked, one cannot assume the veracity of any of it. (Paul Tabori's highly partisan and unreliable biography of Price appears in the bibliography).

Similarly, a great deal is made of 'classic' poltergeist cases of the past, ignoring the fact that evidence dating from before about a century ago is unreliable, at the very least. So the tale of the "phantom drummer of Tedworth" is trundled out. In 1661 a certain travelling magistrate called Mompesson was visiting Ludgershall, Wiltshire, and was pestered by the public drumming of a man named Drury. Mompesson picked on Drury, who in revenge caused all sorts of bangings and crashings at Mompesson's home. A couple of years later, Drury was exiled, and the drummings stopped: but possibly Drury came back to England because, after a while, the noises started all over again. Wilson's account of the case is based on that of Joseph Glanvil, who was peripherally involved in the case, and who wrote about it two decades later.

Now this whole tale has, to me at least, all the trappings of a good legend. Drury is said at one point to have confessed his responsibility to a fellow prisoner; but wouldn't a prisoner have had a certain amount of difficulty making such information generally known? It was, after all, the 1660's. Similarly, to say that Drury must have smuggled himself back into England because the poltergeist activity started again is to get the logic of one's argument back to front.

Other doubts come to mind. For example, most of the ghosts to whom poltergeist activity is ascribed seem to be of the Church: monks are most popular, but nuns turn up, too. This seems more than a little strange - why monks? Mind you, I enjoyed a comment about one particular person of the cloth, the nun at Borley; "They found . . . some fragments of a human skull. The jawbone showed signs of a deep-seated abscess - Peter Underwood speculates that this is why the phantom nun always looked miserable."

Again, I think there just might be more rational explanations for an incident which occurred in 1938, when a Mrs. Forbes (or Fielding) was being investigated as the focus of a poltergeist: "While Mrs. Forbes was standing in full view, with three witnesses around her, there was a clatter, and a brass-bound hairbrush appeared on the floor. It was warm, as 'apports' usually are (the theory being that they are 'dematerialised' and then 'rematerialised'.)

Mrs. Fielding identified it as her own, and said she had left it in her bedroom at home "

If, then, one removes all the sloppy evidence - such as the cases cited above - from this book, one is left with little more than an excellent account of the 'Black Monk of Pontefract' (another monk!), from the 1960's, and a briefer examination of the Enfield Poltergeist. In addition, there is a useful discussion of the Cock Lane ghost, a case which, because it was so early on dismissed as fraudulent, has never been properly analysed. But all this is clouded over by Wilson's apparently desperate attempts to make the explicable into the mysterious. Take the small boy whose clairvoyance is exemplified by the fact that on occasion he saw dead relatives and Christ standing at the foot of his bed; this sounds exactly like hypnagogic imagery. Unknown forces are usually described as 'electricity', which is about as meaningful as the use by Mesmer, et al. of the word 'magnetism' - although I did like "When the two pet goldfish died, the 'voice' claimed it had electrocuted them by accident (which, if true, seems to confirm that poltergeists use some form of electrical energy.)" (One specific point interested me. Wilson repeats William Roll's observation that most poltergeist-shifted objects "tend to move counter-clockwise, and suggests that there is some kind of whirlpool or psychic vortex that drags them into motion". It would be interesting to know if, in the Southern Hemisphere, they tend to move in a clockwise direction; because, of course, this is very reminiscent of the Coriolis Effect, which causes Northern Hemisphere cyclones, as well as water going down plugholes, to move in a counter-clockwise direction.)

But I have a more fundamental disagreement with this book. Until very recently, Wilson not only supported the hypothesis that poltergeist events originated in the right brains of human beings, but he put forward a very good case for that hypothesis. Then, while writing this book, he was convinced by Guy Lyon Playfair that the spirits of the dead are involved. The theory seems to run that the human involvement is the production of a "football" of psychic energy: along come some malicious spirits, and they start kicking the football about. Wilson says that his conversion came about while he was investigating the Pontefract case, in which at one point the assumed 'focus', Diane Pritchard, was dragged upstairs by the throat. Surely her unconscious wouldn't have done that to her, he concludes. Frankly, I don't see why not. It is well known that the personalities involved in multiple-personality cases are not always kind to each other; also, the conscious mind itself is perfectly capable of the most masochistic behaviour. Moreover, in cases of 'possession by the Devil', which in general accord well with the hypothesis that the right brain is at work, the unfortunate 'victim' is often subjected to all sorts of physical and mental torture. (In 'Hostage to the Devil', 1976, Malachi Martin makes an interesting case for possession indeed being the invasion of the individual by evil spirits, but the - terrifying! - cases he details in fact support a right-brain hypothesis quite consistently.) Wilson fails to make his - or rather Playfair's - case.

As noted, Poltergeist! is a cracking good read, but I think it would be a mistake to regard it as too much more than that. I have always found Wilson's own ideas much more stimulating than those of Playfair - especially when the latter are at second hand. Let us hope that Wilson's next book on the paranormal is the 'real thing' once more.

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NEWSLETTER; THE DOSSIER.

SID BIRCHBY

I've been trying to recall the origin of The Newsletter, which is advertised as 'an informal postal exchange for studies in parapsychics and the esoteric arts, founded in 1944', and I fancy that the germ came from a modest effort of young Arthur C. Clarke's, about 1941. He had been a leading member of the pre-war London SF group, and when other members began to disappear into the armed forces he issued an occasional news-sheet to keep them in touch. I think it was called simply The Chain Letter, because it was posted from one person to another, and finally back to him. The later issues were compiled at Colwyn Bay where Arthur, a Civil Servant, had been sent to help the Ministry of Food with its rationing scheme, and in one of them he expressed his glee over 'the giant Hollerith machines' (primitive computers) that were being used. Who knows? - they may have inspired his almost-human computer Hal in '2001', many years later.

When he finally joined the RAF, The Chain Letter ended, and its central purpose of a postal-contact group was resumed about 1944 by Harold Chibbett, or 'Hal' as Arthur called him. Harold was also a former member of the London SF group, and his home became a rendezvous for many SF fans in the armed forces who found themselves in the London area. The hospitality of Lily and Harold Chibbett was never forgotten by their wartime visitors, and certainly not by myself. One such visitor in 1942 was Corporal Eric Frank Russell, SF author and Fortean advocate, who was posted by the RAF to a radio course. He and Harold became lasting friends until their deaths in 1978 within a week of each other, and his time in London produced a series of off-beat episodes in the true Fortean, or Russellian, spirit. Happily, I was also stationed in London, and have memories of such forays as a visit to a radio ham who was in touch with Mars; a dowsing experiment in the air-raid shelter of Harold's office, using the fire-buckets; a hypnotist who made us convincingly drunk on a glass of water, and a prodigious game of table-tennis at a nudist club!

Harold's prime interest had for many years been psychic research, and he had worked with many of the most gifted people of the time. By 1944, when he began to plan the post-war Newsletter, his encounters with science-fiction fans and Eric Russell had further stimulated his naturally flexible and enquiring frame of mind. He now had a large circle of friends and correspondents in three separate fields which he suspected to have something in common, so he determined to conduct what he called an experiment in synergy by providing a meeting-ground for people who were all, in their own ways, involved in what is now called parapsychics or fringe science, or who had the attitude of mind to consider it impartially. His Newsletter was therefore quite different in purpose from the wartime circulars designed to keep old acquaintances in touch, and for 25 years its members wrote back and forth under his editorship. During this time, he refused to accept any payment for it and the sole membership requirement was a wish to participate.

Harold's final Newsletter, No.621, was issued the day before he died in 1978. Several members thought it should continue, and asked me to carry on his work. Being the sole remaining original member, I could hardly refuse, and I have found it very rewarding - not financially, as it is still issued free - but by the enjoyment of watching how new insights arise through the exchange of opinions. He would have liked that. A few minor changes have been made in order to improve circulation, but the essence of his 'experiment in synergy' is maintained, thanks to the most enthusiastic and able band of members one could

wish for. The new NL is issued quarterly in parallel copies, each of which circulates between a few members, the last of whom returns it to me with everyone's comments, which are chiefly on a leading article written by a member. When all the copies have been returned, I make up the next issue containing members' letters.

Although the system looks clumsy, it is borrowed from the political-cell idea, which it is certainly not, and it obviates the weakness inherent in Round-Robin methods of circulation, that if one person breaks the chain, the entire issue is lost. In my opinion, no group of postal correspondents will survive for long unless its members can be reasonably sure that what they have to say will be read, and that quickly. Few people are prepared to spend perhaps an hour or more on a letter and post it into a void.

Keeping this standard of reader-service entails being ruthless in some respects. Membership is by 'mutual agreement', which means either party is free to discard the other. Applicants receive three trial issues before deciding whether or not to join, and anyone who repeatedly shows lack of interest ceases to be a member. Also, the total of members is limited. At the moment, there are no vacancies, although applications for the waiting-list are always dealt with as quickly as possible. I regret having to end on such a dour note, and hope that prospective members will not be discouraged. The address for correspondence is : NL, 40, PARRS WOOD AVENUE, DIDSBURY, MANCHESTER, M20 0ND. (return postage, please).

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Those of you who read many of the other journals and magazines in this and related fields will know that appeals for money or goods appear all too frequently in their editorial pages. Thanks partly to ASSAP, partly to good luck, and partly to a certain amount of cheese-paring, CG is contriving to remain solvent, though another increase in postal charges will ruin that. The only problem we have is that the ageing office typewriter on which we have produced the first four issues is beginning to play up, and will not be worth repairing. I want to buy an electric machine - nothing incredible, but such as won't wake the dead when I use it at night.

Consequently, I'm breaking my own rule of not carrying advertising by suggesting that some of you might like to buy a copy of 'STARS AND RUMOURS OF STARS' a 36-page booklet Sue and I produced in 1980. Subtitled 'Reports of the paranormal in the Welsh Religious Revival, 1904-5' it received some very friendly reviews when published, and does record, in some detail, the most remarkable series of visual religious phenomena that have occurred in the British Isles, ranging from mysterious bells and voices, to flashing UFO-like lights, to balls of fire that would arrive at chapels before a visiting preacher would arrive, to pillars of light, a giant illuminated figure, men-in-black, and much more, including some sociological and historical background. Only £1 each including postage. If I sell what's left, we'll have a new typewriter in time for CG5. Many thanks, Kevin.

If there is one sort of fool I do not suffer in the least bit gladly, it is the over-eager cleric, keen on the sound of his own voice, who criticises paranormal research on the basis of specious and irrelevant portions of scripture. On the other hand, I have every respect for those who, though the reported facts may not sit comfortably with their own faith, nonetheless are prepared to calmly and reasonably consider the implications of those facts. In the following article the Revd. Alun Virgin, an authority on possession, demonology, exorcism, revivalism, and other areas of what I might call the 'fringes of religious experience', together with his wife, comments upon some of the considerations raised in the Christian view of 'the occult'.

Yes, Yes! OWJA No, No!
Alun & Margaret Virgin

Dear me! They're at it again! 'The Christians, a declining band, would point with monitory hand, and often mutter 'Mark my words, something will happen to those birds.' 'But which particular birds?' we may ask - that's the problem. For, as a target, the occult lacks the elegant simplicity of, say, the demon drink. What follows is an attempt, from an avowedly Christian standpoint, to comment on the issues raised and at the same time, in so encouragingly hospitable a milieu, to see if there is indeed some 'common ground' with others.

The relationship between fringe experiences and the higher religions tends to be uneasy and ambiguous. This is because such experiences frequently excite religious propensities without affording them adequate practical expression in the way of love, holiness or service. However, there are two distinct religious approaches. The first stems from the three 'religions of the Book', Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. It insists that such experiences should be evaluated in the light of what is understood as truth revealed once and for all. The second, which is an eastern approach, also found in Spiritualism, is to derive material for philosophy and theology direct from the fringe experiences themselves. Hence, if the potential weakness of the first approach is over-rigid dismissal, that of the second approach is complete subjectivism. There is a real problem here. Experience from the unconscious, whether psychic or spiritual, appears self-authenticating, coming as it does with overwhelming force and conviction. Yet it simply must be evaluated by some independent standard of judgement, rational at least, and preferably spiritual. If it is not we are in danger of becoming trapped in our own interior worlds, or, worse still, in some projected and fragmentary aspect of our own personalities. In this connection it is perhaps worth pointing out that reason is not confined to science but extends to physics and metaphysics also. It is all too easy to overlook this - when fringe experiences raise ultimate questions. But first, in an area so heavily charged with emotion, we must find out what is in fact the case. We should neither accept our experience blindly at face value, nor reject it out of hand through dogmatic scepticism or a premature, and therefore possibly inappropriate, appeal to revelation.

Now, what about the occult itself? The cardinal mistake here, and one frequently made by Christian apologists, is to treat this word as if it signified one single thing. It is, of course, a portmanteau term covering a variety of topics whose only common factor is their rejection by the thinking of the establishment of any given age. In the late 10th. century there was an extraordinary Pope called Sylvester who happened, amongst other things, to be a mathematical genius. In a society where mathematics was considered valuable mainly for calculating the exact date of Easter, most of his contemporaries regarded his ultimate destiny with no very great optimism. The mysterious knowledge he obviously possessed could only come from one source in their view! So advanced mathematics was occult in the 10th. century - and still is for the great majority. Coming to the present, however, we offer the following tentative analysis of the occult in the hope that readers may be able to improve it;

- (a) Anomalous facts eg. induced weightlessness (levitation) and genuine Fortean phenomena.
- (b) Archaic survivals eg. primitive, non-reflective mediumship which tends to fade with increasing use of the reasoning powers. Possibly also telepathy.
- (c) Officially discarded science eg. astrology and alchemy.
- (d) Little recognised powers of the mind eg. psi factors in general, together with much lateral thinking as yet unrecognised.
- (e) Superstition ie. matters which can be fully explained either scientifically (fairy rings) or psychologically (mascots).
- (f) Destructive factors eg. Satanism, psychic manipulation, black magic.

The above should at least be sufficient to show that, apart from the self-evidently obnoxious, no general broadside against so widely separated a range of topics is likely to be on target. Hence the ineffectiveness of many Christian warnings. This is not to say that they invariably lack substance. It also indicates that all is not pure gold; the occult, like the human unconscious itself, is both a treasure-house and a rubbish dump. Hence the cause for legitimate Christian concern.

We propose considering here only the original question of the Ouija board. This was invented and patented in 1892 by Isaac Fould, a Baltimore cabinet-maker, in the form we now know as a planchette; the ouija board proper came slightly later. Before that, of course, there had been the more cumbersome method of table-tapping and the still-used alternative of an upturned wine-glass surrounded by letters of the alphabet. But all can be considered under the one heading. Dislike of the ouija board is not confined to startled Christians. Many, perhaps most, Spiritualists are unenthusiastic. Opposition has even been known from a more unexpected quarter. Just before giving his lecture a clergyman was warned that a self-styled 'King of the Witches' was amongst his audience. He therefore began rather tartly by remarking that for the first time in his life he could say that he had nothing in common with at least one of his listeners. "You're wrong there, Padre," came a cheerful voice from the back. "We both of us dislike Ouija boards."

In brief, the ouija board is a very simple device for providing a short cut from the subconscious/unconscious to the conscious mind, all the more powerful because in the majority of cases more than one person is involved. Unlike most other methods of psychic stimulus or experiment - but in common with automatic writing - it has no inbuilt system of symbolic interpretation. There is nothing to prevent taking the raw material literally at its face value.

This is the crux of the matter. Now fumbling around with the unconscious mind has been happily compared with attempting to remove one's appendix with a can-opener. Doubtless it can be done but a considerable amount of skilled knowledge and judgement would be required - not to mention luck - and in any case there are better ways of doing it! Three fully trained researchers operating a ouija board in a spirit of detached scientific investigation would be unlikely to come to any harm. Provided, that is, they were not emotionally vulnerable at the time - a not unimportant proviso. But in fact many of the people who actually use an ouija board lack the slightest discipline - mental, scientific, or spiritual. Teenagers are especially vulnerable since nearly all have as yet unresolved emotional problems. Nor as a rule is the atmosphere surrounding the proceedings particularly detached; a spirit of dare-devilry or half-fearful curiosity doesn't make the best start. Few, if any, are prepared for the deep waters they may tumble into. It is true that many such escapades still end up with nothing worse than a string of nonsense and a giggle all round. Others don't; we have known temporary hysterical paralysis occur, and raw fear is not particularly amusing.

Can we go further than this as is often suggested? One has to admit that Christians have sometimes jumped the gun here. When the 'spirit of the board' is challenged to reveal its identity and obligingly spells out the chilling letters 'S-A-T-A-N' it is more likely to reflect the secret fears of at least one of the participants. In our limited experience we have not known evil so eager to unmask itself. But having said this we must go on to add that there are cases where the intrusion of evil not only seems a reasonable hypothesis, but where action on this assumption proves effective. A girl is persuaded to attempt suicide by apparent messages from a dead father who misses her greatly. Is this merely a repressed adolescent death-wish, or the promptings of a seducing spirit?

What is at issue here is not the validity of psychiatric categories but whether one can legitimately bring a further dimension into consideration. Two things may be said in this connection. Firstly, different levels of analysis do not automatically contradict one another. It is at least conceivable that an adolescent death-wish, and indeed the whole of the attendant circumstances, are the result of demonic interference. Naturally, a responsible Christian would not reach so grave a conclusion without a very full knowledge of any given case. Besides this, many terms in psychiatry are purely descriptive and do not in any way indicate the underlying cause. Religious explanations, it must be admitted, can be used as an intellectual end-stopper. 'Why is grass green, Daddy?' 'Because God made it that way, my son'. This answer is not likely to encourage the discovery of chlorophyll or photosynthesis. Yet if neglect of secondary causes can produce intellectual stagnation, it could be argued that exclusive attention to them produces results, subtler, but no less serious in the realms of morals and the human spirit. All this, of course, is to state a position, not to prove a case. Conclusions depend in the last resort on basic presuppositions which themselves cannot be proved. Faith is not confined to religion. The most that can be done is to stimulate thought.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that an ouija board is a very blunt psychic instrument indeed. Whatever our opinion concerning their ultimate origin, powerful destructive forces do operate within the human psyche. We risk releasing them in uncontrolled conditions at our peril.



LETTERS

The response to CG3 was excellent. I haven't even been able to quote from all the sensible, considered letters that arrived, and most of those that do appear have been severely edited. I hope I have not missed the point of any of the contributors. Please continue to respond - it is a great help in assessing what should appear in CG and, anyway, it is a well known fact that lots of letters brighten up the bus journey to work!

From Alan Cleaver.

I believe Paul Screeton's article on ghost trains in CG3 to be one of the best articles on anomalous phenomena I have read in a long time. He is probably already aware of the Crystal Palace ghost train, but other readers may like to know some more details. I am indebted to Caroline Mead, a reporter for the 'Eltham Times', for the following information.

The Crystal Palace stood for 82 years in South London until it burnt down on November 30th. 1936. Somewhere beneath the Palace grounds is a piece of decaying railway history - a tunnel concealing a mysterious 'ghost' train. It was used in the middle of the last century to give joy rides to Victorian visitors to the Palace. The underground train was sucked up and down the short passage by a revolutionary pneumatic process. But the novelty soon wore off, and the tunnel was bricked up allegedly with the carriage still inside, and its location was forgotten.

In August 1979 Peter Marks of Ellesmere Avenue, London, NW7 wrote to the Daily Mirror's Little Black Book asking them to solve a mystery. It reads like a typical friend of a friend story, but I quote:

"Some time ago a girl friend of my daughter was walking in the woods near the site of the old Crystal Palace when she fell into a hole. She later reported that she had seen a train hidden in a tunnel, but when she went back with other people to verify the story, they found the area had been wired off, and the hole bricked over.

Now I seem to remember from years ago a story about a railway accident in a tunnel near Crystal Palace. There was a rumour of a 'ghost train', and the original tunnel being sealed and a new one built. Can you confirm any of this, please?"

The 'Mirror' replied: "In August 1864 an experimental atmospheric railway was opened in the grounds of Crystal Palace - "atmospheric" meaning that the train was propelled or rather 'sucked' along by vacuum pressure. It ran in a tunnel some 600 yards long.

The experiment was abandoned in 1866, but from time to time in this century enthusiasts have attempted to excavate the track and train without success. We reckon it was one of these your daughter's friend stumbled into."

Caroline Mead informs me that in December 1980 a highly technical electronic survey of the area by the London Underground Society revealed the existence of a tunnel. "Now they must dig," she wrote in her report, "But if the subterranean hole turns out to be the elusive railway tunnel it is likely to be flooded, and the carriages ready to fall apart if touched."

From Crystal Hogben (Editor, 'Magic Saucer').

M.S. was sent unsolicited to about four witnesses mentioned in the media - that was some time ago, and one replied. Since then we haven't sent out any unsolicited M.S.'s at all - we can't afford to anyway, but the main reason is that I now think it's daft to push stuff on to folk who don't want it. Another reason is that I haven't the courage to any more in any case.

I honestly can't see what bothers you concerning our piece on Infantile Hypercalcaemia (IHC). It merely reported that they exist and that an organisation had been set up, etc. Granted we added our own way-out remarks, but these only covered what several of our contacts had been asking us. For instance an elderly lady, who lives locally, told me in all sincerity that she had read about Pixie Children in a woman's magazine, and wondered if they were 'anything to do with your space people'. I also received a 2-hour long phone call from somebody who has never contacted me before or since, all about the Pixie children, Karma, reincarnation, etc. I thought the least I could do was to include a mention of IHC, and add the questions some people were asking me personally. I was aware from the start that some of these IHC sufferers may read the item. I have no regrets concerning it. For the record, I didn't include anything about the serious handicaps involved as I didn't know much about that side of it, but understood that not all of them are handicapped physically.

In short, I don't know much at all - only what I've read and what people ask me - I don't know any answers. In fact, seeing that M.S. readers want info, I'd welcome any facts or positive ideas, ideally from Lady Cooper's organisation itself or from anyone who may read M.S. and who knows any of these IHC sufferers. I've borne it in mind that M.S. readers may in the future come across someone who knows more, directly or indirectly, about these 'Pixie Children', and who remembers that M.S. is interested and was asking questions. How can that possibly do any harm?

With reference to Ivor Snook's letter on page 32, in which he says in regard to poltergeist cases " . . . making endless notes about everything they see, hear, or feel, others measuring this, that, or the other, or taking photographs, or using electrical gadgets and so on. But amongst all that is going on, no-one at all is really trying to contact the spirit, and find out what it wants." This seems to sum up the UFO situation as well as that of poltergeists. Why aren't any impartial UFO investigators trying to find out what the intelligence behind UFO's want? (Whatever the intelligence is, and wherever it originates.) Can't somebody connected with CG investigate seriously some medium who is in contact with extra-terrestrials and report in all seriousness on whatever they conclude for, say, the readers of FSR, or some other publication which is widely read by members of the public?

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From Peter Rogerson.

Sorry for the long delay in writing to congratulate you on the first two excellent issues of CG. I'd like to comment on several of the articles . . .

Hilary Evans is to be congratulated on his investigation of the Dyfed affair. When I reviewed 'The Uninvited' for MUFOB (now Magonia) I was prepared to grant the story at least subjective validity, which shows how wrong you can be. Even so I was assailed by some angry for not taking the story at face value, and for failing to explain how the cattle got transported around. Of course, we still have the problem of the occurrence of so many folkloric themes within the Ripperston saga; perhaps one clue is that the late Ted Holiday had made a study of folklore. It is not without significance that Randall Jones Pugh, whose investigation of these cases was totally uncritical, was a senior investigator for both UFOIN and BUFORA. However, unlike Hilary, I see nothing in Josephine Hewison's story to distinguish it from other 'strange awakening' cases, in which hypnopompic hallucination is a strong possibility.

As regards the Enfield Poltergeist, what struck me right away from Playfair's book, was how the family and investigators were mutually dependent - the family getting attention and a sympathetic ear, Grosse getting hopes for contact with his deceased daughter. Furthermore, the investigators rapidly became advocates - seeing the world through the eyes of the family in their battles with officialdom.

The article by Michael Goss in CG2 raised some very important points, not least the sort of extreme problems that ufologists and parapsychologists can come up against. Just think of the situation which could have developed if Sutcliffe thought he was under the control of the space people, and had written a reasonable-sounding letter to one of those 'Let's have your UFO stories' competitions that the popular press did to coincide with 'Close Encounters', and had been put in touch with UFOIN (Imagine what might have happened if he'd met Frank Johnson!KM)

If you think that's unlikely, then I have to dissuade you. Back in 1974 the editor of a UFO journal, to whom I had written a couple of letters on the subjective aspects of ufology seems to have developed the erroneous belief that I was a psychiatrist. He gave my address to a guy who lived not a million miles away, who among other things wrote to say that the disc jockeys on Radio 1 were reading his mind and "goading him to do things". As I am a complete coward I decided I really didn't want to find out what he was being goaded into - for all I knew it could have been parting the hair of ufologists with meat cleavers - and backed away, and have confined my ufology to the arm chair ever since. A less timid ufologist could well have got into a very nasty situation

As regards the control-system theory, I feel it is mostly a response to a general feeling of 'manipulation' and of loss of autonomy. It is by no means just confined to the writers you mentioned, and its more extreme exponents such as Gordon Creighton rapidly escalate it into lines of speculation normally confined either to the lumatic asylum or, if you substitute "red" for "elemental" retired military officers. Of course, Creighton thinks that UFO's are the work of the devil, while the most radical 'control system' writer at present, Leo Sprinkle, believes that UFO's are part of a control system to educate people for cosmic consciousness - a view apparently shared by Aime Michel. That for some of these writers 'The Phenomenon' (note the capitals) = God seems a standard equation, in what seems a veritable theology of 'God the Behaviourist'.

As for ASSAP, some of us will need a bit more convincing that it is better thought out than the truly appalling and totally off-putting managementese of its publicity literature would suggest. Some of us have to put up with this sort of stuff at work, and are damned if we are going to let it infiltrate our spare time. I find the spectacle dreamed up by the writer of the dole queues buzzing with animated discussion of the paranormal hilarious. Clearly someone, at least, is in a parallel universe. If ASSAP can get its feet on the ground, and head out of 'Management Today' it could do a valuable job in studying alleged spontaneous anomalous experiences. One study I would like to see, and for which CG would be a natural format is/are sociological and anthropological studies of hauntings; there is a mountain of such literature on witchcraft and witchcraft trials.

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From Ivor Snook.

As one of the objects of ASSAP is to investigate phenomena and particularly to evaluate evidence I feel that the following remarks may be apposite.

I cannot accept G.W.Lambert's article on 'The Geography of English Ghosts' as more than an unsupported speculation. He may well be right - after all, we know that springs and water have a close connection with psychic phenomena, and there certainly seems to be something in the theory of 'black' streams.

First, I would like to consider the list of localities in Devon where hauntings have occurred and which are all within the catchment areas of the rivers Taw and Torridge. But Devon is so amply provided with rivers, streams, and brooks that practically any locality could probably be assigned to the catchment area of one stream or another. Therefore, I cannot feel that the catchment area hypothesis is very convincing.

Then it is pointed out that these rivers are subject to powerful floods in stormy weather, which may have a causative effect on hauntings. I would like to see some positive evidence that there is some temporal connection with these floods; for instance, that hauntings occur as a general rule before, after, or during the flood period.

I have a somewhat similar feeling about the Brentwood case. After all, 'Our Haunted Kingdom' was published in 1974, so the hauntings listed in that work must have taken place before that date, and probably very much before. That means before most of the modern covering-up of land by concrete and tarmac took place. If, therefore, the consequent run-off of large amounts of water causes ghostlike phenomena I would expect to hear evidence of a large number of hauntings where there had been none before, and perhaps increased activity of the pre-existent ghosts, and even perhaps the re-awakening of previously inactive ones.

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From Jenny Randles.

Much as I find their arguments appealing; much as I find their evidence aesthetically acceptable, and much as I (like everyone else) want to believe that they are right and I am wrong, it has constantly baffled me why anyone can take seriously the proposition that mind survives bodily death. It is unquestionably the single most important question in the world, for on its answer rests the fate, moral principles, behaviour and destiny of human society. Yet a logical consideration of the facts appears to actively dissuade one from committing it to belief.

Evidence for survival seems very scanty, in fact, rather less than the evidence for UFO reality (which is going some!) Most communications seem to me explicable in terms of dream fantasies, hallucinations, and crisis telepathic impressions. I have little doubt that it is the receiver who spins the message from out of the tangled web of impressions he or she receives. Whilst these concepts remain tenable, as I am sure they do, then they must be our prime option. For there is evidence for both telepathy and human gullibility. Other than the above there is not evidence for survival of death.

Death-bed visions are a fascinating subject, with which I have had some little personal contact (being present in the two or three days leading up to the death of both my grandparents, and being alone, holding his hand, at the moment cancer finally completed its victory over my grandfather.) But these accounts, despite their fascination, seem to have more in common with hypnagogic hallucinations than with some other-dimensional reality. Indeed, what Sue Blackmore pointed out in CG1 is hardly very surprising to me. I admit that the cross-correspondence testimony is quite intriguing and does hold me back a little. But this is a decidedly poor return in favour of survival, in view of all the other data we can readily interpret in an alternative way. Of course, I realise that this might just be the whole point. Clearly if we do survive death there is a reason why this information is not commonly accessible. There are logical arguments for this. If life is a teaching process then it makes rather a mockery of the exam if you know the answers in advance! So the question does have its complications, I must admit.

Books such as Gordon Rattray Taylor's superb 'NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MIND', and even Lyall Watson's more recent offerings, contrast markedly with the Spiritualist tomes. The distinction is rather akin to the contactee messages of 'the two Georges' (King & Adamski) in ufology, set against scientific treatises by Hynek & Hendry ('the two Allans') Indeed, I believe the connection could be more real than apparent, for a consistent factor in the non-rationalist books is the desire for it to be true, whereas the rationalists (whilst realising they share this feeling deep inside) are able to keep their needs in perspective and judge according to the evidence. One can even extend the analogy to the individual differences, yet underlying similarities, which pervade accounts of the "death world". It seems Heaven and Venus are one and the same.

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It is very seldom that the publication of an apparently serious work concerning anomalous or paranormal experience and occurrence meets such a storm of media coverage and interest as has THE HOLY BLOOD AND THE HOLY GRAIL, by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln (Jonathan Cape, 1982).

It is even more seldom that I go out and spend £8.95 that I cannot afford on a newly-published hardback. This, though, was the exception. Like many others, I had been thoroughly intrigued and entertained by Henry Lincoln's excellent series of three 'Chronicle' programmes centred round the mysteries pertaining to Rennes-le-Chateau and the discovery of lost treasure by its priest. With my appetite whetted further by regular reports from a friend who has attended all of Lincoln's London lectures, and who has undertaken much research of his own (which, with a little luck, might appear in CG5), I could not resist the temptation. Sadly, I was disappointed, finding, where I had expected revelation, only a sort of Shaggy Templar story. I am not qualified to comment on what I did find, but was fortunate enough to secure the services of Bob Gilbert, CFPSS journal editor, antiquarian bookseller, and expert on mystical traditions and religious criticism.

SANS TEETH , SANS TASTE, SANS EVERYTHING

ROBERT GILBERT

To a fanfare of quite unwarranted media acclamation this dismal fantasy has crept into the world of letters, delighting the unthinking, and appalling the scholar. The book is built round two startling but unoriginal claims about Jesus Christ: that he did not die upon the Cross and that he was married, to Mary Magdalena, and sired a family whose descendants are living today. His family escaped to Southern France where they eventually surfaced as the Merovingian kings and survived in secret after the downfall of the dynasty. This putative bloodline has been protected from the machinations of Church and State by a shadowy organisation known as the Prieure de Sion, which has only now begun to reveal the truth about itself in the face of publicity about Berenger Sauniere, the parish priest of Rennes-le-Chateau in the Languedoc, who stumbled upon their secret at the end of the last century and thereby became immensely wealthy as a reward for keeping quiet.

Where this book differs from similar works offering bizarre theories, such as group reincarnation and extra-terrestrial engineering, is in purporting to offer solid, documentary evidence of its historical foundation. Such a claim is indeed remarkable and it is this evidence that must be examined, for by it the theory stands or falls.

Historians make use of evidence of many kinds, evaluating it according to its nature. In the case of documentary evidence there are established critical methods of determining the validity and value of specific documents: historians expect to present transcriptions and facsimiles of those that they use in order to justify their interpretations to the academic world. This approach has not been adopted by the authors of The Holy Blood; instead they employ the novel method of treating all documentary evidence as of equal value and of judging its validity by the support it gives, or fails to give, to their conclusions. In addition, they do not reproduce any of the documents that they cite, rendering still more entertaining the task of determining precisely how their evidence is derived from their conclusions.

They do, however, quote from the most important of the parchments supposedly discovered by Sauniere and from the official documents of the alleged Priory of Sion, so that we can begin to test their worth. An 'official' list is given of successive Grand Masters of the Priory of Sion, from Jean de Gisors in the 12th century, to Jean Cocteau in the 20th, and if this list is typical of the documents used then structural cracks in the edifice of The Holy Blood are evident indeed. The 16th alleged Grand Master, from 1595 to 1637, was Robert Fludd whom the authors claim was "among the conclave of scholars who presided over the translation of the King James Bible" (p.382) - a 'fact' patently false as is his alleged "consorting with many people involved in the 'Rosicrucian' movement (p.382), but they do not see fit to refer to the standard, indeed the only, biography of Fludd. Such 'facts' are typical of the authors' strange methods of historical research. Throughout the biographical appendix (pp 373 - 393) one finds various unrelated events in the life of the subject assumed to have a necessary connection and deep significance if they involve persons germane to the book's thesis and occur at approximately the same time. Thus Isaac Newton, 19th Grand Master, was a friend of Jean Desaguliers who later played a prominent part in early English Freemasonry. Newton also wrote an account of the significance of the dimensions of the Temple of Solomon - a subject dear to the heart of speculative Masons. Further, he owned "personally annotated copies of the Rosicrucian Manifestoes" (p.386); ergo he had strong links with both Freemasonry and the Rosicrucians. But the authors do not point out that Newton's reason for befriending Desaguliers was that he was both a scientist and a Huguenot refugee for whom Newton had great sympathy; that Newton had no interest whatever in Freemasonry; and that his annotations on the Rosicrucian Fama Fraternitatis described the movement as 'an imposture'.

The same curious, selective, and unreliable methods are employed in all the other avenues of research followed in the book. For example, the Grail Romances, which are treated virtually as real history, are related to the Cathars principally by virtue of their being contemporaneous, although the authors' reference specifically rejects such a connection, and no true historian would place Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzifal on a par with Inquisition records. In Chapter 3, the Grail itself is treated as a material relic, guarded by Knights Templar; which thesis is supported by the exceptionally reliable evidence of Wolfram's romance on one hand and the forced confessions of the Templars after their suppression on the other! By Chapter 11 the Grail has become allegorical - demonstrated from the Grail Romances. As Humpty Dumpty said, "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean".

And so, among such errors and inanities, we move back to the heart of the theory: the surviving bloodline of Jesus Christ, pausing only to notice that Merovech, the name of the founder of the Merovingian dynasty and thus a descendant of Jesus, "echoes the French word for 'mother', as well as both the French and Latin words for 'sea' (p.202) while yet it "would seem to be of Middle Eastern derivation" (p.348). But even this cavalier treatment of medieval history and philology pales beside the authors' truly amazing foray into the field of Biblical criticism.

The Gospels may, and for Christians do, reflect historical events, but these cannot be considered in isolation from their essential theological content. Serious textual criticism takes account of both elements, and it is patently absurd to take isolated incidents out of context and to treat them as purely historical when they support a given hypothesis but as purely mythical or spurious when they do not. Yet this is the method adopted in The Holy Blood. The Jesus of this book is a political Messiah seeking his Kingdom by force, while the pacific Jesus of the Gospels who turns the other cheek - thereby doing violence to the book's thesis - is totally absent. Doubtless such a character was interpolated by some evil-minded Early Church Father bent on distorting the true New Testament message of political conquest. Perhaps he also interpolated the whole of the Sermon on the Mount, as well as the rest of Jesus' teaching which is strikingly absent from the authors' Gospel analysis. The miracles, too, are absent; all except two: the raising of Lazarus from the dead and the changing of water into wine at the wedding-feast in Cana. Even these are taken out of context, stripped of their miraculous and theological elements and twisted, by means of the distorting mirror of the book's central hypothesis, to show that the wedding was Jesus' own and that Lazarus was undergoing a ritual initiation!

Most amazing of all is the book's treatment of the Crucifixion. No awe-inspiring act of self-sacrifice here (but the authors' ignorance of the nature of the Atonement is already apparent in their foolish and bizarre comments on Pope John XXIII's encyclical Inde a primis (pp 130-131)), merely a sordid mock-crucifixion and fake resurrection. Admittedly the thesis is supported by a detailed analysis of carefully misused texts, and such minor difficulties as the awkward presence of the two thieves crucified with Jesus and the (doubtless mythical) spear wound in Jesus' side are glossed over. Still further support for the whole incoherent structure is provided from apocryphal Gnostic Gospels which, despite the opinions of every scholar to the contrary, have "a perfectly valid claim to historical veracity" (p.279). References in these to the exalted status of Mary are said to show that she was Jesus' wife, even though the sects who wrote and used these Gospels repudiated matter and abhorred procreation. Truly, folly is heaped on folly.

Without question Berenger Sauniere found something of immense value at Rennes-le-Chateau, but it will require other books, and less foolish, than this one to reveal just what he found and to prove the existence of the phantom Priory of Sion. If this is the limit of the assaults of iconoclasm, Christians need have no fear for eternity, nor historians for the rational progress of time.



CLOSING REMARKS

It may well seem to many ASSAP members that after the splash of the initial launch, and its various meetings, things have gone a little slowly over the past couple of months. However, in view of the festivities, the weather, and the vast amount of organisation that has been going on to set the Association up on a sound footing, this has probably been unavoidable, and we can look forward to increasing activity as the year progresses. I hope to have the chance to meet many of you at the 'Practical Workshop Day' at Tufnell Park on March 6th (details from Carol Sheen, 1, Churston Avenue, Upton Park, London, E13 0RJ), and at the BUFORA talk on the same evening, at Kensington Library, at which I am speaking about 'Seeing and Believing; Religious Responses to UFO Experience'. I don't know what I'll be saying yet - that'll have to wait till I've finished sending this lot out! There is also to be an investigator's meeting in the next couple of months, and hopefully some ASSAP symposia, too. It should be a good year.

This issue of CG has taken on a rather particular complexion, perhaps appropriate for a period when there are relatively few reports of spontaneous phenomena needing investigation. What I mean is that we are for once dealing with responses to phenomena, both direct responses, and philosophical ones, and with the implications of belief in the apparently paranormal and anomalous. There has to come a point when we move away from the raw material of research and case investigation; it is encouraging to see how thoroughly thought out many of these responses are.

Our approach to how the acceptance of phenomena is to affect our own thought and understanding of existence depends very much upon our background, our education, and our other beliefs. Bob Gilbert and Alun and Margaret Virgin argue persuasively for the assessment of phenomena and anomalies on a basis of traditional Christian belief, as do many other of the 'Christian parapsychologists', such as write for the excellent journal of the same name. Vernon Harrison, meanwhile, though I know nothing of his religious beliefs, makes a very strong case for the survival of the personality after bodily death, in a fashion that seems to me to make Christian concepts of incarnation, salvation, and resurrection more or less redundant, and to make a Karmic-type of process that much more likely to exist. It is interesting to note that Colin Wilson seems to have come to a similar conclusion, though from different premises.

Leaving aside the aspects of possible danger involved in the use or misuse of ouija boards - and that is a matter that will probably never be satisfactorily resolved - it is worth considering the use of all such supposedly externally motivated instruments of communication; planchette, ouija, automatic writing, table-turning, glass and cards, and other modern equivalents, probably including the 'Philip' experiments, which I tend to see as an extension of the same approach. If we accept, just in one, unique case, that communication by such means with a non-terrestrial intelligence is possible, then we are making a strong statement about the nature of reality, and must be prepared to adopt a coherent cosmology that can reasonably accommodate such a fact; this goes as much for those who see these as methods of communicating with deceased relatives, as for those who see them as a channel for demonic influence; we must leave it to the holders of these various opinions as to how they identify the personality and origin of the communicator; the communication alone raises enough problems for me.

Similarly, any UFO investigator or researcher who claims to be able to identify the source of the phenomenon must also think through the possible consequences. It is common to read of a whole range of possible explanations in the best of books, but so often little or no consideration is given to the significance of theories such as that UFO's are projections from the future, or are from a 'parallel universe' (whatever that means), or even that they come from within the Earth. If we are to put forward such theories, we must be able to defend them in terms that non-ufologists may be able to accept; to start attributing benevolence or malificence to entities of whom we know virtually nothing is even less forgivable; we must acknowledge our own ignorance of anything but specific cases and reports if we are either to maintain any credibility or to struggle, slowly, to some sort of tentative conclusion.

Drawbacks and limitations of these kinds arise in other areas of study; belief in practical magic re. the laws of cause and effect; in the power of prayer, re. free-will; in concepts of earth mysteries and a benevolent landscape, re. natural disasters; in belief in prediction or premonition, re. accepted concepts of time. All these, and many more can raise immense problems; all these, too, fall within the breadth of our field of interest. Perhaps it is fortunate that the popular approach to the paranormal does not really bother with such subtleties. But if ever we are to make a serious case for any apparent phenomena, we are certainly going to have to. Walking on eggs would be simple in comparison.

Kevin McClure