THE British & Irish SKEPTIC

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IN THIS ISSUE

NAME THIS NEWSLETTER

"The British and Irish Skeptic" (or "Sceptic") is not one of your all-time, great titles. We would like a more distinctive name for this newsletter, one that would tell you immediately what the newsletter is about, but without being dull. Some samples of other skeptical newsletters' titles:

Skeptical Briefs (CSICOP's in-house newsletter)
The New Zealand Skeptic
Stoplight (Houston, TX, Skeptics to Oppose Pseudoscience)
(my favourite) Psientific American (Sacramento, CA)

Suggestions already in hand (thanks to Michael Hutchinson):

Suspended Judgement
Heaven and Earth ("there are more things in Heaven and Earth...")
Occam's Razor

Please submit all suggestions to the Editor, Wendy M. Grossman, at 1, Queens Court, Queens Park, Monkstown, Co. Dublin, Ireland, before August 15, 1987. The winner will receive two years' free subscription to the newsletter, our thanks, and the satisfaction of seeing his choice used.

HELP!

We need articles, newspaper clippings, bits of insight, news, information, book reviews, reviews (or even video- or audio-tapes) of TV or radio shows, cartoons, and anything else related to scientific examination of claims of the paranormal that you can think of to keep this newsletter going. This newsletter covers an unusually large geographical area--England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall...--and no one can possibly read every newspaper and magazine or watch every TV show. So, please--keep us informed.

A FEW COMMENTS...

I would like to make a few observations concerning the concept of local, autonomous groups that share, in general, the principles established by the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). When the idea was first suggested at an annual meeting of the CSICOP Executive Board, that such groups should be encouraged, I was very much personally in favor of the idea. My experience since that time has only strengthened that enthusiasm.

Investigations of the kind of claims that attract CSICOP attention, in which I have been involved for many years now, are almost always complicated, expensive and time-consuming. I have often been unable to enlist the kind of talent needed for these inquiries, and many have had to be dropped for that very reason. However, with the formation of the local groups, there has been a significant change in that situation.

I must specifically mention the *Bay Area Skeptics* and the *Southern California Skeptics* as major contributors to recent very successful investigations. Their willingness to actually become physically involved, to perform long hours of record-keeping and to prepare powerful and accurate data files not only added to the efficiency of the work, but I can confidently say that without their contributions, the work might never have been completed. Certainly, it could not have had so very successful an outcome.

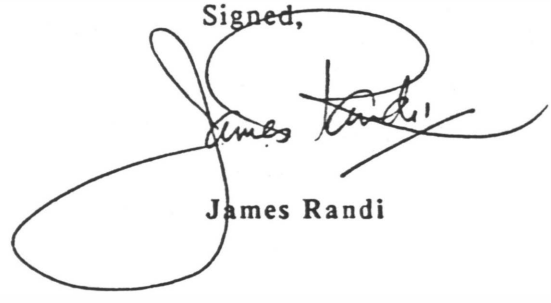
The establishment of the local groups has proven to be one of the best additions to the skeptical armory. They serve the cause well, functioning as information gathering units and watchdogs for CSICOP. They obtain their strength from a sense of service to their local communities and their knowledge of the specifics of those communities. These are both factors that CSICOP itself cannot deal with.

As CSICOP Executive Director Mark Plummer has indicated to you, it is important that local groups can only be of maximum value if they share their experiences and their knowledge with CSICOP. Similarly, CSICOP is prepared to assist the groups in many ways, offering advice and assistance whenever possible. The autonomy factor is important, in that local groups can work on their own, in their own ways, to deal with situations that CSICOP would find impossible to investigate for many reasons.

CSICOP has grown enormously in recent years - far beyond what I might have predicted a decade ago. Yes, we've had problems. But the executive board has dealt with these as they came up, and I think that other groups may do well to examine those solutions and thereby avoid having to go through those situations.

The pay is poor, the insults fly, there are rough times that often seem too much to endure. But the satisfaction of knowing that it was done it *because it had to be done* far outweighs the disadvantages. Now that you are informed of that - no, *warned* would be better word - we at CSICOP invite you to step through the looking-glass with us and enter a world that never was and that needs to be exposed for the flummery that it is.

Signed,



James Randi

HITS AND MISSES

RANDI ON CARSON

Johnny Carson, America's most popular TV talk-show host, and James (the Amazing) Randi teamed up last year to bring the skeptical point of view to a wider (American) audience than ever before. Carson, himself an ex-magician, had Randi on his show five times in 1986, knowingly involving himself in considerable controversy.

On the first of these shows, broadcast live last March, Randi presented a taped version of the damning evidence detailed in The Skeptical Inquirer's Fall, 1986, issue in Bob Steiner's article, "Exposing the Faith-Healers". Randi played a videotape of a "healing" in which a couple, both afflicted with cataracts and other eye problems, had tears running down their faces from the experience of having a total stranger reveal their names and addresses, and lay his hands on their foreheads, saying that, "holy angels are around your house right now." Randi then replayed the tape, overlaid with an audio tape of what was being fed into the radio transmitter in Popoff's left ear.

In answer to a question from Carson, Randi revealed that the live broadcast of this tape on his show would be Popoff's first intimation of Randi's extensive work exposing his methods.

After that show, Randi and Carson both received a lot of "hate" mail, but the number of Popoff's believers dropped off, despite his public denials. A sad sequel, however, is Randi's difficulty in finding anyone willing to prosecute Popoff--his identification with "religion" makes him a politically uncomfortable target.

More recernt shows have included a graphic demonstration of psychic surgery as practiced in the Philippines (these techniques were also filmed a few years ago by Granada Television), a demonstration of key-bending a la Geller, a couple of magic tricks, and Randi's comments on his recent receipt of the Macarthur "Genius" Award.

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SCIENCE IN THE U.K.

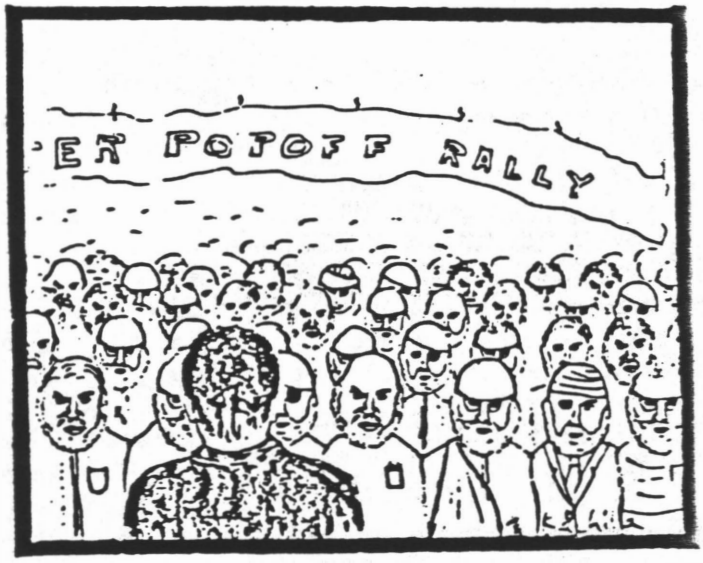
A study funded by the Nuffield Foundation found that about 65% of surveyed adults in Britain said they were fairly or very interested in science news. But:

*75% believe astrology is scientific, but only a bare majority believe ecology is,

*30% described cookery as scientific,

*28% described theology as scientific, while only 24% described sociology that way.

Arthur Lucas, of Kings College, presented these findings to the British Association for the Advancement of Science at their annual meeting in September, 1986; they were reported in "The Scientist", December 15, 1986.



POPOFF NIGHTMARE # 1327 ...
JAMES RANDI ATTENDS A POPOFF RALLY.

LAUNCHING THE IRISH SKEPTICS

As yet there is no regional skeptics group in Ireland. The following people have indicated an interest in acting as Convenors: Frank T. Chambers, a retired engineer and Associate of the Magic Circle living in Co. Mayo, Peter O'Hara, a Dun Laoghaire psychiatrist, and Wendy M. Grossman, a folksinger and writer residing in Monkstown.

Also interested in being involved with the group, though unable to serve on the convening committee, is David Berman, a Lecturer in Philsophy at Trinity College, Dublin.

CSICOP recommends a core committee of seven to convene a viable group, and we need to hear from anyone interested in serving on such an interim committee. Volunteers should be prepared for no pay, long hours, and a certain amount of hostility from people whose favorite beliefs are likely to be questioned by a skeptical group.

In addition, we particularly need to hear from people whose technical expertise we can draw on, particularly in the following areas: magic, psychology, science, education, law, journalism and investigative reporting, public relations, fundraising, and handling the media.

If you have no such skills but are willing, we'd like to hear from you anyway--we would like to hear from anyone who wants to get involved in the movement to promote critical thought.

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GELLER ON WOGAN

Uri Geller is back in the public eye again with the launching of his new book, The Geller Effect. He chose the BBC and Terry Wogan's 29 September, 1986, chat show as his first forum. For Geller it was probably a good choice. Wogan seemed to aid and abet Geller's presentation in every way he could, himself announcing that keys were still bending, and repeatedly revising upwards his estimates of the number of phone calls reporting bizarre occurrences at home, despite the fact that when he lifted the phone there was no one there.

In general, Geller performed the same tricks that made him famous, or infamous, ten years ago, including bending a key, restarting a stopped watch, and reproducing a picture "telepathically".

The Mail on Sunday, on 5 October, 1986, reported on Geller's appearance, calling it "a huge confidence trick on a gullible public--and an equally gullible BBC." Reporters John Dale and Iain Walker, with the help of Michael Hutchinson and CSICOP's British Committee, spent three months compiling a dossier on Geller's activities that resulted in a three-article series exposing Geller's trickery. Included was information from James Randi explaining how Geller works, a report of Geller's disastrous appearance on the Johnny Carson show ten years ago, when for forty-five minutes nothing happened, and evidence compiled by the reporters from interviews of members of Wogan's production staff.

According to the third of these articles, during a TV-AM interview with David Frost, Geller challenged the Mail on Sunday to prove he was a fake. The Mail on Sunday publicly (in their issue of 19 October, 1986) accepted the challenge, offering to donate £20,000 to charity, if Geller could prove under proper supervision that he really does have psychic powers. We have no information that Geller ever accepted the challenge.

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Recently, a free newspaper called "Blueprint for Living" was pushed through Dublin's mail slots. It advertises various forms of "holistic medicine", including Liver Formula pills, Yoga and "Stress Management" classes, and something new to me (wg), Ki massage, study, and therapy. (I would appreciate, by the way, information about Ki therapy and its claims.)

What is disturbing is not necessarily the courses or products offered, but the claims made for them, and the form in which they are made. Dublin has several other free newspapers (e.g. "Southside") which publish articles on local affairs and legitimate business and personal advertisements.

Geller's gold for fools, say Australian Skeptics

By JEFF HAMPTON

An Australian-based mining company is in turmoil after recent revelations by the Australian Skeptics that it paid the magician, Uri Geller, to search for gold.

The Skeptics' founding president, Mr Mark Plummer, said in Christchurch this week that shareholders in the company and the public were told of the payment to Mr Geller after investigations by the Skeptics.

Mr Plummer, a Melbourne lawyer, cited the revelations as an example of how the Skeptics, a non-aligned voluntary group, could protect the public interest.

He was in New Zealand at the week-end for the first annual convention of the newly formed New Zealand Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, or New Zealand Skeptics.

Mr Plummer believes the Skeptics have a role to play in society by questioning the claims of psychics and others who say they have extra-normal powers, and who often demand payment for their "services."

Targets for the Skeptics were people "who have no expertise and base their advice on mumbo-

URI GELLER

jumbo," he said.

In Australia, shareholders of the mining company, Zanex, are upset that the company sought the advice of Mr Geller, a magician and [illegible] who gained acclaim for his "spoon-bending" tricks.

The Skeptics revealed in June that Mr Geller was asked by the company to look for gold in the Solomon Islands and near Maldon in Victoria.

They assert that for his advice Mr Geller was paid more than $Aust350,000 and was given an option to take up 1,250,000 Zanex shares at 20c each by June, 1987.

Shareholders were told that the company was using "innovative methods" to find gold.

A senior Zanex executive confirmed to the "Sydney Morning Herald" newspaper in July that the company had hired Mr Geller. However, he said that it was for a much smaller fee than claimed by the Skeptics.

Mr Plummer said that Mr Geller had no qualifications as a geologist, but was "a talented magician with a reputation for being able to convince people he has psychic powers."

"Geller came to the Solomon Islands after Zanex had already located a potential goldmining area downstream from Gold Ridge on Guadalcanal Island," said Mr Plummer.

"At the opening of Zanex's mine, Geller entertained the guests with magic tricks and even bent a spoon held by the Prime Minister of the Solomons, Sir Peter Kenilorea."

The hiring of Mr Geller incensed a number of Zanex shareholders, and at least one director, and moves are afoot to have two of the present directors replaced and another three elected.

"One wonders if Geller foresaw these developments," said Mr Plummer, who [illegible] numerous examples how confidence tricks[illegible] tried to make money claiming to have [illegible] powers.

In Melbourne, the Sk[illegible] investigated claims [illegible] a meditation group th[illegible] could teach people to [illegible] tate, at a cost of [illegible]

The group had [illegible] graphs to "pro[illegible] pupils could levita[illegible] photographs show[illegible] sons sitting cross-le[illegible] the air above a ma[illegible]

"The people were [illegible] ing up and down o[illegible] mattress and having [illegible] photograph taken [illegible] they were in the air," [illegible] Mr Plummer.

Then there was the chemist who clai[illegible] be able to turn the [illegible] in people's teeth [illegible]

The man made [illegible] $40,000 before he w[illegible] rested and charged [illegible] fraud, said Mr P[illegible]

He also urg[illegible] Zealanders to be [illegible] self-styled psyc[illegible] come from over[illegible] make extravagan[illegible] such as helping murder inquiries.

Mr Plummer sa[illegible] these claims we[illegible] checked, often by [illegible] a telephone call [illegible] claims were [illegible] debunked.

Reprinted from The New Zealand Skeptic, September, 1986

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And from Skeptical Briefs, December:

CSICOP's New Executive Director

Mark Plummer began a six-month term as CSICOP's Acting Executive Director on September 30, 1986. Plummer was one of the three founders of one of CSICOP's most active associate groups, the Australian Skeptics. The Skeptics' were formed in 1980 by electronics manufacturer Dick Smith; columnist, film producer, and advertising executive Phillip Adams; and Plummer, who served as the national president of the group from its inception until the spring of 1986. Under his leadership the Australian Skeptics established chapters in all of Australia's states and launched a magazine.

Plummer was also national president of the Australian Humanists from 1982 to 1984. He has appeared on many radio and television talk shows in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. He is also a lawyer and freelance writer, and his articles have been published in many Australian magazines and newspapers.

Plummer made his journey from Australia to his new position at CSICOP's headquarters in Buffalo by way of New Zealand, America's West Coast and Canada, where he addressed skeptics' groups. He also conducted both formal and informal meetings with skeptics in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, and San Diego.

STARTING ANTI-SCIENCE

By Lewis Jones

Imagine these three scenarios.

One: A man holds a little bottle-pendulum over a paper drawing of a piece of land. Interpreting the swings of the bottle, he draws two "underground rivers" on his map. Where they meet (he tells you) is where you'll find water.

He also tells you that his pendulum shows (a) the kind of material that a drill will go through, (b) the depth of the water, and (c) whether it is drinkable.

He then wanders across the field with a piece of bent wire in each hand. When the wires swing apart, he marks the ground at that point. Drilling begins, and water is found.

Two: Two little girls sit together on an outdoor bench. One thinks of a playing card, and the other guesses which one it is. "Ten of Spades." "Right."

Three: Some schoolchildren hold a little pendulum above each egg in a rack. A circular swing means a female chick; a straight swing means male. "This one's a girl?"

You could be forgiven for thinking that these were dramatised scenes meant to illustrate superstitious behaviour. In fact, they were put out in all seriousness as praiseworthy examples of scientific procedure.

They appeared in Central Televisions's "Starting Science" series for schools on 12 June, 1986. And they were touted as things for which science has no explanation. "Why some people can dowse and find water, nobody knows." It is "rather like magic."

The fact that these things don't work at all was not even given house room. These claimed abilities were not tested: they were simply asserted. This of course turns scientific procedure on its head.

Why wasn't the pendulum taken away from the dowser's fingers and suspended from a neutral clamp? What mechanism is being suggested for underground water indicating its location on a piece of paper? Would the drillers have found water at places and depths where the dowser claimed there was no sign? Why not simply ask the dowser to locate the one water-filled container in a row of otherwise empty ones? Why not turn an unseen tap on and off, and ask the dowser to tell you when water was flowing through a pipe? Why didn't the card-guessers commit their predictions to writing? In view of the ludicrous experimental conditions, what was the point in solemnly recording the numbers of rights and wrongs--what could they possibly tell you? Were the chicks eventually sexed properly when they were hatched? How did the pendulum swingers get on?

What on earth does Central Television think it is doing? If I were trying to sabotage children's scientific understanding, this is exactly the kind of programme I would come up with. Like Central TV, I would make no mention of the scores of times that dowsers have been scientifically tested, and that the only consistency about them has been their total failure. Like Central TV, I would avoid the fact that more than a century of persistent testing has not produced a single authenticated case of telepathy. And like Central TV, I would not confess that egg-sexing pendulums are about as much use as flipping a coin.

Mixing all this up with bees, pigeons, and fish gave a fair indication of the confusion in the minds of those responsible for this programme.

Scientists, we were told, "like to know how something happens, why it happens, and could it happen in the future." Much more to the point, they like to know <u>whether</u> something is happening at all, or whether a claim is baseless. Science is a way of tackling problems intelligently. If "learning science" means anything at all, it means learning how to test hypotheses about cause and effect.

It is hard to believe that a TV programme with an accredited scriptwriter, a "researcher", and no less than two "advisers", could come up with such outdated nonsense. If the aim was to increase children's gullibility, Central TV have done a great job; if the aim was to dismantle children's critical apparatus, Central TV have a success on their hands.

To put out such a travesty under the banner of Science is bad enough. To dispense it in the name of Education is a disgrace.

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Lewis Jones is a writer and editor, and a member of the British Committee.

by David Berman

PAPAL VISIT RESURRECTS IRELAND'S KNOCK LEGEND

The apparition at Knock was the focus of the Pope's visit to Ireland. In common with most apparitions when the evidence is given careful examination it is found wanting. Here is an article which is also appearing in the "Irish Times". David Berman, who teaches philosophy at Dublin University, looks rigorously at the Knock appearance and offers a rational hypothesis to explain the "vision".

Recently there have been several publications on Knock, but they have all been by Catholic supporters of the apparition. This has given the discussion an air of unreality which should please no one. Yet historical problems which have a practical relevance are surely as worthy of critical examination as those of academic interest. And that Knock is of practical relevance is clear from the numbers of people and sums of money flowing into it. About a million people visit its shrine each year; more than a million pounds have been spent on its new church; and it has drawn a Pope to Ireland.

The importance of Knock is based squarely on the alleged appearance of the Virgin Mary on the dull and rainy evening of 21 August, 1879. Now since I do not believe either in an after-life or in the supernatural status of the mother of Jesus, I could hardly believe that she visited Knock, Co. Mayo, a hundred years ago. I think my reasons for subscribing to what might be called naturalism are sound, but I recognise that to many people they are likely to appear difficult and unsatisfactory since they amount to a denial of religions such as Christianity and Judaism. Yet rejecting the Knock apparition without giving any reasons runs into even greater trouble: for it will be seen as dogmatic and arrogant. Moreover, it might be argued that there is no better way of appreciating the truth of a supernatural religion like Christianity than by observing a concrete manifestation of the supernatural. Thus an event, such as that which is supposed to have taken place at Knock, may be said to prove the general truth of supernaturalism as against naturalism, and in a scientific way, as it moves from particular experience to general principle.

Be that as it may, I think it is worth considering the apparition in its own terms—within the Roman Catholic position, which firmly believes in the modern actuality of such supernatural occurrences. Let us then go directly to the hard evidence: to the official depositions of the dozen or so witnesses to the apparition. These depositions were, it is well known, made before the commission of three priests appointed by the Archbishop of Tuam. The depositions were taken on 8 October, 1879, six weeks after the event. What is not generally known is that there is now no trace of the original depositions. Considering the sacred significance accorded to the happening, this is surely surprising.

To be sure, depositions have come down to us and are duly quoted in accounts of Knock. But these depositions were neither printed nor certified by the commissioners or by the Archbishop. They were originally published in various newspapers, early in 1880—three months after the depositions had been taken. Since there seems to have been no repudiation by those concerned, it is simply assumed that these newspaper printings are faithful and authentic. In fact, because they differ in significant respects, they are highly problematic. There are two versions of the depositions: one is offered in the *Weekly News* of 21 February 1880 and the *The Nation* of 21 and 28 February, 1880, and the other is said to have appeared in a number of the *Tuam News* unfortunately not extant. However, this latter text is reprinted, we are told, by John MacPhilpin in *The Apparition and Miracles at Knock* (Dublin 1880). The former text is reproduced in *The Illustrated Record of the Apparitions at Knock* (Dublin, circa 1880), published by T. D. Sullivan. MacPhilpin's text contains fifteen depositions, three more than Sullivan's. I cannot here specify all the significant differences between the two versions, but the following are important since they bear on a naturalistic interpretation of the events of 21 August, 1879.

In the deposition of Mary McLoughlin, who is supposed to have been the first to see the apparition, we find in the MacPhilpin version—to which we shall refer as (M)—that she first saw it "while it was yet bright day". These quoted words do not appear in Sullivan's version—referred to as (S). Indeed (S) contradicts (M) on this point, for in (S) Mary says that "the sun had set that evening at a quarter past seven o'clock"—that is at about 8.45 pm modern summer time. And (S) records her as stating that she saw the apparition shortly after seven-thirty, fifteen minutes after the sun had set. Among the many other differences between the two versions of Mary McLoughlin's evidence is that on first inspection she says—according to (M)—"I saw an altar"; whereas in (S) there is no mention of the altar. This is understandable, since later in (S) Mary is to state that on her second visit to the gable of the church—the scene of the apparition—"I not only beheld the figures I have just now described, but an altar . . . ". And as there are similar words in (M), (M) not only conflicts with (S) but is inconsistent of itself.

Let us, however, move to the deposition of Mary Byrne, another major witness and the second to see

the apparition. According to (M), this Mary first saw the figures at 8.00 pm or 7.45 pm, and "It was still bright." According to (S) it was 8.15 pm, and there is no mention of brightness. Another noteworthy divergence, which reappears more or less throughout the depositions, is that where (M) reads "figure of St. Joseph", (S) reads "statue of St. Joseph". Thus Mary Byrne's brother Dominick says "I beheld the three figures or likenesses" in (M), but three "statues or likenesses" in (S).

In the testimony of Mrs Margaret Byrne we also find a difference in the time the apparition was first seen—8.15 pm in (M) and 8.30 pm in (S). In (M) "it was getting dark"; in (S) "it was just dark". The last divergence I shall mention occurs in the depositions of Margaret and Dominick Byrne (not the same as those previously mentioned of that name). In (M) Dominick says: "The reason I had for calling the third figure St. John is because some saw his statue or his likeness at Lecanvey parish church". But in (S) it is Margaret and not Dominick who says: "the reason I knew St. John was, I saw a statue of him at Lecanvey chapel." Clearly the version of (S) is here coherent and sensible, far more so than (M): for how could Dominick recognise St John from what other people saw in Lecanvey? On the whole, (S) reads more convincingly than (M). Most of the depositions in (S) are either signed, or treated in this way:

her
Margaret X Byrne
mark

(S) also ends with the following note: "All the depositions were duly witnessed by the clergymen conducting the inquiry." This is missing from (M), where only Patrick Hill's deposition is signed, and it is witnessed by one commissioner alone. I should mention that both MacPhilpin and Sullivan are firm believers in the apparition's authenticity.

The hard evidence is not, therefore, nearly as hard as one would like. Admittedly there is a considerable amount of agreement between (M) and (S). But agreement does not imply that both accounts record accurately; whereas disagreement means that one version *must* be wrong. Now, working critically from the evidence there seem to be four possible explanations of what happened on the evening of 21 August 1879:

(1) The Virgin Mary actually appeared.
(2) There was a mass hallucination.
(3) There was collusion and conspiracy amongst the witnesses.
(4) There was some kind of hoax.

Now (2) seems to me intrinsically unlikely, especially considering the number of people involved, and the fact that Patrick Walsh, who saw "a most brilliant light" (S)—"golden light" (M)—from a distance, did not make contact with the other witnesses till the following day. The simplicity and straightforwardness of the depositions also seem to rule out (3). Moreover, if they wished to invent wonders, why did they not attribute some agreeable pronouncement to Mary, such as "This is my dearly beloved land"? No, I am strongly inclined to rule out (2) and (3), which leaves (1) and (4). And here I should like to examine (4), specifically considering the hypothesis that what the witnesses saw was the projection of a magic lantern slide. I recognise that there are difficulties with the magic lantern hypothesis; but considering the state of the evidence, it would be surprising if this were not so. What I wish to argue is that, for all its difficulties, the lantern hypothesis is far more credible than belief in its supernatural alternative.

Consider then the following:

(1) The figures were motionless.
(2) They became brighter as it became darker.
(3) They appeared to be statues.
(4) They were intangible.
(5) They appeared up against a gable wall, a foot or so above the ground.
(6) They embodied iconographic conventions.
(7) They were surrounded by light.

Now one of the objections to the magic lantern is that the sky was too bright at the time for the proector to work effectively. But, as we have seen, in the version of the depositions printed by Sullivan, this difficulty need not arise. Indeed, one is tempted to see MacPhilpin's variants as an attempt to meet or counteract the magic lantern hypothesis. Apart from the earlier time and the brightness in his account, there is another important piece of evidence to support this unpleasant suspicion. I have shown that MacPhilpin's version tends to play down the statue-like appearance of the apparition, by often reading "figures" where Sullivan reads "statues". Now this is significant, as I discovered from a number of books or manuals on magic lanterns printed around 1865-1875. Two points of interest emerged: (1) that magic lantern slides of statues were particularly effective, and (2) that there were numerous slides of religious subjects available around 1870, and many of these were of statuary. Thus in *The magic lantern, dissolving views . . .* (London [1865]) the author informs us that:

> " The extreme clearness of these albumen pictures, is nowhere seen to such advantage as in Negrette and Zambra's photographic pictures of statuary, which in the lantern, reproduce the statue on the screen with such wonderful effect and solidity, that they do not seem like pictures, but the statues themselves." (p. 8).

Similarly, we find in *The magic lantern: its construction and use* (circa 1870) that:

> "Perhaps no pictures can be better shown with a lantern than photographs of statuary. These are now prepared in endless variety, and it is not too much to say, that any well-known statue, either ancient or modern, can be obtained in the form of a lantern slide. These pictures are usually blocked out, that is to say, every portion of the photograph but the statue itself is covered with black opaque pigment, so that the statue stands out upon the screen as a solid reality . . . " (pp. 63-64).

I have noted above that most of the witnesses describe the figures as being like statues. Indeed, some of them, like Judy Campbell, simply say that they were statues. In Judy's deposition—as given by (S)—the word "statue" is used four times; and Brigid Trench was struck by the immobility, the transparency, and especially by the solidity of the figures: which, as she says, "appeared to me so full and life size". All of this suggests that the witnesses did see a photographic reproduction of statuary. And the slide, or a description of it in a trade catalogue, may one day be found, especially as interest in both Knock and in trade catalogues grows. The considerable selection of slides of statuary and religious subjects is apparent from the advertisements at the end of the second pamphlet quoted from above. Thus Perken, Son & Rayment, of 99 Hatton Garden London, offered 59 slides of "Statuary in South Kensington Museum", 36 slides of "Westminster Abbey", 100 slides of Rome, 50 of English cathedrals, 250 Doré Bible illustrations, 60 Holy land, 50 Passion play, and more than 350 slides from the Bible. Note that this is from only one distributor of magic lantern slides; there were at the time dozens of distributors.

From the *Weekly News*, Dublin, 7 February, 1880. This seems to be the first published illustration of the alleged apparition, and as such it has an importance not dissimilar to the early verbal statements of the witnesses. One could hardly imagine a more lantern-like depiction.

The magic lantern was far more popular in the latter part of the last century than most people are aware; thus it was also being widely used at the time in both Protestant and Catholic religious services. Some manuals on the subject also emphasised the supernatural effects which a lantern could produce: e.g. *The magic lantern: how to buy and how to use it, also how to raise a ghost*, by a Mere Phantom (London, 30th thousand 1880). Hence it is not surprising that the magic lantern hypothesis was mooted at an early stage. And it is difficult not to see MacPhilpin's version of the depositions as an attempt to resist that hypothesis—by (1) pushing the time of the apparition earlier in the day when a magic lantern would not be effective, and (2) suppressing that the figures seen were so strikingly like statues, which were known to be such good subjects for lantern slides.

Once again, I know that there are difficulties with the lantern hypothesis. Most of these are summed up by Francis Lennon, the Maynooth professor asked to investigate the apparition. He asserted that the hypothesis was:

> "Highly improbable, indeed, I may say, morally speaking impossible—keeping in mind some statements of the witnesses, the position of the buildings, the part illuminated, and the facility of detection, by even the most ignorant."

But what were the statements of the witnesses when Lennon questioned them? Were they in keeping with (S) or (M)? And could not a lantern have been mounted from the nearby schoolhouse? That position would have had two advantages: first, it would have concealed the hoaxer or hoaxers; second, its relatively oblique situation would have prevented shadows being cast by the spectators. It may be noted that Lennon was not a believer in the apparition, and one of his suggestions was that it was caused by "phosphorescent" paint on the gable. But if the people could be fooled by that, why not by the magic lantern? In short, the magic lantern hypothesis is far from "highly improbable". But even if it *were* highly improbable, it would still be more rational to believe it than its miraculous alternative.

This article is reprinted from "The Freethinker" of October, 1979, and used by permission. It also appeared in "Church and State", but not in The Irish Times. Since 1979, a movement to build a fully-staffed international airport at Knock to serve pilgrims to the shrine has been successful, at a cost of Irish£5 million. We hope to bring you an update on this in our next issue. David Berman is a Lecturer in Philosophy at Trinity College, Dublin.

TOLERATING CONTINUED UNCERTAINTY: LEAVING THE "UNEXPLAINED" CASES UNEXPLAINED

by Peter O'Hara

In the ordinary courses of our lives, we come across new facts and later find explanations for them. In childhood, we deal with simple things, the sort we take for granted as adults. For example, when you turn on the hot water tap, the first part of the water is cold. You later learn that only in the large hot water cylinder can water be kept hot for long periods: the water in the pipe supplying the tap gets cold. I can recall in my youth a bathroom where the cold tap produced hot water at the start. I felt sure that the hot and cold pipes were mixed up in some way. I learned the true explanation from an adult: there was no cross-connection of water between the hot and cold systems, and the taps were correctly marked. I am not giving the full explanation now, because I want readers to experience the position of knowing about an unusual event, but not knowing the explanation. (Of course some readers will be able to work it out for themselves.) This will help with the problem of explaining (or not being able to explain) more serious events in the rest of the article.

Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO's) came to public prominence after 1945, especially in the USA. An object seen in the sky is intially called a UFO when a person sees it and cannot for the moment say what it is. Many of the surveys on UFO's start by collecting such eyewitness accounts. Then they interview other witnesses to the same events. They also check for aircraft and spacecraft with the appropriate sources, and they review weather and astronomical records for the times of the sightings. By these means, most of the objects originally dubbed "UFO's" have been identified as aircraft, spacecraft, planets, ball lightning, ground lights, etc. One such survey, the US Air Force Project Blue Book, found that 94% of UFO reports couald be thus explained. The remaining 6% of cases are "unexplained." For some people that is all there is to be said. But there are others who fell this residual 6% are "true UFO's"--that they cannot be explained by anything in my list above, but have another explanation--perhaps that they are craft from distant planets paying us fleeting visits. However, this is not because of any physical evidence left behind on Earth and available for examination. Rather, it is a jump into the unknown, as I hope to show in my next example.

When a person dies, the cause of death is officially registered. In peacetime the vast majority of deaths are from natural causes, and a doctor who has seen the person before death can certify the cause. The remaining cases must be investigated by police and pathologists. Such deaths may be from natural causes (not seen before death by a doctor), murder, suicide, or accident. The post-mortem result or the circumstances of the death generally put it clearly into one particular category. However, some deaths resist categorization. A body is pulled out after a week or two in the sea, and "marine digestion" has removed the facial features so that the person cannot be recognised. The amount of water in the body makes it reasonable to suppose that the person drowned, but did he or she fall in by accident, or throw him- or herself in, or was he or she pushed? So, one out of every eight thousand deaths in Dublin City cannot be put into one "unexplained cases" is either murder, or accident, or suicide, or due to natural causes, only we haven't enough information to decide which. The police may feel that one case was a murder. The relatives of the dead person may feel it was an accident, while the doctor privately feels it was a suicide. Nobody makes up a fifth category to put them into. People put up with the uncertainty here.

We humans feel uncomfortable with an unexplained event. Some of us, in some circumstances, find such a puzzle so difficult that we make a jump, as with the residual 6% of UFO claims. But if we were to follow the example of the death of indeterminate cause, we would say that these sightings were "either aircraft, or comets, or planets, or rockets, etc, but we don't know which."

For those who were puzzled by the cold tap producing hot water, its pipe lay alongside a long run of hot pipe, and was thus warmed up. After this section of water came out, the cold tap was really cold.

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(Peter O'Hara is a practicing psychiatrist in Dun Laoghaire, Ireland, and a Convenor of the Irish Skeptics.)

MOVING STATUES: AN UPDATE

by Leslie Shepard

It would be wrong to assume that moving statues belong only to earlier history or unsophisticated communities. During 1985, there was an astonishing outburst of cases of statues moving, bleeding, or weeping throughout the Republic of Ireland. Cases were reported from over thirty localities in only a few months of the year. Interestingly enough, no cases were reported from Northern Ireland during this period, although there is a large Catholic population there.

Characteristically, the period was one of great cultural, political, and religious unrest. For decades, Ireland's radio and television media had spread an alien pop culture, allied with the consumerism of postwar industrialization and the economics of the Common Market following membership of the European Economic Community. The EEC farm subsidies had first floated a new affluence, particularly amongst the Irish farmers, but the sudden restriction on such financial aid in the general depression of the late 1970s and early 1980s imposed new hardships. Rapid changes of government had done little to reduce unemployment and a large national debt. The continuing unrest in the North, with its regular toll of bomb outrages and brutal murders had uneasy echoes in the South, intensifying divisiveness on the issue of national unity. With the abolition of censorship of books and films, the old certainties and conservatism of religion had been challenged.

This came to a head in 1983 with the ferment caused by a referendum on amending the Constitution to protect the rights of unborn children. Fierce pro- and anti-abortion lobbies campaigned for support, at a time when hundreds of Irish women traveled to Britain for their abortions. New legislation liberalizing the availability of contraceptives, with the promise of a referendum on the issue of divorce (not permitted by the Constitution), had excited conservative protests that the sanctity of marriage and family life was in danger of being destroyed. However, tragic reports of lonely deaths in unwanted pregnancies, victimization of unmarried mothers, and the heartbreaking legal and social tangles of marriages that could not be dissolved or remarriages that were illegal, all indicated that neither the old religious conservatism or the newer liberalism had come to terms with the problems of modern life. All this came to a head with the reports in 1985 of the protracted judicial inquiry into the extraordinary case of the Kerry Babies, stemming from the discovery of an infant corpse with stab-wounds on the White Strand rocks at Cahirciveen.

It was against this apocalyptic background that the statues of the Virgin Mary throughout the Republic were reported as moving. It began on February 14, when several children in Asdee, Co. Kerry, claimed to have seen a statue of the Madonna and child at the parish church of St. Mary open its eyes and move its hands. An eighty-year-old farmer also stated that he saw the Madonna blink three times. Thousands of people visited the church, but there were no further reports and the excitement died down.

A few weeks later, children at Ballydesmond, Co. Cork, stated that they saw a statue move in the local church, but parents ascribed this to an overactive imagination.

A group of tourists at Courtmacsharry, Co. Cork, claimed to have seen a statue near the town move, but no other movements were reported and the affair died down.

In July, two teenage girls reported seeing movement in a statue of the Virgin Mary in a grotto some 20 feet up on the side of a hill at Ballinspittle, Co. Cork. Soon other people reported seeing the statue change expression or move, and large crowds gathered regularly to watch and recite the rosary. Many people claimed to see the Virgin's eyes or hands move, or the statue to move backwards and forwards or sway from side to side. Thousands of pilgrims visited the shrine, which became a central focus for stories of statues that moved. Pilgrimages and reports of movement of the statue persisted for over three months and only subsided at the end of October, when vandals smashed the hands and face of the statue with an axe and a hammer (see **Ballinspittle**).

Meanwhile throughout August and September, further reports of phenomena associated with the Virgin Mary came from all over the Republic. In Mitchelstown, Co. Cork, children stated that they had seen black blood flowing from a statue of the Virgin Mary, and an apparition of the devil appearing behind the statue. Many pilgrims gathered, and other young people claimed that they saw the statue move. Four teenage girls said that a statue at the local Marian shrine spoke to them and called for peace.

In Dunkitt, Co. Waterford, a statue of the Virgin Mary in a grotto on the main Waterford to Kilkenny road was reported to have been seen to move. Some people claimed that the statue breathed and the hands moved from center to right. A local publican and his wife stated that the statue shimmered. Thousands of pilgrims visited the grotto.

In Waterford city, two young boys stated that a statue of the Virgin Mary outside the Mercy Convent School moved its eyes, which were full of tears, and spoke of Pope John Paul II being assassinated. Hundreds of people kept vigil around the statue.

At Mooncoin, Co. Waterford, several youths stated that they saw a statue move, and a girl said she saw a tear fall from the right eye of the statue and the left eye open and close. Local people gathered at site for novenas and vigils.

Many statues in Co. Limerick were said to move. In Limerick city, a statue of the Virgin Mary at Garryowen was said by several witnesses to have blood on the hands. Other statues in St. Mary's Park and the Moycross housing estate were reported to move. In Mountcollins, Co. Limerick, crowds assembled at a grotto after some local women and children said they saw the statue move and sway. Other people believed they saw manifestations of the Sacred Heart over the statue and blood coming out of the statue's eyes. Other Co. Limerick locations reported moving statues, including Foyes, Coolard, Cahermoyle, and Mainster.

Two reports came from Co. Wexford, from Camolin, and from Enniscorthy. At Glenbrien in Co. Clare, two local women stated that they saw a statue of the Virgin Mary move. At Cartloe in Co. Clare, pilgrims gathered after two women in a local prayer group claimed that the statue moved. There were also reports of a face resembling Christ which was superimposed on the Virgin's face. Some children stated that they saw the face of Padre Pio and one of the Popes on the statue. A woman stated that she saw the face of Christ from the **Turin Shroud** appear. Hundreds of people prayed around the statue.

At Rosecrea, Co. Tipperary, local people claimed that a statue of the Virgin Mary in the grounds of St. Ann's Convent had moved, although the nuns were skeptical.

(cont. on page 12, column 1)

BOOK REVIEW

Secret Cult. By Peter Hounam and Andrew Hogg. Lion Publishing Co., Icknield Way, Tring, Herts., England, 1985. 287 pp. £1.95.

The cover carries the words "Secret Cult" in red, "Mission Impossible" lettering, and the words "A full exposé of a strange and destructive organization that is penetrating the corridors of power." I picked it up with some trepidation, thinking it was going to be another one of those paranoid accounts of hidden enemies taking over the world. In fact, the book reads rationally and soberly as a reasoned account of a world-wide cult that, for a change, originated in Britain.

Based on a series of articles published in the London Evening Standard by the same authors, the book chronicles the birth, growth, and current strength of a group that is known in London as the School of Economic Science, in New York as either the Practical Philosophy Foundation or the School of Practical Philosophy, and in Dublin as the School of Philosophy. Originally founded by a Glaswegian, Andrew MacLaren, a man with strong ideas on tax reform, for the purpose of promoting these economic ideas, the group changed direction radically under the subsequent leadership of MacLaren's son , Leon, who guided the group from the study of economics to the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, the techniques of TM (which are still taught by the SES, although the authors were unable to trace the reasons for the split between the two movements), and the study of Sanskrit and Hinduism, and MacLaren's explanations of the Word as revealed to him on regular trips to India to consult the Shankaracharya (a spiritual teacher).

The book is useful and important on several levels.

First of all, there is the simple level of information: not much is known about the SES, partly because of the secrecy that surrounds it, as all cults, and partly because it is relatively small, and therefore less visible. However, the lack of size is made up for in part by the identities of some of its members, including, for example, Roger Pincham who, in 1982, anyway, was Chairman of the British Liberal Party, a former Bishop, and a number of other, if not prominent, at least not anonymous, people. Hence, presumably, the quote on the cover.

This information includes a fairly detailed picture of the lives of the SES' members, lives which are dominated by the cult's "Measure". This code of behavior includes a five-hour-a-night limitation on sleep, required twice-daily periods of meditation, the practice of calligraphy and Sanskrit, and other traditional Hindu subjects, an extremely limited vegetarian diet, and a variety of School activities which must be carried out, including attendance at classes and meditation 'checking' sessions, cleaning buildings and other manual work, residential retreats, etc. In addition, the longer you stay in the School, the more control your 'tutor' assumes over your life, until there are no decisions you are free to make without consultation. Many of the ex--members say that membership in the School puts enormous strain on marriages, not only because you are expected to put the School's interests before everything else, but also because the School teaches extremely traditional sex roles to its members, dominance for men, subservience for women. Coupled with the required indoctrination of children from an early age, these rules make a normal family life impossible. The SES also runs private schools, open to children of SES--members and non-members alike, and the book devotes an entire chapter to an account of these and the experiences of non-member parents who were so insufficiently informed as to send their children there, in general to their regret.

Secondly, there is the level of analysis. The authors go to considerable trouble to identify the original component parts of the teachings of this organization, tracking down the roots in Hinduism, in Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's philosophies, in TM. The result is a startlingly clear picture of just how clouded and fuzzy the reasoning behind these teachings is. In addition, the analysis of these ideas is contrasted to the answers given by cult members to public questions, and provides a clear picture of just how much obfuscation is going on when they are challenged.

Thirdly, there is the level of understanding. Generally speaking, we see the end result of fanatacism: Guyana, or concentration camps, or Moonies wandering around like zombies, and we say, 'how is this possible? These were rational people once.' This book uses the personal stories of ex-members and current members, predominantly the former, of course, since all members of the SES, under whatever name, are sworn to secrecy, to show the thousands of tiny steps that go into the making of such a phenomenon. Literally, the path leading from the way of sanity is taken in such small doses that one's leaving it is almost imperceptible until, as happened to one young mother whose neighbor berated her for the way she was treating her children, one is confronted in some way with reason. (Personally, of course, while I claim no immunity to gulli-

(cont. on next page, column 2)

(Moving Statues, cont.)

At Mount Mellary, Co. Waterford, three children made the astonishing claim that a statue of the Virgin Mary near the Cistercian Abbey had walked down from its pedestal and told them that "God was very angry with the world." Thousands of people gathered around the statue, by then back on its pedestal.

At Monasterevin, Co. Kildare, a statue of the Virgin Mary was said to have been seen to move regularly and also to have had the face of Padre Pio superimposed on it. At Abbeyleix, Co. Laois, a statue in the ground of Knock church was said to have moved. At Stradbally, Co. Laois, bloodstains were said to have been seen on a statue of the Virgin Mary, and there were also reports that the face changed to that of Padre Pio and to the Sacred Heart.

In Co. Carlow, there were reports of moving statues from Killeshin, Spink, and St. Dympna's Hospital. In Carlow itself, a small glass-covered image on Rossmore Hill was said to have moved inside the glass.

In Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim, a young girl stated that she saw the statue of the Virgin Mary in the grounds of convent move. In Carns, Co. Sligo, large crowds attended vigils at a location where four local school girls claimed that they saw a vision of the Virgin Mary. Other people stated that they saw images of the Virgin and of St. Bernardette and a crucifix in the night sky.

In Cork city, three school children claimed to have seen the statue of the Virgin Mary in the Church of the Resurrection, Farranree, move. They said the statue almost toppled over. The mother of one of the children claimed that the Virgin's eyes were red and her cheeks and feet black.

Even in Dublin, there were reports of a moving statue in the grounds of the Oblate church in Inchicore, although local priests dismissed it as "just messing" by local children.

In the scores of cases reported from all over the country, it seems clear that the statues *appeared* to move, rather than physically shifting position. Psychologists pointed out that staring at statues in half light, especially with a glare from an illuminated halo, could result in optical illusions. However, the essential and more elusive aspect of the phenomenon was the religious fervor associated with it, the feelings of spiritual grace experienced by many individuals, including a number of skeptics. This wave of religious renewal, sweeping across a whole country, was in every sense a moving experience. (See also **Apparitions; Ballinspittle; Stigmata**)

Excerpted from the First Supplement to Shepard's Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology, Second Edition, 1984-5, Gale Research Co., Detroit, USA. The first edition of the Encyclopedia was reviewed by Ray Hyman in The Skeptical Inquirer, Summer 1979. Used by permission.

(Secret Cult, continued)

bility, any cult that demanded I give up red meat and get up at four every morning would lose me right there!)

I have no personal knowledge of the SES in any of its incarnations; however the book rings true. It is well-written and obviously thoroughly researched, what few things I could check, checked (such as the Irish names and addresses of the local branches), and the book includes comments from people outraged by the articles they saw as slandering their beloved way of life as well as comments from people who felt they had been damaged by the movement. The authors say they tried to interview Leon MacLaren himself, but he repeatedly refused. This is consistent with the reported experiences of CSICOP researchers in SI, when they are challenging someone whose activities don't really bear challenging.

I had a few minor quibbles. I would have liked to have heard a little more about how the authors went about researching the book/articles. Presumably once they started, often people contacted them, but I would have been happy to have had more references, so that I could follow up what I had read, if I wanted to. They discuss TM as practiced by the SES in terms of self-hypnosis. This seems to me, from what I have read in SI and related places, as questionable. This theory is derived from (one of their few specific book references) R. K. Heller's De-programming for Do-it-yourselfers: A Cure for the Common Cult, who is quoted as saying, "The cult is a sect of people wherein victims hypnotize each other..." (p. 165). I found the ex-members' analyses of their own motives (the desire to be superior to others, guilt and fear at feeling themselves inadequate, the desire to please, and later, complete dependence on the group for all social activities) much more convincing reasons for their increasing suggestibility, but this is a matter for scientists to debate.

I recommend the book highly as a partial answer to the question, often heard in CSICOP articles, books, and speeches, 'How could this happen?'

Reviewed by Wendy M. Grossman

(This review is shortly to be printed in The Skeptical Inquirer in condensed form.)

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IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

We already have a small, representative sampling of newspaper clippings about Doris Stokes. We would like to make her our "psychic of the month". Any contributions to the cause (more clippings, personal experiences, etc.) will be welcome. In addition:

* David Berman's update on Knock Airport
* more Hits and Misses
* Profile of a Small-Time Psychic

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