

## Eighteenth-century Flying Saucer

The news that "flying saucers" have been produced in a glass jar by fiddling round with molecules of ionised air in a partial vacuum will delude only the scientists. The rest of us would just as soon believe that the gaily coloured little ships which repose in bottles on old-fashioned mantel-pieces are really the Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth, and the record-breaking United States. Although we have degraded the phenomenon by giving it a name from the crockery shelf, we cannot forget that the flying something has a distinguished tradition. And you cannot bottle a tradition as if it were a glut of peaches.

It is now nearly 250 years since Lemuel Gulliver, marooned on a desolate island in the Pacific, saw the prototype of the "flying saucer." His notes place the identification beyond doubt. Gulliver perceived a "vast opaque body between me and the sun," moving towards his island at a height

towards his island at a height of about two miles. As it

approached "it appeared to be a firm substance, the bottom flat, smooth, and shining very bright. . . ."

But our eighteenth-century traveller did more with his "flying saucer" than any of us, even with the help of jet pursuit planes, has been able to do. He induced the saucerites—or Laputians, as they preferred to be known—to take him on board.

This adventure of Lemuel Gulliver might be regarded merely as a curiosity if it were not for another astonishing fact. Not only did he find the original "saucer"; he also discovered the progenitor of those scientists who try to bottle everything—a curious fellow who had been working for eight years upon a project for bottling sunbeams after extracting them from cucumbers. Two and a half centuries later, the sunbeams remain unbottled, and it is a safe guess that 250 years hence the moonbeams from a

the moonbeams from a larger lunacy—now known as “flying saucers”—will still be outside the bell-jars of science.