

# PEOPLE DO SEE FLYING SAUCERS

## But Are They Seeing What They Think They Are Seeing?

*People do see flying saucers. They do see an assorted range of celestial crockery, vegetables and other apparitions. To that extent scepticism seems to be weakening.*

*But are they seeing what they think they are seeing? That is the question.*

In the face of expert testimony, it is being more generally admitted in the coldest official quarters that there is no ready explanation for every strange object sighted.

We may have our doubts about some of the more ornamental reports from United States, where the competition in sighting flying saucers and little green men is as intense as in other fields of American life.

The observation over the Yarra Valley on New Year's day of a flying mushroom by a veteran Australian National Airways pilot is one of the examples that bring the whole subject nearer home.

And the Civil Aviation Department's cautious: "We do not regard this business as a

not regard this business as a joke," together with its invitation to the public to report "unidentified aerial objects" without fear of ridicule, is part of the spreading recognition of the incompleteness of knowledge of the skies.

There are scientists of the highest repute to say that these things either have no physical existence, that they are freaks of light and reflection, or that they are meteorological devices about which there is no mystery.

### **Natural Phenomena**

One of the foremost authoritative sceptics is the British Astronomer Royal, Sir Harold Spencer Jones, F.R.S.

"There are many natural phenomena which appear mysterious, and for which, in some cases, there is as yet no satisfactory explanation," Sir Harold wrote in the Spectator London, in 1950, dismissing a book by Gerald Heard on flying saucers.

"The accounts of such appearances given by those who are unfamiliar with them may be strangely unlike the real thing. The aurora borealis, ball lightning, St. Elmo's fire, mock suns and parhelia, the Brocken spectre, a blue sun or a blue moon, a bright fireball, a slow-moving train of meteors, for instance, are sufficiently far from the common

...events, for instance, are sufficiently far from the normal range of most people's experience to give rise to wonderment.

"I receive many reports of unusual or strange phenomena; but rarely is an account of what was seen sufficiently precise and accurate for a definite opinion to be given as to the cause."

Sir Harold went on to ridicule Mr. Heard's suggestion that the flying saucers might have come from Mars, and that the Martians may be large insects, super-bees about two inches in length, and with a highly developed social organisation.

"The scientific reader," Sir Harold said, "will jettison the whole of this chain of argument. We know enough about Mars and the conditions that prevail there to be confident that no animal life can exist on it.

"As for very big manufacturing plants being in operation on Mars in order to turn out discs in large numbers, as is supposed, it is just fantastic."

### **Forget Them**

Three years later, the Astronomer Royal still conceded nothing to theories that the flying saucers came from Venus or Mars—or Russia.

Writing in the "Evening Standard" ...

writing in the "Evening Standard," London, he said: "I can say with absolute assurance that none of these flying saucers come from other planets. My advice is, forget all about them."

He described as "humbug" reports of "little men" having landed in America from flying saucers. Most of the saucers, he said, were observation or meteorological balloons. There were natural explanations for most of the others, and there was nothing mysterious about flying saucers.

A corresponding line has been taken by Dr. Donald H. Menzel, Harvard professor of astrophysics. Nobody, he says,

should be ashamed of seeing flying saucers and of reporting them. He has seen them himself.

But that, says Dr. Menzel, is not the same thing as believing that they are spaceship: manned by intelligent beings from another planet.

#### **Distrusts Reports**

Like Sir Harold Spencer Jones, he distrusts the detail of most of the reports that have been made, especially on the apparent speed of the saucers, real or imagined.

He added light beams, producing optical "ghosts," to the list of factors which might produce the impression

might produce the impression of discs moving at dizzy speed and so erratically that, if they were aircraft, the suddenness of their movements would kill any human crew.

Flying saucers have been almost a universal topic of speculation since they were sighted in Idaho in 1947, and then in many other parts of the United States and the rest of the world.

There may never before have been a sustained and widespread "rage," but there is ample evidence of comparable spectacles long before they became a standard subject for popular jest — with a mixture of apprehension encouraged by the age of the atom, the jet, and the rocket.

Notable examples mentioned by Dr. Menzel include the "Unknown Lights of Japan" seen "flying" in a long line, and sometimes changing their formation, by the British warship *Caroline* just south of Korea in 1893.

When the ship's officers reported their discovery at Kobe, they found that the same phenomena had long been observed by Japanese fishermen, and had even been described in Japanese school-books.

Then there was the "airship" that startled Oakland, California, in 1896, and was reported in other parts of the

California, in 1898, and was reported in other parts of the United States in the following year. It took the form of a huge bird-shaped object with a brilliant light in its nose. As usual, the accounts varied. Some aeronautical fanciers in Chicago were sure it was a dirigible balloon. The astronomers put it down to a freak of starlight.

The serious investigation now carried out has led to no firm or revealed conclusions that the modern saucers are tangible. The use by the United States Navy, for example, of translucent plastic balloons 100 ft. high to carry electronic instruments aloft in parachutes, and left to drift in the intense winds of the stratosphere, may well have created alarming spectacles.

Research itself puts into the skies objects almost as strange as those now coming out of planetary fiction. The controversy has stimulated inventive hoaxers.

There may be a rational and harmless explanation for every authenticated peculiarity observed in the seven years since the saucers gripped current popular imagination. But, despite the scepticism of eminent authorities, learned inquiries go on

---