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What can we believe?

MANY of our readers from all over the world have written to us to ask exactly where we stand on the issue of the contact claims. It is a fair question, but it is not one that can be answered in a few words. We envy those who can say that they believe wholeheartedly, and we admire equally those others who are able to dismiss the claimants as a pack of liars. Our answer must be more circumspect. What we can say immediately is that to ignore completely the contact problem is a coward's way out of the difficulty. Whether we like it or not, the student of flying saucers who tries to convert will, sooner or later, be asked what he believes about the stories of visitors to this planet and what he thinks of those who claim to have met them. To answer that all these people are fraudulent is merely to ask for the objection that all those who say they have seen strange objects in the sky are similarly untrustworthy. To answer that all the claimants are telling the truth is to land oneself into even greater difficulty, for it must be admitted that, on occasion, the claimants contradict each other on some vital point. Nor will it help if one claimant is believed and the other rejected. The plain truth is that we do not know what to believe.

While we keep our mind open, however, it is as well to study the problem and its implications. We can accept as a starting point that the saucers are real machines, intelligently piloted or controlled and emanating from outer space. Also, we accept unreservedly the Papuan sightings so ably reported for us by the Rev. N. E. G. Cruttwell*. Therefore, we accept the fact that some of these machines, at least, have human pilots with intelligences similar, though probably superior, to ours. Having gone so far, we have to admit that we are not very far from accepting the *possibility* of truth in the claimants' stories. Their claims are not that much in advance of Father Gill's. In Papua the pilots waved, apparently in friendly greeting: in California and elsewhere there occurred, or so it is alleged, an inter-communication of ideas. From the one to the other is but a step, and a not unreasonable one to be asked to take. But an objection lingers in the mind and it had better be stated without hesitation.

The Rev. N. E. G. Cruttwell's reports are much more convincing than the claimants' stories. It is difficult at first to analyse the difference, but it appears to us that in the Papuan report there is a ring of truth that the others lack. Is it humility that is missing? Too many claimants tell their story on a "take it or leave it" basis and there

* See particularly our November-December, 1960, issue.

is no concession made to the doubter. They prefer to bludgeon the reader rather than to persuade and occasionally impute to him some moral inferiority if he should persist in his questioning. It is an attitude which jars upon the sensitive and finally angers. How much more reasonable is Father Gill's attitude. According to the Rev. N. E. G. Cruttwell's report, Father Gill, who has suffered a great deal of criticism, says that sometimes he wishes that he had never seen the object and that he is quite prepared to accept what he calls a "reasonable" explanation if one can be offered. Compare this cautious approach to those of most of the professional claimants: Father Gill recognises that his story is a "tall" one and has the good manners to meet his audience half-way. The others, with stories not that much "taller," often adopt a holier-than-thou attitude and hint that they have been chosen for some special merit, while to doubt their story is to commit blasphemy. All we can say is that it seems most unfortunate that those who are visiting us did not choose Father Gill and his mission boys

for their earlier and closer contacts. If the purpose is to carry a message to a long-suffering world, then those who have been selected have proved a poor choice.

The apologists for the claimants will suggest that they have been chosen because they are often the simple-minded and that we cannot expect eloquence from such people. The immediate reply is that the very simplicity of many of the witnesses in Papua contributes to the ring of truth and that simplicity is the one quality that is lacking in those other contact stories. With Father Gill and his mission boys we feel that we have been told the whole of the truth as they saw it. With the others we feel that the claimant has stood, in some way or other, between us and the truth. Our conclusion must be not to dismiss these stories altogether as false, but to admit that there is a mystery behind a mystery. We only wish we knew the truth. What we cannot and will not do is to pretend that we know the answer and that there is no mystery at all.

The evolution of mystery

I too believe . . . that the study of mystery in all its forms is the noblest to which the mind of man can devote itself; and truly it has ever been the occupation and care of those who in science and art, in philosophy and literature, have refused to be satisfied merely to observe and portray the trivial, well-recognised truths, facts and realities of life. And we find that the success of these men in their endeavour, the depth of their insight into all that they know, has most strictly accorded with the respect in which they held all they did not

know, with the dignity that their mind or imagination was able to confer on the sum of unknowable forces.

Our consciousness of the unknown wherein we have being gives life a meaning and grandeur which must of necessity be absent if we persist in considering only the things that are known to us; if we too readily incline to believe that these must greatly transcend in importance the things that we know not yet.

Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Buried Temple*.