

BEWARE OURSELVES

By C. H. GIBBS-SMITH, M.A., F.R.S.A.

AS one who was originally a scoffer—and who even scoffed over the radio—I have come round to the opinion that flying saucers may well be interplanetary vehicles and that the whole subject should be pursued vigorously, continuously and relentlessly. But in arriving at this attitude there have been, and still are, a number of stumbling blocks which are disconcerting and even deplorable—the stumbling blocks placed along the road by the believers—with a large B—the enthusiasts untempered by caution, by the hoaxers, and possibly by ourselves. Causes are so often bedevilled by crusaders and even ill-served by martyrs. The people we need in the investigation of saucers are enthusiasts, yes, because enthusiasm provides the fuel for activity; but our enthusiasts must be cautious to the point of scepticism, judicious to the point of perfection, and honest to the point of obsession. Otherwise we shall all have to wait for the time when the pilots from other worlds decide to land in Piccadilly Circus and prove their interplanetary origins by some dramatic and drastic behaviour which even the News Editor of the *Times* will have to respect and report.

We all have some of the faults I am thinking of, but we must get rid of them once and for all, even if we lose a little excitement on the way. The appearance of a new book on saucers by Monsieur J. Guieu entitled *Flying Saucers Come From Another World* (Hutchinson, 12s. 6d.) gives us an excellent chance to analyse our faults, because—although it is in some ways a good book

The value of an article such as this one is that, among other things, the author is : A Companion of the Royal Aeronautical Society; a Keeper in the Victoria and Albert Museum; formerly Director of the Photograph Division, Ministry of Information; Organiser and Classifier of the Hulton-Picture Post Library, the largest Press photographic library in the world; regular contributor to the official "Recognition Journal" published by the Air Ministry; Chairman of the London Committee, English Speaking Union, and a Member of the Committee of the National Film Archive.

In addition, he has written numerous books; among them : "Basic Aircraft Recognition"; "The Aircraft Recognition Manual"; "Ballooning"; "A History of Flying"; "Operation Caroline"; "Yankee Poodle" and others, and made more than 50 radio and television broadcasts.

—it is in many ways highly dangerous, and an object-lesson to us all.

Take first the author's narration and his descriptions of sightings. It really is useless and frivolous for writers to go on stringing together a whole farrago of incidents good, bad and indifferent, without careful assessment and classification. With new sightings, as with old, we need—not an arbitrary arrangement—but a *classified* and *critical* arrangement. We want to find placed together the sightings by those best qualified for the purpose such as pilots, scientists and others whose professional standing alone would go far to prevent them from allowing their names and occupations to be associated with fake or unreliable incidents. Then progress to less authoritative and reliable—but still, if possible, corroborated—statements. And finally to Farmer Giles and old Herbert who have sworn to the local police that they saw a Sèvres soup-tureen alight beside them and a miniature figure of Louis XVI get out and pick blackberries. Science would benefit from the first of such witnesses, folk-lore from the last.

Then, for pity's sake, do let us have the *sources* for the sightings, and if the story is just relayed from another book be honest and say so. Old stories not only need careful treatment but often careful elimination: if Jimmy Guieu had checked Leslie's item about the Ampleforth Abbey manuscript on page 212, he would be surprised at the laughs now surrounding it.

And not only the sources. Where an incident is significant a careful *assessment* of those sources

must be made because even affidavits from certain people are as valuable as thousand-pound cheques from a paranoid.

Next on the list of dangers is drama, or rather *drammer* in the old-time American sense. The more dramatic you make a story the more unreliable it often becomes. Even Donald Keyhoe, one of the best pro-saucer men, shakes our belief in him sometimes by the over-emphasis—and hence possible distortion—he indulges in, and by his dramatic conclusions to make a climax.* The best saucer book I have read is Major Edward Ruppelt's *Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*.†

Sifting the Truth

Credulity and gullibility are other dangers, and I can best illustrate this, I regret to say, by something that appeared in the last number of this excellent journal, where its special correspondent refers to a saucer sighting where many photographs, including movies, were taken—all of them being confiscated by "the authorities." I just don't believe it: I know a good deal about the Press and about photographers, and I just cannot swallow the idea that good tough Press and ciné photographers would allow all their negatives to be confiscated. There would have been an almighty rumpus with the official Press associations and other organisations who would raise hell with the government, to say nothing of the plates or films discreetly removed and put in pockets before "the authorities" could get around to all the photographers.

That leads us to photographs, and they are some of the most dangerous weapons which well-informed scoffers can use against those of us who are trying to sift truth from non-truth. Just look at the plate opposite page 160 of Guieu's new book: the Eiffel Tower is actually drawn—yes, repeat *drawn*. Even if the u.f.o. flying over it is perfectly genuine, the presence of that doctored tower simply rules the whole thing out of court at the start: it is no excuse or defence to say the tower was really there in the original photograph and has just been touched up. Once you tinker with a negative or a print, you lose all right to serious consideration, and you are—to a greater or less extent—faking it. The drawing in this plate in question is not even well done. Then

look at the two photos opposite his page 81: show those dark opaque lines round the u.f.o. to a professional photographer or process engraver and ask him what he thinks. Now, the point is this: I do not say or imply that these two particular photos are fakes or doctored—whereas the Eiffel Tower one is doctored without question—but anything that *looks* so suspicious shouldn't be published, as it can only do more harm than good. If you take a photo of a genuine saucer which—on development—looks suspicious, it is even better not to publish it at all. For example, I am convinced that the Adamski and Allingham photos, no matter how genuine they may be, have done much more harm than good. Why? Because they don't *look* right, and their reasons for not taking photos other than the ones which they did take—although no doubt as genuine as gold—don't *sound* right. "Justice must not only be done but must also appear to have been done" is a sound precept. If Adamski couldn't get anything better than a stretch of rocky wasteland with a small blob in the far distance for his long-shot of the saucer, I don't think he should have published it. If Allingham couldn't have taken his Martian better than to reveal an out-of-focus three-quarter view retreating figure showing a conventional terrestrial-type hair-cut head and a conventional wrist-length sleeve with hand emerging, I feel he should never have published it at all; because, no matter how genuine the Martian is, he looks like an ordinary guy, without any visible features to show he isn't a native of Kensington or Balham.

Machines and Blobs

With reference to photographs of actual u.f.o.s, my feeling in general, for what it is worth, is that any or all of them could have been faked better by my photographic staff in the war; that the defined views seem never to have been taken with the u.f.o. "all in" the negative and in spatial relation to other objects, but are always odd shots of bits of the machine; that they have a definite but indefinable look of terrestrial artifacts; and, for some extraordinary reason, they always seem to be out of focus. As for the lights in the sky, or "blob" school, they are anyone's guess: all the ones I have seen could be easily rivalled by deliberate fakes. Some of these

* See Review of Keyhoe Book, p. 20.

† Major Ruppelt's book will be fully reviewed in the next issue.

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