

The truth: some suggestions for the investigator

by Peter F. Sharp, B.Sc.

Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews. . . .

St. John XVIII, 37 & 38.

PERHAPS if Pilate had not chosen to make his exit at that point we might be very much wiser about truth. Being unfortunate in not having a divine definition of truth, I propose, for the purposes of this discussion, to define truth as "a precise description of the facts as they are."

In our subject truth is frequently a preoccupation of the researcher and usually his preoccupation is in direct proportion to the strangeness of the case he is studying. For example, if a witness reports seeing a silvery, oval-shaped object flashing silently across the sky, his report would go on file almost without question. But if, on the other hand, he reports seeing a space craft on the ground, or even worse, claims to have actually met hominoids from inside it, his account will receive an entirely different reception. In fact, if the researcher is of one school of thought the witness will be practically dubbed a liar before questioning starts, and similarly others of the opposite persuasion will almost have him signed up for a lecture tour before meeting him. Familiarity breeds, not contempt, but acceptance; the unusual has doubt as its handmaiden.

As already indicated, one of the dangers in the rarer type of sightings is the preconceived notions of the investigator. A bigoted or biased researcher is a block to the truth if only in that he will unduly stress those parts of the report that fit his beliefs. This being in addition to having a preference for those questions that will tend to get the witness to reply in the pattern he,

the questioner, expects him to according to his preconceived beliefs. For example, there is still a small school of thought that accepts that many, if not all, UFOs originate here on earth. Supporters of this thesis can be understandably excused if they interpret markings on the side of space craft as being from a terrestrial alphabet, or if they emphasise any sounds made by the object and play down unearthly characteristics. Because emphasis and bias cannot be humanly eliminated from reporting (and the American Government's experiences with automatic punch-card systems seem to have been less than successful), we should only build theories based on a large number of cases so that the statistical probability outweighs human prejudice. The outstanding case, in my judgment, of building up a theory on such a paucity of evidence that the theoretical superstructure topples under its own weight was that propounded by Civilian Research Interplanetary Flying Objects in their newsletter *Orbit* in 1955. This was that the actions of the UFOs were so hostile as to "constitute a state of interplanetary war." Eight years on from that statement I do not feel it necessary to make any comment.

The two points I have been trying to make in the above are:

- (i) the investigator should always bear in mind the scarcity factor, i.e. his normal reaction is to become increasingly sceptical as the unusualness of the case increases.
- (ii) theories must only be built on wide experience and documentation; e.g. orthoteny would be a poor thing if only Aimé Michel could find orthotemies.

In what follows there will be some truisms, and in anticipation of the criticism that I am merely stating the obvious I must point out that it is all too easy to lose sight of the obvious, especially in this subject, and we never lose anything by its restatement.

The majority of people, to the best of their

ability, tell the truth about what they have seen.

Consider a set of people composed of habitual liars and those who habitually tell the truth. Ask one of the set to which type he belongs. Now if he is truthful he will say so; but consider if he is a liar. If he says "I am a liar" he is telling the truth, so he replies that he is truthful. This unremarkable result should remind us that anyone who sets out to be a deliberate liar will scarcely admit the fact under close questioning, unless, of course, there is overwhelming factual evidence that disproves his story. In our subject such evidence that would destroy a perjurer is unlikely to be obtained and we cannot, therefore, expect a contact claimant suddenly to admit he is a hoaxer.

A mental "shift"

A truism? Yet I remember a case some years ago of a man who claimed to have conversed with a Martian; his story contained within it, it seemed to me, the seeds of its own destruction, namely astronomical inaccuracies and studied vagueness on vital matters. I repeated my doubts to a well-known investigator who had interviewed the man. He retorted that he was inclined to believe the man because he neither admitted any deception nor gave way on any matter under skilful cross-examination.

The fact is, of course, that people do not break down under this sort of examination if they have a modicum of intelligence and their facts cannot readily be checked.

My knowledge of psychology is scant, but it seems to me that some of the contact stories may be regarded as follows. A person perpetrates a hoax more out of fun than anything else and enjoys giving Press conferences, of meeting the various cranks who appear to question him, etc. Then the police and/or the Air Force arrive and go over his story with studied carefulness. Our hoaxer is quite glib now, having repeated his tale so often, and he has already met most of the tricky questions and thought out suitable answers, but—and this is an important "but"—he is a little frightened that his hoax is being taken so seriously. Alternatively he may feel flushed with success. In either case I think that at this point his mind undergoes a shift. He makes the decision to go on with the hoax. If he was frightened, the way to avoid mental conflict with his own conscience is to believe his own story. No longer does he suffer mental strife, he has made his decision, he is at peace with himself. He becomes more convincing than ever because he is genuinely outraged if anyone

doubts his story. New successes follow and his belief in his own hoax is confirmed and reinforced.

A similar process occurs if he carries on his hoax in the flush of success. However, in this instance I would imagine that he does not delude himself to the same extent, but in both cases a vicious circle is set up, lies reinforcing the will to more lies.

A third type of delusion might occur with the "evangelical" type of contactee. Here the witness uses his hoax as a vehicle for his *genuine* concern over the state of mankind, the threat of a nuclear holocaust, man's lack of spirituality, etc. His propaganda is avidly received by the many who are ready to share in his concern and for whom his revelation strikes a sympathetic note. In their eagerness to accept the message these people also accept the contact story. It is like a religious conversion at a primitive level. One is also reminded of the converts to communism; once Marx has been swallowed the convert readily accepts Lysenko. Again the hoaxer's mind undergoes a shift; the end justifies the means. Since he regards the message as the Truth, then the vehicle for it, the contact, must also be true and he believes it himself.

Hints for the Investigator

I think that we all have had experiences where we have started on a course of action without much thought or just by chance, only to find that the ensuing events have enmeshed us and have fully committed us. These experiences are the only experimental evidence for the analysis above, but before someone rushes to point out that I have already stated that we should build theories only on wide experience and documentation, let me add that I was throwing off ideas in the hope that someone better qualified for the task than myself could decorate them with sufficient facts to turn them into theories.

If my analysis does hold good, then its importance for the investigator is obvious. One thing that emerges is that it is vital to be on the scene quickly, for not only will the facts be fresh in the mind of the witness if genuine, but also if a hoax is involved the hoaxer will be less practised in his story and thus likely to make slips, and, most important of all, may not yet have undergone the mental change so that he believes in his own tale. One must always bear in mind whilst investigating contact reports that the most important evidence available is the witness himself. The investigator will be used to ascertaining whether the witness is giving objec-

tive or subjective judgments about speed, height, etc., but does he note what coloured words the witness uses? By coloured words I mean those likely to carry emotional overtones. To give an extreme example here is part of a fictitious account of a contact of the "evangelical" type: the spaceman radiated a feeling of warmth, well-being, peace and calmness. His voice was soft and melodious and his expression echoed his words: "We of the Brotherhood wish you Earthlings to cease your nuclear explosions."

The coloured words tell us what type of person we are dealing with and hence what possible ulterior motives he might have for a hoax. As I am a lover of a peaceful life I do not intend to put forward here any conclusions that I have come to as to the veracity of the classic cases such as those of Adamski, Allingham, etc., but may I suggest for the open-minded reader an exercise that might help him to decide for himself in such cases?

Some non-contact sightings have a greater probability of being true than others. For example, one where there were several independent witnesses; radar or photographs to back up a visual sighting; one in an orthotenic series, etc. Take several of these sightings where the actual words used by the witnesses are recorded and place their descriptions alongside descrip-

tions of landings. The former we may take as being representative of the language used by the normal honest human-in-the-street who has seen something he cannot understand or readily categorise.

When this exercise is completed I think that the reader cannot fail to notice that several of the contactees do not talk at all like our man-in-the-street. One is tempted to follow on from this with the following deduction. Either these people were picked to be contacted by the spacemen for just those characteristics that distinguish them from the plain man, or they belong to that group of hoaxers and self-deluded persons we have discussed above. If in addition to this semantic evidence there are doubts engendered by the internal facts of the story appearing suspicious, then we are justified, I feel, in writing off the account as a hoax.

For the reasons stated at the beginning of this piece, I feel that this sort of analysis, conducted by someone who is open-minded and prepared to work on the supposition that the latest astronomical evidence on the surface conditions of the planets is to be preferred, as a yardstick, to the vapourings of suspected liars, is the only way we have of weeding out the trash from the valid evidence on this most important aspect of the subject.

Space gremlins?

Strange things have been happening in some of America's space vehicles and puzzled scientists can give only one explanation: there must be gremlins up there. Experts at a satellite conference in Blacksburg, Virginia, this week were asked about these odd happenings. Lights on the ANNA goetic sphere resumed flashing after months of inactivity;

Blinking beacons on the Fire-fly satellite began fading last year and finally stopped. The beacons mysteriously reappeared this week. Telstar 2 ceased transmitting on July 17. Last Monday it came back to life. The first Telstar also recovered

by itself after going out of action. Power in the Venus-bound Mariner spacecraft cut off after it had apparently been struck by a meteorite—and then suddenly returned.

Commenting on the ANNA mystery, Mr. Richard Kershner, of the Applied Physics Laboratory of Johns Hopkins University, which developed the satellite, said: "We have no explanation of the lights coming back on. We don't like to believe in space gremlins, but we've reached the point where that's as good an explanation as any."

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