

19. Sundry Objectionable Facts

Most of us dislike having to change our opinions. So, while facts are facts, objectionable ones are often deliberately misinterpreted.

It will by now be obvious to anyone that facts such as those already given, even if scattered piecemeal through thousands of outlets and dozens of countries during more than a hundred years, could not fail to evoke some response. Nor have they. Starting in 1920, they have produced violent reactions.

Though the story as a whole gained immediate popularity, the reaction came primarily from the ranks of science, and notably from zoologists. It was highly skeptical; and, in many cases quite violent. Besides being dull, most professional skeptics are insufferably conceited, and in this affair have never even bothered to collect the facts or examine them properly. As is their wont they made positive statements, and before we go any further, we must examine these because they form a thick overlay of inaccuracy, illogicality, and illusion which, if not exposed and analyzed, will distort any firm conclusions you may wish to draw from the actual facts.

The pronouncements of most of the scientific skeptics and "experts" are not caused exclusively by boneheadedness on the part of those who make them; some are deliberately misleading and designed to promote further skepticism, without any regard for truth. In the case of ABSMs, a whole gamut of factors conveniently [for them] combine to promote skepticism in any case, and many of these are very fundamental. Some are downright objectionable, but they cannot simply be brushed aside on this account. They exist, and they lie at the very core of the whole matter. Some of these factors may at

first appear to have little bearing on ABSMery but, assembled, they constitute a massive barrier to progress in the search and to any proper appreciation of its import by those who aren't in the know. I will put it this way.

Almost every time you open a newspaper you will find without much effort some crazy item that sounds not only odd but often illogical. Occasionally this is a lead story, but more often it is a filler. You read it and pass on; sometimes you go back and read it again and with an increasing sense of annoyance. Yet, we are for the most part pretty immune to such items, and have developed a habit of regarding them as just examples of irresponsible reporting. They amuse; and, if one does not take them too seriously, they are predominantly harmless. However, in some instances they are particularly aggravating because of their very persistence. These are the old chestnuts that, indeed, usually crop up in what is called "The Silly Season."

Among such are the matters of large unknown animals in lakes or the sea, commonly called "sea serpents" in the past, but now somewhat more properly sea monsters; children brought up by wolves; things called poltergeists that allegedly throw plates about; and the perennial UFOs or more popularly "Flying Saucers." Some years ago the magazine *Science Service* ran an article giving advice to science writers, in which was included a long list of "don'ts" and of subjects to avoid. This included the above items and a lot of other items that we all know; some truly silly and others just annoying. The editor of this article warned against dealing with these subjects on the grounds that they had all been *finally* and *utterly* discredited by "science."

This now famous list was compiled by Edwin E. Slosson, Director of *Science Service* and published on July 1, 1950. It states categorically that, among other items which are phony, and therefore taboo for all professional science writers, there are: "Seeds that grow after more than 300 years; especially that old chestnut about wheat in mummy cases." Wheat found in canopic jars [and placed therein in 1200 B.C.] has now been germinated on several occasions, but found, perhaps

rather disappointingly, to be nothing else than the lowest possible grade wheat, still grown by the fellahin in the Nile Valley. Further to this, seeds of the Flowering Lotus dug from a swamp near Pekin in North China, were germinated in the hothouse of Kew Gardens in London, and bloomed. This species of plant is not found today growing nearer Pekin than north Assam—a distance of 1500 miles away. The swamp from which these seeds were taken was originally believed to be some 500 years old. However, radio-carbon dating of other material taken from it, done in Japan, indicates that its lower layers, at least, are 24,000 years old. The seeds were in these layers and could be up to 40,000 years old! In this list of “don’ts” appears our poor, original ABSM.

Included also are some matters that either lie, or appear at present to lie, outside our logic. However, there are many, like ABSMs, that are quite logical and substantial, so that they ought to be open to physical examination and thus, ultimately, be obtainable. These, too, are nonetheless of a wide variety of likelihood in point of fact; by which I mean, some sound frankly very unlikely in the light of what we *do* know, while others seem perfectly feasible, if not probable, for the same reason. Unfortunately, science does not any longer make this distinction, but prefers to lump them all together, as in this article, and write them all off as *impossible*. This is not only silly, because, as time has shown it may prove to be wrong; it is *unscientific*.

Science is defined in the dictionaries as the pursuit of the unknown; yet science today is coming more and more to insist that it not be bothered with this, and it has reached a point where anything that is *not* already known is frowned upon. At the same time, there is a distinct tendency for science, per se, to become synonymous with technology, while the title *scientist* is becoming a class distinction founded on the occupation of the employer of the individual concerned. Thus, anybody who is not employed in or by very certain specific categories of organizations, whatever be his or her education, training, experience, and even published works, is referred to, and often scathingly so, as “an amateur.”

Building radio sets or milking cows is not science; it is technology and technologists are manipulators. They are trained to do certain things and are conditioned to tackle only one thing at a time, preferring to be given a straight yes-or-no problem and be left to worry it out. If you suggest that they try to find but one correct answer out of many [or an infinity] of possibilities, their invariable answer is "If I had to investigate every crackpot theory that comes along, I'd never get any work done." Most regrettably, scientists today are tending to agree with the technologists in that they just don't want to be bothered with anything new that requires any novel effort or new thinking. There is also an extension of this attitude which denies even the possible existence of anything to which an answer has not already been given. Thus, all "unpleasantnesses," especially if brought up by the press or suggested by an "amateur" are often not just ignored but held up to ridicule as examples of dangerous practices.

One does not like to take "science" to task in this or any other way; and it is regrettable to have to treat it as if it were a sort of cult, but the state of affairs has become so irrational by the deliberate design of scientists themselves that this cannot be avoided. True scientists there are aplenty, but most of them appear to be so cowed by the system and its self-appointed hierarchy—which, I also regret to have to point out, is founded on a purely economic basis today—that they very seldom dare to speak out or give either their own or any truly scientific opinions. Then again, a not inconsiderable percentage of persons called or calling themselves scientists prove, on proper investigation, not to have any formal scientific training at all. Most regrettable of all, I have to state flatly that the percentage is vastly higher in this respect in the United States than in any other country. If anybody wishes to question this statement, let them go through any standard reference work in their public library, that will list the formal academic recognitions of each individual. From this, it will be discovered that a rather small percentage of those in directorial or other responsible positions in such institutions—such as museums and zoos—have any such [save

for "honorary degrees," which are not academic recognition]. At the same time, it will be found that there is no record of any practical scientific experience on their part either.

The result is that everybody other than this hierarchy is either overawed or beaten into submission by it, and is, as often as not, held up to ridicule to boot. The press meanwhile, trained to a high degree of skepticism for very good reasons, dares not make a decision on its own; runs to what it thinks is, or what it has been told is, *Science* for answers; and it publicizes these pronouncements quite unthinkingly. As a result, the public is increasingly less well informed on many vital matters and a most dangerous situation is being created generally—a situation that may very well lose us our position in the modern world.

The obvious and invariable question asked by the layman at this stage, is *what* scientists or "experts"? This is a difficult if not impossible question to answer but not for fear of giving offense. The most that can be said is that they were mostly if not all, professional [allegedly] zoologists, and most of them British for the simple reason that ABSMery was until quite recently a purely British affair. Then again, the press very seldom named those "experts" whom they quoted; again for the simple reason that said experts either refused permission for them to do so or were acting as spokesmen for corporate institutions or official organizations and were not therefore *permitted* to do so. Most of the criticism of these pronouncements [which were themselves all highly critical] was directed at the British Museum (Natural History), as being the official mouthpiece of zoology in Britain; but, although that institution always "officially" denied the possibility of there being ABSMs, this did not perhaps reflect the real opinions of all its professional staff. Then there is another aspect to this.

Actually, almost no professionally trained or professionally employed scientists have published on the subject—even critically. This may not be so much evidence of caution as an indication that they wholly and almost universally considered the matter so impossible as not to be worthy of mention in

print. Apart from Elwes' brief notice in the Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London, I don't really know of any mention in British journals. The Hollanders in the Indies did so publish; and, of course, the Russians, Mongolians, and Chinese have issued quite a body of material. There have been others in some countries who have made passing references in their books; works that may be regarded as textbooks; but these are almost, one and all, mere references to the existence of the "problem."

Despite the above, and apart from those scientists whose assistance I acknowledged at the beginning of this book, there have always been some—and this number is increasing every year—who have taken an unbiased view of the matter and who have not denied it in toto. At the same time, not even these people would say so to the press, so that the latter fraternity has always had to fall back on the accepted but misleading term "experts say . . ." The greatest trouble arising from this situation has been that any "Tom, Dick, or Harry," trained or working scientist or not, has been able to say almost anything he likes, off the record; even speaking for an institution, provided what he said was in accord with the agreed or expressed policy of that institution. Thus, it is the over-all attitude of the sciences [and notably zoology] that is to blame and at fault. Science may criticize, but if it positively denies anything, it should at least state a case *and* give valid [scientific] reasons for this. This it has not done; and, worse, it has never really reviewed or investigated the facts, the alleged facts, or even the reports.

As an example, witness the real shock sustained by the lay public on the announcement of the Sputnik I launching. This was only the beginning; Lunik I, only a reminder; the Coelacanth fish, a mere hint. Much worse is to come; and we may expect it from all angles and at an increasing tempo. Another example, exactly comparable to the Coelacanth, but of much greater human potentiality, is that of ABSMs. This is, moreover, a rather special case.

A landing by a UFO, piloted by some super-intelligent entity from some other celestial body, would seriously jolt our

whole world; but to get one of our own ancestors, thought to have been extinct for thousands of years, for study, would have almost as profound effects. If, moreover, that creature turned out to be so intermediate in character and characteristics between man and beast as to be ineligible for either class, it would have even profounder effects—at least at first—than the arrival from space of thinking creatures of an entirely different origin and culture, because it would touch what is perhaps the rawest spot in our consciousness. This is our religious belief.

Let us not forget that not so many years ago a thinking man was persecuted and physically attacked for having so much as taught the Theory of Evolution and by inference our kinship with the apes, other primates, and lower animals. *Man*, more than one Holy Writ states categorically, is made in the image of God, whereas “the animals” are not. What therefore are you going to do with a living creature that not even a scientist can say is either one or the other, specifically and definitely? Quite apart from the legal, ethical, and social problems involved—such as whether he [or it] has a vote and other citizens’ rights, whether shooting it is murder or hunting, and whether you lock it up in a cage or invite it in for afternoon tea—you have to face the much more basic question as to whether it is in the image of God or not; and, if it is, *what* image of *what* god, and what the latter’s qualities may be. Further, if it stands half—or anyway between us and the other mammals, are we to believe Holy Writ or Charles Darwin?*

The matter of ABSMs, while utterly intriguing is, also perhaps more than any other enigma, open to another very human sentiment; namely, that an unsolved mystery is much preferable to a solved one. As I have threaded my sometimes weary way through the maze of facts about this business for over a quarter of a century, I have often wondered, and sometimes with a real jolt, whether some of its greatest protagonists *really* want the matter solved or one of the creatures caught. It seems that people will go just so far, but the

* See Vercors’ splendid book, *You Shall Know Them*.

moment they see any real possibility of a solution, they find some subconscious excuse to draw back.

All these factors combine to create a very widespread and united front for the skeptics in this business. But they are not the only ones. There is still pure ignorance; and by this I do not mean of the scientific variety, but of a perfectly legitimate nature. In order to avoid giving offense, I should stress that just because most of us can't build a television set, it is no indication that we are uneducated. It is nevertheless an example of "ignorance" on our part. Nobody expects anybody to know everything, and nobody *can* know everything, but this puts upon all of us a limit as to what we are qualified to talk about. What is more, even specialists can hardly any longer be expected to know the whole of their own field. In addition, there is a very great deal more to be learned about everything than is at present known, and this applies to our earth as much as to anything else. In fact, we really know astonishingly little about the latter (see Chapter 18). Finally, there is, today, still another bugbear; namely, the compartmentalization of knowledge.

To put it crudely, very few specialists in one field know even the rudiments of any other, although, among "experts," there is a sad tendency to act as if they do. The rift is not just between, say, the physical and the biological sciences. My own speciality happens to bridge botany and zoology, and I am constantly and consistently unable to discuss it with either zoologists or botanists, simply because a zoologist who takes any botanical matters under consideration is an extreme rarity, while the average botanist finds no use for animals except as a minor ecological factor. The amount of plain "ignorance" even among the most learned is quite terrifying, though the truly learned are always the first to admit this. We have no quarrel with the learned nor with the true scientist: our clash is with these so-called "experts."

This is itself a thoroughly loose term, and the whole concept of "expertism" is based on false premises. You can be a specialist in several things, but you cannot really be an expert in anything; and when someone says he is—or he is said

to be, in some matter, and particularly a matter the person concerned denies exists—it is manifest that something is very wrong. The press is principally to blame for the widespread use of this cliché and it is a very dangerous procedure to which the public should be alerted. The very word should be suspect and, if used at all, should be fully qualified. Thus, if somebody says he is an "expert" in the matter of ABSMs he is a liar; if others say that he is an expert on anything, it is incumbent upon them to state just why they say so; and this entails stating in just what fields he may have been trained and have specialized. In the ABSM case, such specialists as mountaineers and hunters do not qualify to pronounce upon the matter, apart from making straightforward factual reports which is everybody's [and anybody's] prerogative. Further, even if a zoologist has specialized in the known animal life of, say, the eastern Himalayas, it does not qualify him to make statements about the extinct sub-hominid Pithecanthropines of the other parts of the Orient; though, as a zoologist, he ought to display sounder judgment on such matters than, for instance, a botanist.

We come then to still another hurdle. This is a very odd one indeed. In some respects it seems illogical but it is nonetheless a fact, as the press, above all others, can attest. Explanation of it is often attempted on psychological grounds or by a general appeal to the fallibility of human nature. Personally, I have always felt that this is avoiding the main issue and is nothing more than an intellectual "out." I refer to the extraordinary manner in which strange, odd, and especially inexplicable happenings gang up, both in time and space. To try and explain what I am talking about let me attempt a purely hypothetical case.

Let us suppose that some county newspaper reports the incidence of innumerable apparently spontaneous fires breaking out in some isolated farmhouse. If the reports persist, some larger newspaper may send a reporter. Arriving in the area, he may stumble upon some grotesque local political situation. Then, something like a murder may take place, involving still another story of, say, alleged witchcraft. Then the funsters

get in the act and pull some incredible stunt that starts the local constabulary off on a wild-goose chase. But, if the outsider persists, he will, it seems, almost invariably turn up something else again, quite unrelated to any of the previous shenanigans, and probably quite unknown to or even suspected by the local inhabitants. Ask any reporter. For the life of me I cannot name one single news-story that I have ever been on that, starting with an oddity, did not bring to light half a dozen other enigmas and a similar quota of hoaxes, accidents, and other red herrings.

When we come, therefore, to examine our principal matter on hand, and its reception by public, press, technology, and science, we must bear in mind that it offers an extraordinary range of possibilities for intelligent skepticism, and that there is much legitimate reason for plain, honest people to be skeptical. However, the scientific skeptics have gone too far and too fast, so that in the end they have become frankly asinine and brought into existence a powerful counterforce. This is a solid skepticism of the scientific skeptics themselves, now so widespread and potent that anybody criticizing any aspect of the business immediately becomes suspect himself. This is a healthy but also a dangerous development.

As I tried to make clear in my brief introductory history of ABSMery, it was the coining of the phrase "*abominable snowman*" that first brought this matter out of the seclusion of what was till then regarded as native folklore and made it front-page news. There had been hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of strange and bizarre tales told before that time by travelers of every ilk ever since prehistoric days but few had ever made "news"; while news dissemination itself had previously been slow, ponderous, and was in no way as effective then as it is today. The scientific world had really never been called upon to face a public outcry of these dimensions and urgency, while they had always before had not only the press, but the public on their side in coping with unwanted and awkward items. Never before 1920 had the public clamored so insistently for an explanation of what was still then only a "newspaper story"; and never before had

the originator of the story held a position quite like that of Colonel Howard-Bury who, to boot, was on a mission of deadly seriousness to his country. The attack on Mt. Everest and its conquest was a prestige matter to the British; it had official blessing; and, it was of enormous popular appeal. Persons in charge of it simply could not be ignored.

The result was that those zoologists to whom the press applied for guidance and an answer to the new riddle responded more or less out of habit and to form. They were frankly unaware of the potential of this business and seemed to have thought that it could be brushed aside like the other objectionable matters that were brought to it from time to time. They simply denied it. This is to say that, without any consideration at all, they glibly announced that it was a lie.

This was a staggering thing to do and one that could only have been possible in a hierarchical realm, conditioned to issue categorical pronouncements that would not, or were deemed should not, be questioned. But they had forgotten several new factors already in existence, such as the Everest business and the new-found power of the press. They also seem not to have realized the growth of real skepticism among the public. Even the press was a bit staggered by these denouncements of a popular hero.

Accused, in turn, of being liars themselves, those who had pontificated immediately either retracted or elaborated their previous statements, they came up with two alternatives. Either, they said, the whole thing was a case of mistaken identity by somebody, however worthy in other fields, but who was not a trained zoologist and who therefore could not be expected to know what he saw or interpret correctly anything of a zoological nature; or, they said, it was a hoax. There was not very much anybody could do about the first suggestion because it cannot be denied; while there was much evidence that untrained personnel did in fact often make mistakes in identifying things in other specialized fields. It was not till later that it was pointed out that an experienced mountaineer is more likely to interpret correctly what he sees in mountains—where seeing is notoriously unreliable—than a

zoologist who has never been on a mountain; just as a sea captain is more likely to know what he sees in the sea than any landlubber. [Moreover, it was then observed, that the seaman had better be able to do so, or ocean travel should be abandoned until he did, for the safety of ships depends wholly upon their captains' ability in this respect: and, if they are going to start mistaking bits of seaweed, floating logs, or deflated Navy blimps for sea monsters, they are not going to be able to pick up marker buoys, or even to make port.] There are lots of people and categories of people, much better qualified to identify animals in the field than zoologists, and especially that breed of the latter who made these particular pronouncements, most all of whom had spent their lives in museums! The suggestion of a hoax presented quite other possibilities.

The idea that this whole thing might be of such a nature is naturally both intriguing and satisfying to the average person, because it explains something unpleasant and "explains away" many things that are highly objectionable. The only aggravating feature to it is that the confounded things themselves persist in cropping up again and again and from ever wider sources when, one would have supposed, the whole matter had been settled once and for all. The trouble is that very few have examined the premises of the hoax theory carefully. Let us analyze this idea.

First, if the whole thing is a hoax, it must be the oldest one in history because exactly the same things have been reported by Western Europeans since at least the mid-15th century (see Chapter 14). Second, they, or it, must be the product or products of a thoroughly international organization, because they have appeared on five continents throughout the ages. Third, the organizers must have had a positively enormous amount of money at their disposal at all times, because all the concrete evidence has turned up not only in the most out-of-the-way places, but almost precisely where the toughest explorers on the one hand and the most expensive oil companies on the other have either not previously been, or where they have found it almost impossible to go. Fourth, their or-

ganization must surpass in security techniques anything ever devised by any other organization, private or public, because not one iota of suspicion, let alone evidence of, their existence has ever turned up or even been claimed. Fifth, their operatives must, throughout the centuries, have been chosen and trained with a skill that is really quite unbelievable, for they have managed to get into the most impossible places and have done things there, persistently and without ever being seen even by the locals, with such devilish cleverness as defies our imagination. How, for instance, did they manage to lay out a set of bipedal foot-tracks in fresh snow just before Messrs. Howard-Bury, Shipton, *et alii*, together with the best local Sherpa mountaineers happened, by mistake, to turn aside up a certain pass, and to select a stretch of territory so rugged and difficult that even the Sherpas gasped in admiration at their mountaineering skill. This is all odd enough, but I have a further parenthetical question.

Why?

To manufacture a lot of fossils to fool a professorial pedant is one thing, but to pull a hoax, world-wide, for centuries, to fool nobody in particular is not only senseless and illogical, it is just plain fantasy. The hoax theory is, in fact, so stupid that it hardly warrants mention, and when it is presented, as by Messrs. Peissel and Thioller (see *Argosy*) as being a deliberate conspiracy to promote "tourist" trade on the part of a scattered bunch of Buddhist monks in Nepal, it becomes far more laughable than the real story itself.

When the public insisted that the thing was *not* a lie, and the simplest logic showed that it was not a hoax, the zoologists resorted to what was to them "Holy Writ," and they trundled out their biggest intellectual guns to try and prove it. Since the tracks existed, as they now had to admit, they stated that the whole thing was perfectly normal, and in no way odd, being no more than cases of mistaken identity. They then proceeded solemnly to recount the list of animals known to exist in and around the upper Himalaya and [to be on the safe side] chose a goodly selection of them as being the makers of the tracks. These included the Giant Panda [which

is not found within a thousand miles], outsized Gray Wolves, certain larger species of Langur Monkeys, the Snub-nosed Monkey (*Rhinopithecus*), the Snow Leopard, and even some "large bird" [type unspecified] but, above all, a creature they called the Isabelline Bear. This is a very mysterious creature itself, as was explained in Chapter 2.

Much of the world "bought" the bear theory and there is an endless literature on the subject, most of it absolutely not worth reading, since none of the writers seem ever to have taken an impression of any bear's tracks nor even have bothered to look in any of half a hundred books [some published up to 50 years ago] that give drawings, measurements, and even excellent photographs of such things. ABSM tracks are *not* bear tracks. Nor are they those of any of the other animals listed above and suggested by the skeptics. I need not go further into this irksome business; and you may refer for further information to Appendix B. Since I am not among those who affirm that the average intelligence of the citizen of this country is that of a 12-year-old, and since I have the profoundest respect for the intelligence and more so the perspicacity of 12-year-olds in any case, wherever they were born; and, furthermore, since I believe that any child of much less age can tell the track of an eagle or a monkey from that of a man, I refuse to further insult anyone's intelligence. But, believe it or not, this is just exactly what the skeptics did. It is one of the most deplorable bits of chicanery that I know of ever perpetrated on the public in the name of science.

After Eric Shipton published his photographs of ABSM tracks in 1951, none other than the British Museum (Natural History) mounted a large exhibit in the main hall of their building in London, and advertised the fact that they had done so. This exhibit showed pictures and casts of Mr. Shipton's discovery alongside casts and photographs of bear tracks and those made by Langur Monkeys and then had the brazen effrontery to state that these proved that the ABSM tracks were those of bears—"or monkeys," as they neatly put it! This was outright deception, and not just a foolish prank or due to a lack of knowledge. The whole exhibit was designed spe-

cifically to debunk Mr. Shipton's findings and the whole ABSM business, but, so completely out of touch with reality were those who perpetrated this hoax that they apparently really thought that their word was enough to fool the public. One can hardly credit such stupidity, let alone the duplicity of anybody who would place the casts of a bear, a man, a langur, and an ABSM [especially Shipton's enormous and most unusual find] alongside each other, and then try and tell the public that these *proved* that the last was a bear—let alone “either a bear *or* a monkey.” What in the name of anything do such people think—or don't they? Personally, I cannot believe that it was just stupidity and simple lack of education. The British Museum is administered as a part of the British Civil Service and for all that may be said of that organization, it is certainly not stupid. Mistakes it may make, but to attempt a *hoax* of this nature—and that is exactly what it was—is not in their book. The Empire would have collapsed long before that time if it had been; and, besides, the British public is as sane as any other.

This most disgraceful of all hoaxes backfired. It was virtually the end of the skeptics, for even the press overcame its inverted scruples, and howled. It marked a turning point in the history of ABSMery, just as important as Colonel Howard-Bury's telegram in 1920 and the decision of the Soviet Government to investigate the matter in 1958. In fact, this really ended the regime of the skeptics and opened the field to intelligent appraisal by honest men. From then on, people demanded the facts and were no longer interested in the mouthings of “experts” or the tricks of officialdom. So, I now turn to a final appraisal of those facts.