

Does Siberia hold the proof?

by DEREK DEMPSTER

In the November-December 1961 issue of the *Flying Saucer Review* P. F. Sharp declared that the most unambiguous indication of a visit to Earth by space-travellers would be the discovery of an artifact out of its geological context. He also referred to the enigma of the Siberian 'meteorite' of 1908 nuclear-powered space ship. Derek Dempster, first editor of the *Review*, now surveys the history of this 'meteorite' and reports the latest news of the subject from Russia.

IT has always seemed to me that the allegorical tale of Snow White and the seven dwarfs has a modern parallel in the history of flying saucers. You have Snow White as the flying saucer protected by seven virtues (or truth), the jealous step-mother who puts Snow White to sleep as the irrational scientist, the dense forest as the lunatic fringe, the official attitude and ridicule, and Prince Charming as the honest seeker undeterred by obstacles.

Fortunately there are plenty of Princes Charming hacking their way through the foliage, and an increasing number of men of science penetrating the forest along tracks already cut. Snow White, it seems, may soon be found and officially pronounced real—or (and let's be prepared for it) bunk!

But bunk it is unlikely to be, for there are signs in the West and behind the Iron Curtain that the arguments are swinging in favour of the reality of visitors from other worlds.

Precisely when this swing began is extremely difficult to assess. But I would say—not forgetting that many have secretly harboured belief in extra-terrestrial intelligence for years—that the rot set in to infect the forest when the Russian astro-physicist Shklovski put forward the theory that the moons of Mars, Phobos and Deimos were artificial and that they were put into orbit by a long extinct civilisation.

He came to this conclusion after noting that the innermost of the twin satellites, Phobos, was slowing down, whereas Deimos was not; and that this slowing down could be accounted for only by assuming that it was light and hollow and

subject to the resistance of the red planet's tenuous atmosphere. As there is no such thing as a hollow heavenly body, the moons of Mars had to be artificial. Therefore, argued Shklovski, they were built by creatures endowed with intelligence and powers of reasoning.

Although they presented Shklovski's theories seriously at the 10th International Astronautics Congress in London in 1959, the Soviet delegation—among them Professor Leonid Sedov—later changed their tune; Shklovski, they told me, was not to be taken seriously.

American speculation, too

Why this sudden change in attitude? If Shklovski's theories were prepared for presentation at an International Congress, they could not have been regarded in any but a serious light at the outset. Or is it that the Russians delight in leg-pulling? I don't think so, for the curious behaviour of the Martian inner satellite has been observed by American astronomers whose speculations seem to have followed Shklovski's.

Unfortunately for the professional sceptics, Shklovski has not been forgotten. His conclusions have registered and set many on the path of speculation—speculation which has since been further excited by another Soviet citizen, Dr. Yuri Rall.

Writing in *Nedelya*, a supplement of the government newspaper *Izvestia*, last year*, Dr. Rall said: "There are about 150,000,000,000 stars in our galaxy, and astronomers believe that

* See FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, Sept.-Oct., 1961.

one in a million of the stars has a planet on which conditions are suitable for the evolution of life. So there may be life on 150,000 planets.

"Biological factors, he went on to say, had persuaded him that the inhabitants of other planets did not take forms science fiction writers liked to imagine.

"An intelligent inhabitant of remote planets is sure to have a highly organised nervous system (comparable to the human brain) and a skull to protect it against accidental damage. Since there is a force of gravitation on any planet, the brain must be located in a special part of the body, free from excessive strain. Another surmise is that intelligent beings on other planets must move in space and consequently must have symmetrical limbs and organs of sense." Dr. Rall concluded by writing: "The law of unity of physiological functions and the most economical adaptation to environment must inevitably lead to a similarity in principle of higher organisms in the universe."

It can be accepted generally, therefore, that among those of us who bother to think at all, doubts about the existence of intelligent life elsewhere are no longer entertained. We are beginning to see the wood from the trees. But the undergrowth is still thick.

Having got so far, there can be no doubt that of those who accept this fact, a large proportion, strengthened by man's successes in orbit, are prepared openly or secretly to believe that beings from other worlds have succeeded in doing precisely what we are trying to do—to conquer space and explore neighbour worlds.

A clash of opinion

Officially, however, visitations from other worlds are not acceptable. But in the light of recent revelations, the official line can no longer hang together—and more and more people are realising it. They are finding it impossible to ignore the clashes of opinion on the origins of the Tungus "meteorite," the evidence presented by honest men and true like Father Gill in Papua, and the opinions of top military personalities like General Chassin, until recently General Air Defence Co-ordinator, Allied Air Forces, Central Europe (N.A.T.O.).

I find it appropriate at this juncture to quote the *New Scientist* for February 2, 1961. "Was it a comet that hit Siberia?" asks the magazine.

"More than half of our fast-moving century ago," said the paper, "on June 30, 1908, to be precise, a light, travelling at great speed across the sky, was reported from various parts of the world, and a strong earth tremor was recorded by several seismic observation stations. . . . A few

days later fine dust was observed in the higher layers of the atmosphere over Europe, as far west as Ireland and extending in latitude to the south of France, giving a continuous spectrum, and noticeably increasing the glow of the night sky. At last it looks as if the true nature of the event is going to be settled once and for all.

"The centre of the disturbance was calculated to be somewhere in an uninhabited region of Siberia. Speculation about the nature of the occurrence was rife for a considerable period, until an expedition sent to the area found a huge crater surrounded by many square miles of outward-leaning trees apparently knocked sideways in varying degrees by a shock wave. The expedition brought back some iron-containing fragments of the type found near areas of reported meteorite falls. The cause of the event was then assumed to be a meteorite, the largest reported, and was named the Tungus meteorite after its location.

"In recent years this conclusion came to be questioned, and speculation about the event was revived, because a Soviet expedition reported that there appeared to be no trace of any further meteorite fragments such as could be expected from a catastrophe capable of producing such a vast crater.

"More expeditions were sent out, and many new theories were put forward, including a fantastic supposition about a cosmic ship with nuclear propulsion from outer space exploding a few miles above the Earth and contaminating the surroundings with radioactivity.

"The theories were aired in various scientific and popular-science journals, until Professor E. L. Krinov, chairman of the Meteorite Committee of the Academy of Sciences' Astronomical Council, in *Priroda* some months ago, stated authoritatively that the so-called Tungus meteorite was actually the main portion of a comet which hit Earth. After that the expression of other theories seemed to disappear from the pages of the journals.

"Now," continued the *New Scientist*, "*Vestnik*, an official journal of the Academy of Sciences, has published a joint article by Krinov and Academician V. G. Fensekov, one of the most prominent astrophysicists and vice-chairman of the Astronomical Council, upholding the opinion that 'it can be regarded as definite' that the 1908 event was the impact of a comet. It was travelling at great speed in the direction opposite to that of the Sun, and the atmospheric dust observed over extensive regions west of the impact was the comet's disintegrating tail. In the opinion of the Soviet scientists this theory is supported not only

by the ascertained speed and direction of the intruding body, but also by the fact that no meteorite fragments had been found, only some minute magnetic and silicate balls, 30-40 microns† in diameter, such as are assumed to be produced by the melting of meteorite surfaces by atmospheric friction.

"In order to reach a definitive scientific conclusion the Presidium of the Soviet Academy of Sciences has approved the mounting of an extensive and comprehensive expedition this coming summer, under the general guidance of its Meteorite Committee. The Moscow Institute of Geodesy, Aerial Photography and Cartography is first going to make a complete aerial photographic survey of the area, and the Ministry of Geology, as well as a number of Academy Institutes, are going to participate in this research task, either directly in the expedition or by processing its findings afterwards. These are the Institutes of Geochemistry, Analytical Chemistry, Terrestrial Physics, Chemical Physics, Soil Research, Permafrost and Botany, and also the Main Botanical Garden."

Three facts

Three interesting facts emerge from this report. It refers to an enormous crater; it ignores eye-witness accounts and it makes no reference to trees felled outside the blast area.

I have examined an aerial photograph of the centre of impact and can find no sign of a crater! What the picture does show, however, is hundreds of dead trees flattened outwards from the centre, rather like the spokes of a giant wheel. The "hub" is comparatively small.

Eye-witness reports can be accepted only to a certain degree, but what the inhabitants of the remote Tungus area had to say is interesting. The object glowed alternately bright and dull as it fell. As for the trees outside the main area of devastation, many lay flat as though they had been struck from above at regular intervals on the object's approach course of several miles.

What does all this suggest? To begin with, that the absence of a crater points to an explosion above the ground. Secondly, that the bright glow,

dull glow cycle described by the locals ties in with the dead trees found at regular intervals along the approach path. I may be completely wrong, but does not this point to an intelligent attempt to avert disaster—to put on the brakes before the object blew up?

The proper analysis of the discoveries made by this year's expedition to Tungus will obviously take time, and one cannot expect a report to be published until well into the New Year. I have a strange, and perhaps unwarranted, inkling, however, that Soviet scientists may have gone home to Moscow with some startling evidence showing the Tungus meteorite to be neither meteorite nor comet.

The Russian attitude

Gordon W. Creighton has given readers an excellent assessment of the Russian attitude to extra-terrestrial life in previous issues of *FLYING SAUCER REVIEW*. This is positively affirmative and since, as he pointed out in the November-December issue, there is no room in the Soviet Union for individual whimsy or the private view, the results of the Tungus expedition may have far-reaching repercussions on the world attitude to visitors from outer space. Could the recent dismissal of Professor Alla Masevich, vice-chairman of the Astronomical Council of the U.S.S.R., be a pointer? It was she who replied to a questioner: "I have never heard of flying saucers in my country. Nobody knows them."

The Papuan visitations witnessed by Father Gill and many others have been so well documented by the Rev. N. E. G. Cruttwell that there is no need to reiterate them here. Suffice it to say that these honest churchmen have driven the wedge hard into the crack in the stubborn wall of the official attitude.

General Chassin has sent the wedge even deeper. And the forest surrounding "Snow White" will all the sooner be destroyed if those who will not be blinded by orthodoxy and who, above all, want to see truth triumphant, will join the great crusade of common sense the General has suggested.

But whether the crusade gets into its stride or not, it seems to me that the reality of "Snow White" will soon be proved.

† A micron is the millionth part of a metre.