

NEW ZEALAND SKEPTIC

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Satanic Panic in Christchurch

by Jenny Barnett and Michael Hill

There is a worldwide epidemic of satanic child abuse allegations. Are they true? Has satanic child abuse happened here in New Zealand?

The most extensive child sex abuse case to be heard in a New Zealand court was the Christchurch Civic Creche affair. Nor was this an ordinary sexual abuse case, for throughout the lengthy period of investigation and the initial depositions hearings, bizarre claims of ritual sexual abuse were made. There were several similarities between this case and a sexual abuse case which had first surfaced in the US ten years earlier in 1983 — the highly publicised McMartin preschool case in Los Angeles — which also dealt with claims of ritual sexual abuse. In both cases, claims were made of the existence of child pornography networks and satanic conspiracy.

Although New Zealand has frequently been judged a highly secularised society, claims of Satanism were widely accepted during the initial investigation into the Christchurch creche

case, and were repeated during the depositions hearings. Indeed, the whole affair led to a moral panic concerning child sexual abuse which later spread throughout the country.

It is important to stress that a moral panic is not an entirely spontaneous public reaction to a perceived problem such as child sexual abuse. It is also a consciously planned course of action which involves one or a number of different interest

groups. Panics concerned with sexual abuse cases in general often involve groups such as fundamentalist Christians, mental health professionals, social workers, law enforcement officers, and the media.

The events which led to this particular "satanic panic" in Christchurch can be traced to Christian fundamentalist groups and the direct import from the United States of the satanic ritual abuse scenario.

The Satanism scare in the United States gained momentum during the 1980s, in the aftermath of the religious cult scare of the 1970s. Christian fundamentalist interests — especially groups which subscribed to the belief that the "end time" had arrived and that satanic ⇒ p3

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The Easy Conclusion

In the years since the Skeptics' beginnings in 1985 we've seen paranormal and pseudoscientific fads come and go. The Shroud of Turin was big back then, till carbon dating did it in (except in the minds of the hard-core Shroud Crowd, who now claim that rising from the dead involves an emission of neutrons which increases the atomic weight of the carbon in your winding cloth). Uri Geller is more feeble than ever, UFO sightings are in decline, and Bigfoot has made himself even scarcer than usual. But quackery in the name of "alternative" medicine still flourishes, and cold readers (such as the lamentable James Byrne) periodically meander on stage.

However, there haven't been any significant new trends in pseudoscience until the recent arrival of False Memory Syndrome (see reprint, "The New Victims of Sex Abuse," p. 12). In a sense, this fad was a disaster waiting to happen. In the 1950s, hypnotic regression was used to help people discover their past lives. Harmless, perhaps, and even comfort for someone to learn of having once been a rich courtesan in Atlantis or, better still, a Chinese Empress (but oh those aching feet!). In the 1980s, this same structure of therapeutic hypnosis was being used to help people remember how they were spirited to the planet Zork in a flying saucer in order to be subjected to medical procedures.

The sorry new development sets out from UFO abduction, but is much more sinister because it attaches itself to a demonstrably real social problem: sexual abuse. By incorporating the concept of hypnotic recovery of repressed memories into the current hysteria over sex abuse, the lives of thousands of families are being destroyed.

Consider a phone call I recently received. An articulate widow in her seventies, who with her husband raised five children, had seen my newspaper article on False Memory Syndrome and wanted to tell me her story. One of the children, a woman in her middle thirties, is a troubled soul who had been visiting a coun-

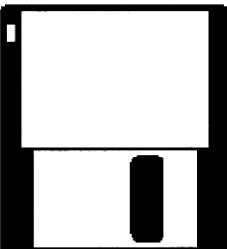
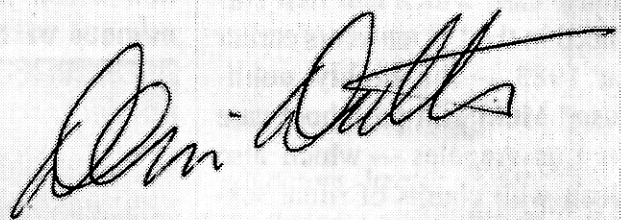
sellor for the last year. The daughter's therapy has "disclosed" that her mother and late father sexually abused her in her childhood. The abuse began before she was three (a remarkable memory to have, since the hardwiring for long-term memory doesn't even exist till after then). Her father had regularly raped her till she was seventeen. She had "forgotten" all this until just now.

Her brother says it's rubbish, and the mother is shattered, but the daughter fully believes it, having been manipulated by her therapist to confabulate pseudomemories. The daughter has now denied her mother access to the grandchildren. This distraught old woman, who knew nothing about FMS or that others have had the same thing happen to them, had been contemplating suicide. (Fortunately, I've been able to get her some competent help.)

Hers is not a unique case, and if something isn't done to bring the problem of FMS to public attention we will see many more cases in New Zealand. We're working on it.

This issue of the *Skeptic* is coming to you a few weeks late because the last two months have been among the busiest in our history. The spectacularly successful visit of James Randi, along with a very well covered annual conference have helped us to boost Skeptics membership to about 350. Thanks to everyone who helped in organising those events.

On a per capita basis, we are probably the strongest national Skeptics organisation in the world. It would be temptingly easy to conclude from this that New Zealanders are simply more sensible and intelligent than people elsewhere. So why argue? For once, we'll take the easy, tempting conclusion!



This is a floppy disc. If at all possible, please send articles on **IBM-compatible** disc in ASCII, Wordstar or Word Perfect formats, or email them (address at right). Discs will be returned if clearly labelled.

Please indicate publication and date of any clippings.

Contributions should be directed to:

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forces would be particularly strong during this period — were behind the moral panic which spread across the United States.

Additionally, some mental health professionals and law enforcement officers were prepared to disseminate the idea that Satanism was rife. Of these two groups, the former were often associated with adults who alleged that they were “survivors” of ritual sexual abuse.

Indeed, the origin of the modern Satanism scare can be traced to the earliest “survivor” account — the book *Michelle Remembers*, which was published in 1980 by Michelle Smith, co-authored by her therapist, later husband, Lawrence Pazder.

As the panic spread during the 1980s, the satanic scenario was broadened to incorporate such elements as large-scale child abduction, ritualistic abuse of children, human and animal sacrifice, and cannibalism.

Law enforcement officers, social workers, and mental health professionals provided the key secular network for spreading ideas of Satanism through their involvement in

seminars and workshops aimed at combatting the satanic menace.

It was in this manner that the anti-satanic movement spread to Britain later in the 1980s, and eventually to New Zealand. American fundamentalist Christians, presenting themselves as “experts” in the field of ritual child abuse, were invited to speak at social worker and police seminars. One such “expert” visited Christchurch in August 1991 and was reported as saying that “satanic ritual abuse posed as great a threat to children as sexual abuse” (*Christchurch Press*, 27 August 1991).

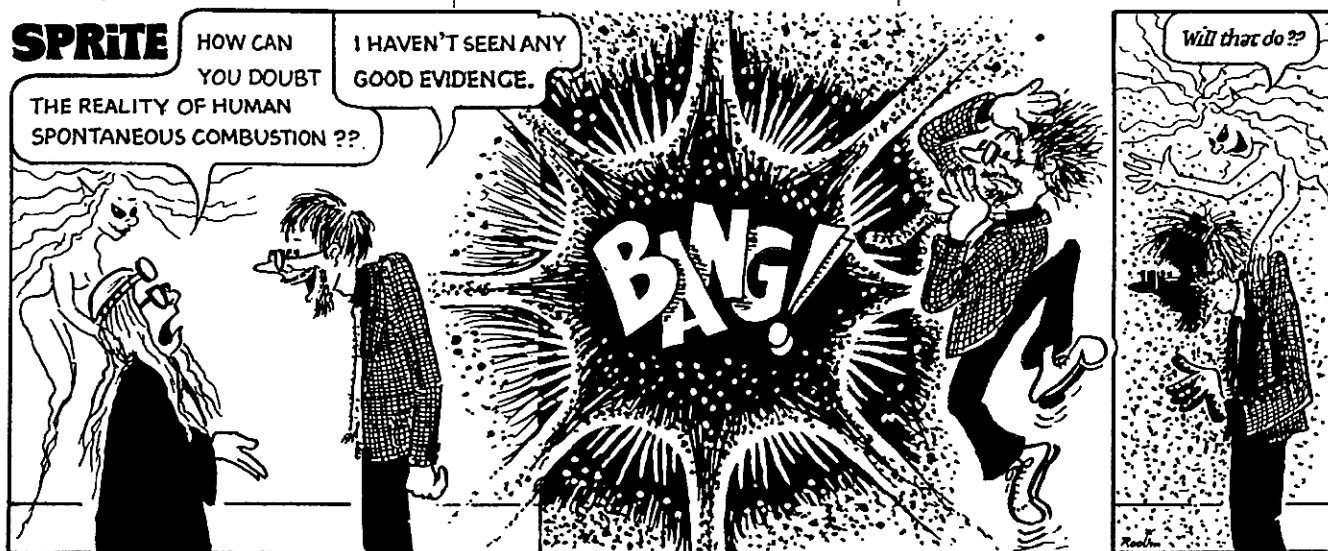
Although the Satanism scare appears to cover a unique, if somewhat bizarre, series of events, it is in fact a development of earlier trends in the child protection movement.

Beginning in the 1960s with the “discovery” of the battered baby syndrome, by the late 1970s child protection became increasingly focused on sexual abuse. This was expanded during the 1980s when false claims were made (in the United States) that as many as 50,000 — or even 90,000 — children were abducted by strangers each year.

It was in the early 1980s that the first adult “survivor” accounts of satanic abuse began to emerge. Following such accounts, the child protection movement made claims that satanic cults were responsible for the majority of the child abductions. The most prominent claims came from an extensive network of social workers, police, and psychotherapists — groups which were already involved in the task of aiding child victims of adult exploitation. They assumed responsibility for this “new” form of child victimisation — satanic abuse — and thus were able to expand their organisational base.

It should also be noted that claims of satanic abuse incorporated psychological categories to explain victims’ behaviour. The psychological material is too complex to permit more than a brief summary here, but two important aspects should be mentioned.

First is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) — a term used in the diagnosis of patients whose maladaptive behaviour could be explained by supposedly traumatic past experiences. PTSD, it has been suggested, is often coupled with multiple personality disorder (MPD) and



Skeptic (UK), Donald Room

“occult survivors” were typically attributed with this condition. Indeed, the “expert” mentioned earlier was reported as saying that MPD was the usual damage caused to children by satanic ritual abuse. He also argued that “about half the children suffering [MPD] had been victims of satanic ritual abuse” (*Press*, 27 August 1991).

A major factor in the diagnosis of “survivors” with PTSD and/or MPD was that patients’ denial was proof; any denial of involvement with satanic ritual was dismissed as a typical symptom of the underlying disorder.

The media’s role in spreading the Satanism scenario cannot be overlooked, since in the United States, Britain, and New Zealand, popular newspapers and television talk shows were very much involved. The New Zealand media, in September 1991 (shortly after reports of the visiting American sexual abuse therapist), reported a workshop presentation which was given at the Family Violence Prevention Conference in Christchurch. The main theme of this particular workshop was ritual abuse and was a prominent feature of the conference.

As co-ordinators of this workshop, the Ritual Action Group (RAG) were concerned with presenting ritual abuse as a serious threat to children in this country. Their presentation drew on both anti-cult and anti-Satanist literature, detailing a definition of ritual abuse, the situations in which it was likely to occur, and the signs parents should be looking for to determine whether their child had been abused.

There was a period of intensified media interest in claims of Satanism following the Sep-

tember conference and the RAG workshop. This included reports that police were stepping up investigations into ritualistic cults, following bizarre claims coming from Australia which told of satanic cults there. These cults were said to have links with child pornography rings, but they were also reported as killing and eating babies.

It was also reported at this time that a “prominent New Zealand policeman” had spent time in the United States studying techniques for investigating links between child pornography and Satanism: the same policeman had earlier been linked with the RAG group. It was during this period of intense media coverage that allegations of ritual abuse in the Christchurch Civic Creche began to surface.

Following similar patterns in the United States and Britain, the links between child pornography, organised sex rings, and ritual abuse have been a prominent feature of the Satanism scare in this country.

Although the first reports of Satanism appeared in 1991, it was not until a year later that a moral panic which focused on

the sexual abuse of children broke. From early in 1992, a former male worker from the Christchurch Civic Creche had been under investigation for indecent assault and sexual violation of children. Subsequent events further amplified the panic — the abrupt closure of the civic creche; the police investigation into a “major paedophile ring” operating in New Zealand and reputed to have links with an international network of child pornography dealers; the leader of the Centerpoint commune facing charges of child sexual abuse; and sporadic claims of abuse emerging from other childcare centers around the country.

All these events occurred within the space of two months during the latter half of 1992. Although the Department of Social Welfare began to express concern about their rapidly increasing caseloads of child abuse, it was not until the news broke that four female co-workers were also alleged to have committed indecent assault and sexual violation of children at the creche that the panic gained full momentum. The creche case now took on elements of “organised” abuse rather than

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being one involving a lone "predatory" male abuser.

It was at this stage that the media concentrated on the bizarre nature of the case, with its alleged elements of ritual abuse. In particular, one alleged incident known as the "circle incident" provided a vivid image which enabled the media to locate this case within an established stereotype of ritual abuse. However, it was not only the media who made links between this case and the ritual abuse scenario. During the depositions hearings the mother of an alleged victim had called for an overseas "expert" on ritual abuse to be brought into the inquiry.

As the events leading to the Christchurch case have shown, religious concepts still feature in the public perception of problem conditions such as child sexual abuse and the amplification of deviance thus generated. This is despite the increasingly secularised nature of New Zealand society.

Christian fundamentalists in particular have been relatively successful in having their ideas on issues such as child pornography and alleged satanic abuse incorporated into the rhetoric of secular agencies such as social work, counselling, and law enforcement. It is no coincidence that this moral panic has focused on children given that, in periods of rapid social change and uncertainty such as New Zealand has experienced in recent years, children represent the hope for the future. This is likely to prove a recurrent theme of perceived social problems.

Ms Jenny Barnett and Prof Michael Hill are with Victoria University's Department of Sociology.

An Alternative Hymnal

Martin & Janette Wallace *Tune: "Abide with Me"*

Hymn for Homeopaths

Dilute with me
fast comes the magic field —
the molecules dis-
perse and we are heal'd.
Doubt and disdain
in Skeptics round I see
O, you who still believe
Dilute with me.

Abiding with Acupuncturists

Press deep my flesh
with needlepoint so fine
Rotate the ends
and ease this pain of mine!
Oh pierce my toe
To ease distress and woe.
This hymn for you we sang
with yin and yang!

Chiropractors Chorus

Manipulate
And twist my tortured spine
The nerves are pinch'd
and twisted like the vine!
But please take care
my spinal chord to guard
and don't forget to use
my credit card.

Aye, Aye, Iridologist Mine

Look deep into
my eyes and iris see!
Give me your thoughts
on what is ailing me!
There you might see
a fault or two or three
Oh, you that thinkest not
Eye ball with me!

Verses of this were lovingly sung at the conference by the Skeptical Trio of Tony Vignaux, Warwick Don and Bill Morris, abetted by Margaret Mahy, Phil Spencer, Vicki Hyde, Cynthia Shakespeare and sundry others.

Bent Spoon to TV feature

PRESS

By HOWARD KEENE

The television show "Country Calendar" has been awarded this year's Skeptics Society Bent Spoon Award for a programme on biodynamics.

In the programme, a farmer is shown carefully grinding blowflies into a pulpy mass to add to his animals' drinking water in homoeopathic quantities to prevent flystrike.

The Skeptics chairwoman, Ms Vicki Hyde, said, "'Country Calendar' provides the farmers of New Zealand with a lot of good, useful information, but they really had a turkey with this show."

She said biodynamic farming was developed by the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner in the 1920s as

an offshoot to his spiritual science. He claimed to be "in touch with ancient wisdom through direct spiritual experience".

Also touted on the programme was the practice of possum "peppering" — burning possum testicles at a certain time in the lunar cycle and then diluting the ash to minute levels for spraying around the property to keep other possums away.

Forest Research Institute scientists had recently shown the practice was ineffective.

Many similar unfounded claims appeared in the programme, all treated in an uncritical fashion, which was inappropriate in a show that purported to deal with a subject in

a serious, sensible fashion, she said.

Three awards for excellence were awarded by the Skeptics this year.

A general commendation went to the nutrition columnist of "The Press", Janice Bremer.

"A great deal of rubbish is written about nutrition and health these days, so it's pleasing to read a columnist who is consistently sensible," Ms Hyde said.

Other excellence awards went to Amanda Cropp for a "Pharmacy Today" article on the questionable claims made by a Christchurch vitamin salesman, and to Christiaan Brakman for an article in the "National Business Review" on a petrol pill.

Farm show gets Skeptics' prize

NZ HEARST

The recipient of this year's Skeptics Society Bent Spoon Award is doubtful he will ever receive his trophy.

The society has named a *Country Calendar* programme on biodynamic farming, screened at the end of last year, as its winner.

But the producer of the triumphant show, Frank Torley, has reservations that a bent spoon will ever come his way.

"I'm' rather sceptical over whether I'll ever get one," he said yesterday.

In the "winning" programme a farmer was shown grinding up blowflies to add to his animals' drinking water to prevent flystrike.

Also a solution containing the ash of opossums' testicles was sprayed to make males of the species in surrounding areas infertile.

Torley said the broad philosophy of *Country Calendar* was to allow people featured to tell their own stories.

"I would personally be as sceptical as the Skeptics Society but it's not our place to pass judgment," said Torley of the award-winning programme.

That show, he said, had



Frank Torley ...
"an excellent year."

drawn the most mail and phone calls for about two years.

The Bent Spoon follows two more awards for the show this year. Reporter Donna McKindley-Willison recently received a Rongo award for best agricultural journalism and the show was named best factual series at the New Zealand Film and Television Awards.

"The Bent Spoon has capped off an excellent year for *Country Calendar*," said Torley.

"Good things come in threes."

But the programme

prompted a scathing attack from the Skeptics.

"*Country Calendar* provides the farmers of New Zealand with a lot of good, useful information, but they really had a turkey with this show," said a society spokeswoman Vicki Hyde.

Opossum peppering — where the animals' testicles were burned to make a spray solution aimed at scaring the species away — was tested by the Forest Research Institute, according to the society.

"New Zealand researchers were the first in the world to ever test these claims scientifically," Hyde said.

"It would have been good if it had actually worked, but it didn't."

"As for the idea of burning sperm to make other individuals infertile, one has to wonder if biodynamicists have considered the implications of living near crematoria."

"It is a patently ridiculous idea and it's startling that *Country Calendar* should treat it so unquestioningly," Hyde said.

The Bent Spoon Award was named in "honour" of Uri Geller who claimed to bend spoons with the force of his mind.

Scepticism not healthy

By AVALON WILLING

SKEPTICS may scoff at homoeopathy but it works, says a professional homoeopath.

Susanna Shelton, of Wellington, was in New Plymouth on Saturday to speak at a seminar on homoeopathy and paediatrics organised by the Taranaki Homoeopathic and Naturopathic Group.

"The sceptics' main criticism is that homoeopathy must have a placebo effect. They acknowledge that people and physicians report an improvement, but everyone is under the delusion that it's all in the mind."

"But it's hard to argue when animals, small children and even comatose people respond to the treatment. Something is going on that needs further investigation. The sceptics say if you don't know how it works, how can it be used?"

"We don't know the mechanism by which it works but we do know how it consistently behaves over time, cross-culturally, in veterinary and even in-vitro experiments."

Ms Shelton said the main difference between homoeopathy and conventional medicine was the individual, rather than the disease, was treated.

"We might have five children with eczema but each will end up with a different prescription through studying their medical and family history and how things like weather and food aggravate or alleviate the condition."

"Medicinal substances that can cause symptoms in a healthy person can stimulate the cure of the same symptoms in a sick person."

Ms Shelton said interest in homoeopathy was gaining momentum.

Scepticism greets new science

by Nigel Malthus

The commercialisation of scientific research is the path to "shonky science," the Skeptics' Society annual conference was told in Christchurch at the weekend.

The Crown Research Institutes were now businesses, which no longer published findings because they were commercially sensitive, Dr Edmund Cutler told the gathering.

Those with money could buy information, but the public and independent scientists could no longer look it up, discuss it, argue it, or take it to planning hearings.

Dr Cutler, a retired reader in soil science at Lincoln College, said scientists employed by commercial interests would give the

answer the customer wanted. He highlighted advice by the Ministry of Forestry that pine trees made soils more fertile.

Dr Cutler said this was based on research into nutrient levels in tussock land planted in pines, compared with unplanted tussock. Changes in the availability of certain nutrients were noted, but no increase in total nutrients. The author concluded more research was needed.

The Ministry of Forestry had used the research in publications that baldly stated pine trees were "uniquely able" to reverse soil degradation, and that natural tussock was "demonstrably unsustainable."

Another example was a Timberlands proposal to spend \$6 million planting

Tasmanian blackwood trees in areas of the West Coast.

Dr Cutler said the decision was political. Tasmanian blackwoods required far more fertile soils than existed in the planned planting areas. "Where is the science behind the proposal? There is none."

A retired zoology professor, Professor Wally Clark, had a similar message, telling the conference that "client-oriented science" had nothing in common with the rigorous, peer-reviewed science in which he spent his working life.

He told of environmental impact reports in which he said the aim of the authors was to further their clients' interests and so get another job with them.

Research practices defended

NZPA

Christchurch

Scepticism over the quality of New Zealand's restructured science organisation is unwarranted, says the Crop and Food crown research institute.

The chief executive, Dr Michael Dunbier, was objecting to a claim that the commercialisation of science was the path to shonky science.

The comment was made to the Skeptics Society conference in Christchurch at the weekend by a retired scientist, Mr Edmund Cutler.

Dr Dunbier said the Government funding agency, the Foundation for Research Science and Technology, was the big-

gest client of most crown research institutes. The research it funded with taxpayers' money was "public good" science and had to be published.

He said 75 per cent of Crop and Food's income came from the foundation.

"These results are peer-reviewed, published in scientific journals, and the technology is transferred, including through the general media."

Dr Dunbier said it was important to distinguish "public good" science from commercial research, which is never published unless the client is willing.

Dr Dunbier said what had changed was that Government-

funded science had become more accountable and regularly audited.

Scientists could not afford to give clients, whether Government or private, the answer they wanted to hear, as Mr Cutler had claimed they did.

Mr Cutler said yesterday that his position had been overstated. He had not said, or intended to imply, that all crown research institutes were keeping secret all their research findings.

In his speech, Mr Cutler had noted that the institutes were competing for funding from the foundation for "public good" science.

"The new research organisations are businesses," he said then, "and I have read that one [crown institute] says resource information is commercially sensitive, therefore this information is no longer part of the public domain."

"The owners of the information, much of which we paid for, will want to keep it secret and they will want to make it their own interpretations of this research."

Yesterday, Mr Cutler said the particular institute he was referring to was Landcare Research (NZ) Ltd, whose new stance was laid out in a Society of Soil Science publication late last year.

'Droves of psychics' no help to police

6.9.93



Mr Holyoake

Christchurch (PA). — Psychics, clairvoyants, and other "dreamers" have been of absolutely no use to the New Zealand police in solving crime, says one of the country's senior police officers, Assistant Commissioner Ian Holyoake.

He told the Skeptics Society annual conference in Christchurch that "droves" of psychics came forward, whenever there was a well-publicised disappearance.

In no case, however, had they succeeded in finding a missing person or disposed of a body.

Mr Holyoake said a prominent medium claimed in a recent book to have found the body of Mona Blades, who

disappeared years ago hitchhiking on the Napier-Taupo road. In fact, her body had not been found, he said.

Mr Holyoake, now the police regional commander in Dunedin, headed the still unresolved enquiry into the disappearance of Kirs Jensen at Napier, 10 years ago last week.

The file on that case still contained about 400 items of "information" from psychics.

One had even telephoned Mr Holyoake's home, upsetting his wife with graphic descriptions of what he believed had happened to the missing girl. "They come forward in droves presenting disturbing information of

little use."

Mr Holyoake said psychics would often predict that a body would be found "beside trees or water". Given New Zealand's geography, that was usually true but it did not take psychic powers to say so. Only about 5% of them would try to be any more specific than that.

He said they raised expectations "sometimes to the degree of danger," and could severely inhibit an inquiry.

Mr Holyoake said, however, that police continued to accept "help" from psychics for a variety of reasons.

The police force's very good record in solving murders and disappearances depended on public support.

Police always asked people to come forward with information, however trivial.

"So you can't seek that support, then dismiss it out of hand because you don't like the look of his third eye or his astral plane."

Nor did police want to discourage people who, weeks after an event, were genuinely unsure whether they had actually seen something or only dreamt it.

Another possibility was that an anonymous "psychic" caller might be the offender.

There were also cases where the victim's family would seek psychic help.

Check your spoons — here comes Randi

A debunker of claims of paranormal powers visits New Zealand next week. **Frances Jones reports.**

FOR Canadian-born James Randi, magician, writer and decrier of the occult, exposing so-called psychics and holders of supernatural powers is part of his daily life.

"There will always be people who really don't want to know that there is no tooth fairy," he says.

James "The Amazing" Randi, 65, a professional magician and escape artist, has for the past 20 years enjoyed a high profile in the United States for his work investigating and disproving claims of psychic ability.

Born in Toronto in 1928, Randall James Hamilton Zwinge dropped out of school at 17 and joined a travelling carnival. Some years later, having started on the nightclub circuit billed as The Great Randall, he claimed his first slice of fame after escaping from a pair of handcuffs and out of a policeman's car.

Embarrassed, the local police challenged him to escape from a locked jail cell, which he did, prompting local newspaper headlines that read, "The Amazing Randi es-

capes from Quebec prison".

From that point, he became The Amazing Randi and legally changed his name to James Randi.

One of his most famous exposures, was that of Israeli psychic Uri Geller, who is now attempting to sue Randi in a number of US states as well as other countries for defamation. A number of the cases have been settled in Randi's favour and others are continuing, with the latest claim by Geller, for \$US15 million.

A self-proclaimed disbeliever of the paranormal, Randi's troubles with Geller started in 1972, when the Stanford University Research Institute (SRI), announced it was conducting tests on the Israeli psychic, who claimed to be able to bend spoons, levitate and cause electron beams to change direction.

After watching a Geller performance, Randi declared, "the tricks were very simple. There was nothing you couldn't get off the back of a cornflakes packet."

Another famous Randi debunking was of the Peter Popoff Ministry, the television evangelist who alleged to hear, and be guided by, the voice of God. Popoff seemed able to walk up to complete strangers in a crowded auditorium and know their names and personal details.

In 1986, with the help of several volunteers and a video camera, Randi discovered that Popoff's wife was planted in the audience and would strike up conversations with people which were carried backstage through a radio transmitter hidden in her handbag. She would then go backstage and direct Popoff to the same members of the audience through a tiny receiver hidden in his ear.

Randi later told Time magazine: "Popoff says that God speaks to him directly. Three things amaze me about that. First, it turns out that God's frequency — I didn't know he used radio — is 39.170MHz, and that God is a woman who sounds exactly like Popoff's wife Elizabeth."

In 1988 Randi published his book, *The Faith Healers*, which contained a section on the Popoff scam. Following publication, membership to the Popoff ministry fell off dramatically and the Popoffs were declared bankrupt shortly afterward.

Randi was awarded the MacArthur Foundation "Genius" award of \$US272,000 in 1986 for his work exposing television evangelists, faith healers and psychics.

He is currently in Australia as guest speaker at the 1993 Australian Skeptics National convention, where he presented the 1993 Bent Spoon award, (a gold plated bent spoon on a wooden base said to be from the original Noah's Ark) to this year's winner.

This year, the award was given to Tonight Live a Network 7 show for "services to the electronic media for perpetrating and perpetuating ignorance in the name of entertainment, for promoting mediums, clairvoyants and astrologers, Uri Geller and all other manner of paranormal claptrap."

For more than 25 years, Randi has offered a \$US10,000 cash prize for "the performance of any paranormal, occult or supernatural event, under proper observing conditions." So far, it has remained unclaimed.

Randi arrives in New Zealand next week, to give his thanks personally to the New Zealand Skeptics Society for support and financial contributions they have sent during his legal battles with Geller.

Dr Denis Dutton, a skeptic and professor of Fine Arts and Canterbury University, says Randi is an honest man who is coming to New Zealand to increase public awareness of skepticism as well as to thank the New Zealand skeptics for their support.

"Randi is a professional magician who is scrupulously honest. Many magicians as a matter of professional honour won't reveal tricks, but if that is what it takes, that is exactly what he does, so the public can understand the difference between confidence tricksters and entertainers."

Dutton warns Wellingtonians to check their spoons before Randi arrives next week.

"The sheer psychic force of the man will have spoons bent from Wellington right through to the Hutt Valley. We have even had to re-route the drive from the airport to the city to avoid damaging any bendable monuments and of course, to avoid causing unnecessary bends to the high density residential areas on the way." □

"There will always be people who really don't want to know that there is no tooth fairy."

James "The Amazing" Randi

Chch violence spurs visitor into action

By NIGEL MALTHUS

A visiting American conjuror and sceptic, Mr James Randi, took the lead in tracking down the offender after a man was assaulted on a Christchurch street on Tuesday.

A university lecturer and former president of the New Zealand Skeptics, Dr Denis Dutton, described yesterday how Mr Randi jumped out of their car and tracked two youths after one was seen to beat a man to the ground.

The incident occurred on the footpath at the corner of Gloucester and Manchester streets on Tuesday morning.

"Dr Dutton and Mr Randi were driving past when they saw what Dr Dutton described as 'a small man being beaten up by a large guy'. The man was left lying on the ground.

Other witnesses said it started when one of two youths on skateboards ran into the man. Words were exchanged before one of the youths assaulted the man.

Dr Dutton said Mr Randi took it on himself to leap out of the car and follow the pair, who went up Manchester Street to Armagh Street then back down Regent Street to Gloucester Street.

They then went along Gloucester Street towards the Canterbury Public Library and

finally to an alley near Noah's Hotel, by which time other witnesses had alerted the police, who arrived to speak with the pair.

Dr Dutton called it a vicious assault, the like of which he had never seen, "not in New York, Los Angeles, any place".

He was full of praise for Mr Randi, who, despite his distinctive looks with bald head and vivid white beard, managed inconspicuously to follow the youths by ducking in and out of doorways, and kept up despite their being on skateboards.

Mr Randi was a catcher of frauds and con artists, who had only been in New Zealand less than 24 hours at the time of the incident, Dr Dutton said.

"I do think it showed something about Randi. It was his own initiative, and he wasn't going to give up. He was absolutely tenacious," Dr Dutton said.

Mr Randi is a professional conjuror who has made a career out of debunking claims of the paranormal, most notably the claims of the Israeli "spoonbender", Uri Geller.

He was in Christchurch as part of a tour sponsored by the New Zealand Skeptics.

Constable Paul Tweed yesterday praised the "absolutely perfect" assistance from the public over the incident. A youth, aged 15, would be dealt with by the youth aid section, he said.

Call for help

Sir,—As "The Press" reported (July 8), the eminent American Skeptic, James Randi, and I witnessed a vicious assault on Manchester Street on Tuesday. Thanks to Mr Randi's clever, single-handed tenacity in shadowing the offenders, they were apprehended near Noah's Hotel. No thanks whatsoever to the two uniformed parking wardens to whom he appealed for help near the library. "We're parking wardens, mate." They could not be bothered to join Mr Randi's pursuit or even summon the police on their portable phones. Frantically searching both for Mr Randi and for police help, I came on them a few minutes later. They seemed irritated to have their conversation interrupted twice about such trivialities, one of them waving his phone at me and explaining again that they were not police. I swore at them vigorously. I wonder if it occurred to them that they should have me arrested.—Yours, etc.,

DENIS DUTTON.
July 8, 1993.

Spooky cleaners

VICKI HYDE, the chair-entity of the Skeptics, tells us her organisation is willing, for only a slightly exorbitant fee, to cleanse places that have been the site of particularly silly or gullible events (The Great Hall after the next Psychic Fair, Parliament...). "We'll invoke the spirits of Socrates, Aristotle, Newton, and others, and place ritual objects (Skeptic newsletter) in appropriate places (the morning tea table)."

Psychic Skeptics?

THE Skeptics' Society will deny this but its choice of a conference location definitely influences the weather. Last year the Skeptics held their conference in Wellington on the weekend after the big snow in Canterbury. This weekend they were in Christchurch when gales hit Wellington, causing havoc. Past experience therefore proves beyond a doubt that any city hosting the conference will avoid calamitous weather.

Skeptics back inquiries into sexual-abuse cases

by Sarona Iosefa

The New Zealand Skeptics have come out strongly in support of Facade, a society set up by the four women acquitted in the Civic Childcare Centre case.

Ms Gaye Davidson, Ms Janice Buckingham, Mrs Marie Keys, and Ms Deborah Gillespie launched a campaign yesterday aimed at changing the way child sexual abuse allegations are handled.

They called for a public inquiry into the handling of child abuse therapy, investigations and prosecutions throughout New Zealand, and a public inquiry into the Christchurch Civic Childcare case.

The president of the Skeptics, Ms Vicki Hyde, said yesterday false accusations of child abuse were one of the most serious issues with which the Skeptics was involved. Increased panic in

the United States about child abductions, and satanic ritual abuse matched a sudden increase in sexual abuse charges there, she said.

"We want to get people to take a good rational look at what is claimed and the procedures being used, so that there is protection on both sides (accused and abused)," Ms Hyde said.

The Skeptics endorsed the call for standards for people carrying out evidential interviews, because it was frightening how gullible people were.

Sexual abuse had become a "trendy" counselling area, where some well-meaning people were pushing the belief that someone who was not happy in life was likely to have been abused as a child — even if they could not remember it. This led to social panics similar to McCarthy's communist purges in the United States, she said.

Dream

Sir,—I read with interest (September 7) the account of the dream in which a man heard the voice of his dead friend telling him to "come and get me mate. I'll be visible to you." An image of the location appeared to him. This led directly to where the body was found. I would be most interested to hear what comment the NZ Skeptics Society has to make on this matter.—Yours, etc.,

MELISSA LEIGHTON.
September 7, 1993.

[Dr Denis Dutton, of the Skeptics, responds: "Each year in New Zealand missing persons cases generate hundreds of visions and dreams by worried relatives and well-meaning people who believe they have psychic powers. The Kirsa Jensen case alone provoked over 400 such visions, none of them of any help. Indeed, almost all such information is worthless, though the odds require that once in a while the vision will appear to fit the facts. Journalistic practice ensures, however, that the lucky hits are the only ones we ever hear about. The thousands of inaccurate and misleading dreams and visions never make the news".] Press

Vivaldi's music seasons noodles

AFP Tokyo

A Japanese company is to start selling noodles whose taste has allegedly been improved by exposure to Antonio Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, a company official said yesterday.

Takasago Shokuhin, a medium-sized noodle manufacturer, says that experiments have shown that the Japanese "udon" noodle tastes better if it dries and matures under a shower of classical music.

The company plays the *Four Seasons* together with recordings of birds chirping for four hours in its udon factory every day.

"We have no scientific explanation, but our employees who ate samples have said that the udon that listened to the music is more delicious than the normal udon," the official said.

Party's policy on health 'a charter for quacks'

by Robin Munro

The Skeptics Society has denounced the Alliance's health policy for supporting complementary health-care therapies.

A medical spokesman for the Skeptics, Dr Bill Morris, a student health doctor at Massey University, said yesterday complementary therapists were also known as fringe or alternative therapists.

"I think it's a tremendous charter for all sorts of quacks and others without medical qualifications."

The policy says an Alliance Government would allocate public funds to "suitably qualified, registered, and certificated practitioners of complementary health-care therapies".

Health centres would be encouraged to employ both mainstream and complementary staff. Health research funding would be redirected to include work on the personal and environmental effects of a wide range of potential hazards.

The potential hazards included pesticides, electro-pollution, and multiple doses of pollutants and toxins ingested together. Natural medicines, alternative treatments, and holistic approaches to health would also be assessed, according to the policy.

Dr Morris said he did not want to work with a complementary therapist. He asked who would register and certify complementary practitioners. Mainstream practitioners would not, he said.

Most "natural" therapies, such as homoeopathy, had been known for some time, and had either been incorporated into mainstream medicine or been rejected.

"If there was anything important in homoeopathy we most certainly would have found it."

Diverting funds to research complementary therapies would mean spending less in other health areas where the benefits were known. Press

Uh oh!

Mystic Uri eyes another NZ tour

SOME 20 years ago TV viewers watched with amazement while a young man called URI GELLER (right) bent spoons and showed us his psychic powers. It's rumoured that Uri is making another New Zealand tour later this year.

The New Zealand Skeptics conference in Christchurch has

Disbelief raised to an art form

*Dilute with me,
Fast comes the magic field;
The molecules dis
Perse and we are healed!*

*Doubt and disdain,
In skeptics round I see;
O, ye who still believe,
Dilute with me!*

STIRRING words, indeed, when making use of that most favoured of all hymns, *Abide With Me*, to stick it to the homeopath industry.

Even more stirring when sung at the back of a concert hall by a male quartet consisting of the professor of zoology at the University of Otago, the professor Statistics and Operations Research at Victoria University and the doctor in charge of the student health service at Massey University, plus a Motueka potter.

Most stirring of all, when joined by internationally acclaimed children's books author Margaret Mahy, throwing herself into the irreverent words on the crest of a wave of adulation after a scintillating after-dinner address to the New Zealand Skeptics' Society's conference in Christchurch last weekend.

The Skeptics have been making their presence felt increasingly in recent years, due in part to powerhouse publicising by fine arts philosopher Dr Denis Dutton, and in perhaps greater part to an end-of-century proliferation of cranks, dingbats, child abuse promoters, global warming theorists, spoon-benders, cultural safety practitioners, homeopaths, crystal-massagers, herbalists, acupuncturists, New Age travellers, holistic medicine proponents, born-again fundamentalists and psychics.

This growing army of modish nutters are enjoying unprecedented exposure through television's spectacularly uncritical readiness to give any fool a nation-

wide audience. In the view of many Skeptics, at least as indicated by a vigorous discussion at the conference, television viewers and newspaper and magazine readers wouldn't be quite so ready to lap up these crazy notions if it were not for Education Ministry ideologues who discourage teachers from encouraging critical thinking.

Dr Dutton drew applause when he quoted the Royal Society's Latin motto, translated as: "Take no one's word", and said one of education's main functions was to work always to undermine the authority of the prevailing culture.

Instead, education policy today was increasingly directed to confirming the authority of the culture.

'Take no one's word; a main function of education is to work always to undermine the authority of the prevailing culture'

The Greeks, who invented critical thinking, recognised its power to undermine authority. The authorities were right, therefore, to kill Socrates for corrupting young people with ideas.

After the decline of Greece, the notion of critical thinking disappeared for more than 1000 years, not to be rediscovered till the European Enlightenment of the 17th century.

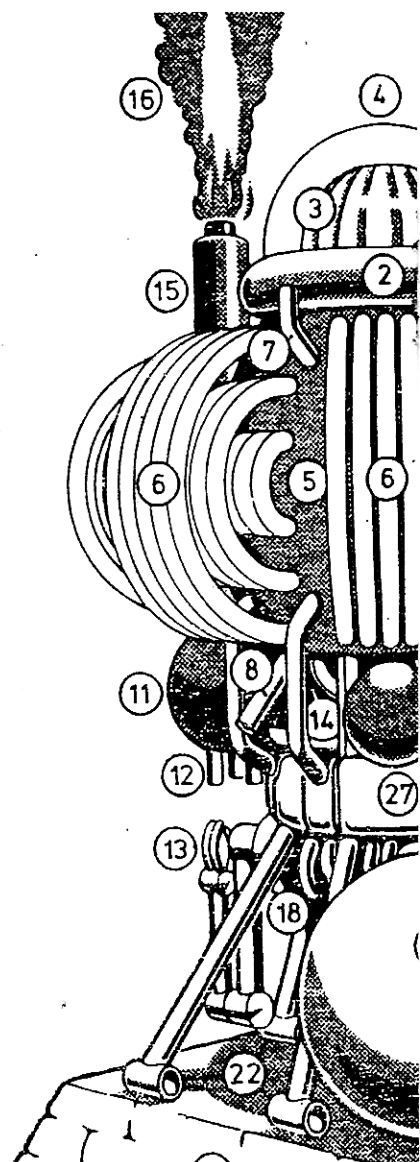
Heather Mackay, a computer specialist teacher at an Auckland intermediate school, injected some optimism into the conference's

generally down-beat view of education prospects when she said she had found it possible to beat the system.

She had just attended a conference of the primary teachers' union, and was dismayed by the extent to which policy direction was in the hands of "the touchy-feely gang", who made decisions from the heart instead of the head.

She had found that you were not expected to question accepted notions in polite company. If you did, you were regarded as a trouble-maker, and if you were a woman you had aspersions cast on your sexual affiliations as well.

Moves to bring religion back into the



THIS nuclear-powered machine made the desert, according to a reconstruction based in the *New Scientist*, Petrocorp geologists

schools made nonsense of any idea of critical thinking, but she persisted in encouraging her charges to disbelieve, to check everything she told them.

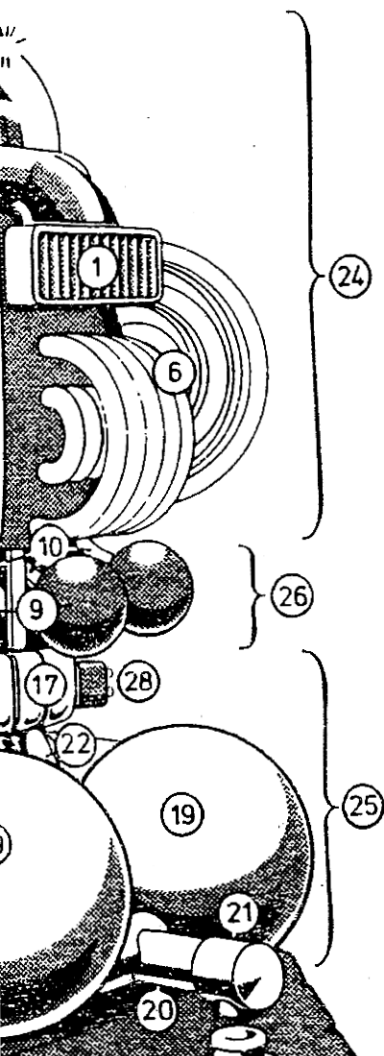
She found to her delight that they brought reference books to show her where she was wrong. It taught everyone a profoundly valuable lesson without diminishing her authority.

It was so much easier not to think critically, to join the crowd, to avoid making waves, but if that negative approach could be reversed among children aged 11 to 13, there was a good chance they would continue throughout the rest of their education to question what they were told.

To a questioner quoting a young relative who went recently to Germany where he is now at the bottom of his English language class, Ms Mackay said her experience in Auckland was that Chinese children were here to teach New Zealand children the mechanics of English. The Chinese were very slack about sport, but the schools were working hard on them to

ard all about pseudo-science. Frank Haden reports

DOMINION, FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 10 1993



...manna which fed the Israelites in the
...ed on ancient Judaic texts and revived
...ist Fieke de Bock told the Skeptics

...orrect that unfortunate tendency.

Surprisingly, in such irreverent com-
any, questions of cultural safety tended
o be tiptoed around, though Dr Dutton
avaged the currently fashionable notion
at there is such a thing as "Maori sci-
nce" as distinct from "Pakeha science".

It was a disastrous notion, he said, to
ive the title "science" to the body of
nowledge which Maori people had accu-
ulated over the years, and which had its
wn function.

Anything which called itself "science"
ould inevitably be judged by the dispa-
ionate tests of the scientific method, and
e negative results of applying the meth-
d to disprove Maori concepts would end
p by destroying Maori people's respect
or their people's knowledge.

This provocative theme was taken up
y Mike Dickison, who works in the nat-
ral environment department of the Mu-
eum of New Zealand. He told fellow
keptics, to approving nods and smiles,
at the word "science" could not be ex-

panded to mean *matauranga*, or "know-
ledge about the world", a term which in-
cluded knowing the rules of card games
and how to fix cars.

He said moves were now being made
to accommodate "Maori science" along-
side "Pakeha science" as alternatives in
the museum, and to introduce "Maori sci-
ence" into the school syllabus, again as an
alternative. Children were already being
taught in *kohanga reo* classes that there
were two "sciences", existing side by side,
both of equal value. Scientific texts were
not being translated but rewritten with lit-
tle regard for the originals.

The result would be harmful in the
long term, though the idea was being pro-
moted with good intentions. Science was a
process, not just a body of knowledge, and
its aim was to find out more, whereas in
matauranga there was no disjunction be-
tween knowledge and religion.

Skeptics' natural interest in bizarre
cults brought Michael Hill, Victoria Uni-
versity Professor of Sociology and an ex-
pert on religious cults, an enraptured au-
dience when he traversed the events in
Christchurch which led eventually to the
railroading of Peter Ellis into jail on
outlandish charges
of child abuse.

Professor Hill
pointed to the ar-
rival of fundamen-
talist Christians
dedicated to pro-
moting panic over
Satanic ritual child
abuse a few months
before the Christ-
church creche case
hit the headlines.
The Satanic abuse
movement had be-
gun in the United
States, then spread
to Britain with re-
ports linking child
pornography to or-
ganised child
abuse, the con-
sumption of urine
and faeces and the
breeding of chil-
dren for sacrifice in
circles of adults.

As often hap-
pened, the demand
for phenomena re-
sulted in the dis-
covery of such phe-
nomena, on the ba-
sis of the slogan
that "lack of evi-
dence is evidence
itself".

A fundamen-
talist Christian child

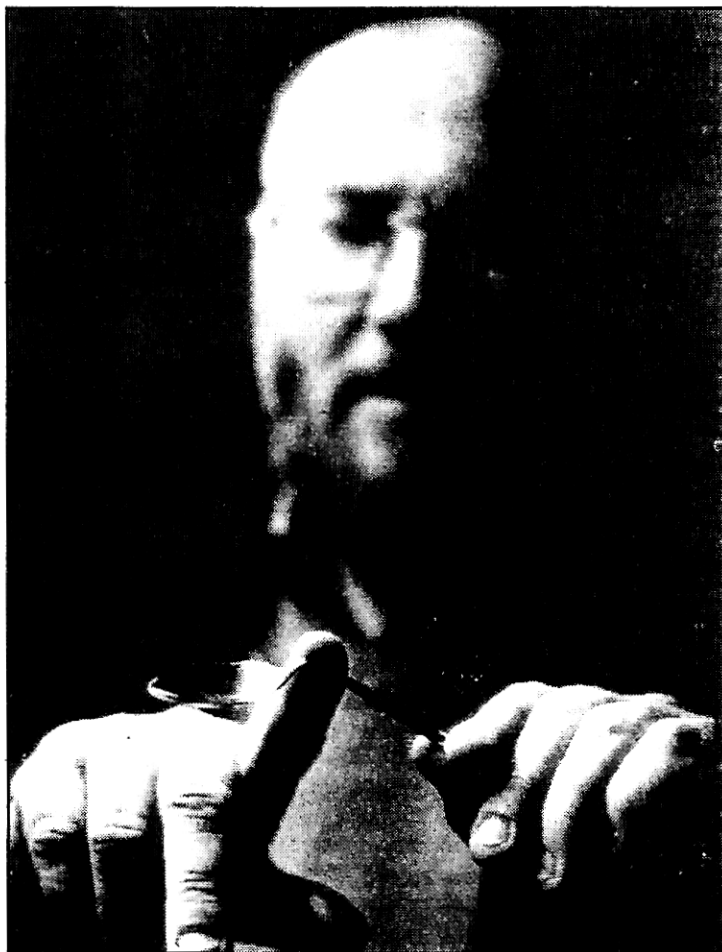
abuse specialist arrived in Christchurch in
September 1991, and six days later a ritu-
al abuse workshop was held. By Novem-
ber there were stories in the Sunday pa-
pers about what has become known as
"the Circle Incident" involving five peo-
ple who were later accused.

The Skeptics confer at intervals to lis-
ten mostly to scientists bringing them up
to date on the latest community follies.
They would gain from enlivening their
gatherings by inviting the perpetrators of
the follies to make a case for them.

Last weekend they heard from a wo-
man who writes ghost stories. She spoke
with notable lack of scepticism about vari-
ous New Zealand hauntings, and was lis-
tened to with grave courtesy. Nobody
said, "Here, come on, what was all that
nonsense about?"

I was relieved they didn't, because she
was a likable woman, eager to please, and
it would have been a shame to mount a
barrage of scepticism. But plenty of com-
mitted true believers could address the
Skeptics and give a good account of them-
selves before a hostile audience.

Perhaps next year ...



CONJURER Pat Sweeney showed the Skeptics how to bend
spoons simply by stroking them, even under close scrutiny

The new victims of sex abuse

University of Canterbury philosopher DENIS DUTTON recently delivered the annual President's Lecture at the Christchurch School of Medicine. These remarks are extracted from that address.

THE very idea of child sexual abuse provokes deep passions. On the one side, there stands a profound impulse to protect vulnerable children from hideous crimes. Such feelings represent the best part of human nature, but they can bring out the worst part as well: panic reactions that amount to little more than witch-hunts, with blameless families broken up (as in Britain) and innocent parents and child-care workers languishing in prison (in the United States). Even if cleared, the victims have their lives left in tatters (as the women in the Christchurch creche case have asserted).

The stark reality and horror of child abuse, as the social psychologist Carol Tavris has pointed out, is such that considerable throat-clearing is required to raise even the slightest scepticism about its diagnosis and treatment. Yet a failure to examine critically the more extreme claims of what she calls the "sex abuse industry" has created a whole new class of victims.

Consider the case of a retired Royal Navy officer summoned not long ago by his 28-year-old daughter to her London flat. Sitting lotus position, "Joanna", the name given her by the "Independent" reporter who investigated the story, read him a statement describing in explicit detail how he indecently assaulted her when she was less than a year old. When she was eight he had supposedly raped her in various ways.

Later Joanna "remembered" being molested by her grandfather and taken to a meeting where a baby was killed and men raped her in various ways. With supporting letters from her therapist, she was now demanding £70,000 compensation from her father. He had refused and she has severed links with him, except for messages of swearing rage she leaves on his answering machine. These still reduce him to tears.

Joanna is not a victim of sex abuse, but rather has succumbed to the most

vicious therapeutic trend of recent years. She is suffering from False Memory Syndrome, having been wrongly convinced by her therapist that she is an incest victim.

A typical case such as Joanna's begins when a client seeks counselling for a problem such as headaches or depression. Her (or his) therapist, persuaded by books such as "The Courage to Heal" by Bass and Davis, or Beverley Engels's "Right to Innocence", has adopted the doctrine that undetected childhood sex abuse causes many psychological malaises. The memory of abuse, these authors argue, is often repressed and unknown to the patient.

Confronted with the "reason" for her problems, the patient initially recoils in disbelief, but to the therapist such denial is further proof that the sexual abuse is real. Using hypnosis, the therapist urges the patient to recall the abuse, and by a process of suggestion and leading questions both become convinced something terrible happened in her childhood. This in turn explains what is wrong in her life now.

Often the pseudomemories created in these sessions are revolting in their ugly detail. But sometimes they are based on definitions of sexual abuse so elastic they encourage clients to feel that anything their parent did they didn't like was abuse. Beverly Engel disliked the way her mother would give her a "wet" kiss or walk in on her in the bathroom: "It was not until recently that I came to terms with my mother's behaviour and saw it for what it really was — sexual abuse." In this climate of victim-worship, every annoyance or slight the mind can create or remember is elevated into a lasting grievance against parents.

Repeated sessions "clarify" the traumatic memories, which are nothing more than fantasies based on the therapist's doctrines and line of questioning. To the vulnerable patient, however, it is all vividly real, and the establishment of a False Memory

Syndrome is complete. The patient may take great consolation in procedure, discovering the reason for her current symptoms and achieving the status of victim/survivor. Certain of her condition, she confronts her stunned and bewildered mother and father, perhaps suing or demanding they be jailed. Though her family ties have been damaged irreparably, she now enjoys the care and love of her therapist and fellow-survivors. (The therapeutic process may take time, however: one woman who subsequently sued her father had finally "remembered" his molestation in her 32nd therapy session!)

FOR students of the paranormal, this all has a familiar ring. A decade ago many people came to believe aliens were kidnapping ordinary citizens from their beds at night. Awakened by a blinding light, abduction victims were levitated out of the window by peculiar little beings with gray skin and large, black, Modigliani eyes. Once in the alien's flying saucer, horrible medical experiments were performed on them, and women abductees were impregnated with alien embryos.

Most abduction "survivors" only understood their experiences after they had received attention from "expert" therapists trained (by reading the right books) to recognise the symptoms of UFO abduction. In fact, the same structure of practice and belief underlies both the misguided forms of the incest/sex abuse industries and the UFO abduction industry. Patients suffering psychological distress are treated by therapists ideologically predisposed to a single cause for most of life's difficulties.

There is a crucial difference, however, between narratives of UFO abduction and fantasised sex abuse. The aliens aren't on hand to be sued or thrown in jail. But Mum and Dad, if they're still in the neighbourhood, make perfect targets. Of course, sexual abuse is a demonstrably real crime in New Zealand today. But in our anxiety about it we must not create a whole new class of victims: parents and family members falsely accused of sex abuse by younger people suffering from FMS.

The key delusion on which FMS is founded is the notion that traumatic memories are often "repressed" and can be recovered decades later by hypnosis. There is no evidence whatsoever for general repression of major life-events, and certainly not for highly traumatic experiences. One study of children who had witnessed the murder of a parent showed that none had repressed the memory. Children who were in concentration camps cannot rid themselves of the memories. The question for true victims of sex abuse is not, "How can I remember it?" but rather, "How can I forget it?"

Recent psychological studies have shown how easy it is to inject false memories into people's minds simply by asking questions ("Remember when you were little and lost in the shopping mall?"). Far from improving memory, hypnosis tends to render subjects more suggestible while making pseudomemories more vivid. The old idea, popular in the 1960s, that hypnotism can improve recall, for example enabling crime witnesses to remember briefly glimpsed licence numbers, has by now been thoroughly tested and refuted, but it is still treated as a valid doctrine by some sex-abuse counselors.

Little wonder then that over 4000 distraught families have so far contacted the False Memory Syndrome Foundation in Philadelphia, formed, in Martin Gardner's description, "to combat a fast-growing epidemic of dubious therapy that is ripping thousands of families apart, scarring patients for life, and breaking the hearts of innocent relatives". Gardner calls FMS "the mental-health crisis of the 1990s".

False Memory Syndrome represents a threat to every loving, normal parent in New Zealand whose child might some day encountering a rough patch in life, fall into the hands of an ideologically driven sex-abuse therapist who accepts the myths of memory repression and hypnotic enhancement. It is up to educated, enlightened psychologists and health professionals to see that this is one fad that does not become established here. Sex abuse — a real and terrible crime — creates enough victims as it is.

'Maori science' queried

ODT 6.9.93

Christchurch (PA). — Promoting the notion of Maori science will do the opposite of what it intends, according to a Museum of New Zealand scientist, Mike Dickison.

A speaker at the weekend conference of the Skeptics Society in Christchurch, he said those who backed the concept had the worthy intention of making science relevant to Maori youngsters.

However, he believed putting up barriers between "Maori science" and "pakeha science" would ultimately make science less accessible to them.

"I would argue that one of

the distinctive features of science is that it is universal. There is no such thing as pakeha science. Science is science and anybody can do it."

Mr Dickison said it was "very unfair" to teach Maori children that science was something the pakeha owned.

Mr Dickison told the conference his concern was raised by moves within the national museum to accommodate Maori science as an alternative alongside European, and also by the current revision of the school science curriculum to include a Maori science syllabus — not a translation, but a rewriting around different concepts.

He said there would be contradictions, such as the Maori lore that the pukeko came to New Zealand from Hawaii on a particular migration canoe. Scientific evidence was that the pukeko, like many New Zealand birds, was of Australian origin. Mr Dickison said he was trying not to "tread on toes" but what was being promulgated as Maori science was not true science, developed by questioning assumptions and rigorous testing of hypotheses.

Rather, it was "matauranga", a body of knowledge about the world, passed down in unquestioning fashion.

Hokum Locum

by Dr John Welch

The sting

Following his own empirical observations that bee "treatments" helped his arthritis, a Levin bee-keeper is claiming that he is being ignored by the medical profession. (*Press* 3/8/93) Not surprisingly, his trial of 11 patients failed to impress skeptical observers. Two patients dropped out and the remainder reported that the "sting" was effective. Having paid for the privilege of being stung, a sensation to be normally avoided, they are hardly likely to say that the treatment was worthless.

In the middle ages, hornets were applied to the skin as a treatment for plague. Nothing appears to have been learned from such unpleasant, not to say dangerous, treatments.

Bogus professor

An unqualified woman who posed as a doctor and professor, was sent to prison for 6 months for fraudulently claiming that she could cure cancer and AIDS. Analysis of her product, Canceled, or CH6, showed "it had no medicinal properties and contained toxic elements." (*BMJ* 306 p1499).

It is ironic that the courts (in the UK at least) will move swiftly to deal with quacks, but the medical profession has failed to take action against registered medical practitioners who practice quackery such as homeopathy and EAV diagnosis.

Caesarean sections

Australia has a high rate (30-35%) of caesarean sections among private patients, and the introduction of a global obstet-

ric fee that applied irrespective of the mode of delivery did not change the proportion of caesarean deliveries. (*BMJ* 306 p1218) The caesarean rate in Brazil is an amazing 50% on average, with the highest rates among the poor. Two reasons for this are a virtual absence of midwives and the belief (encouraged by obstetricians) that a vaginal delivery will permanently impair normal intercourse afterwards. Both of these examples demonstrate how doctors can develop bad practices when the socio-cultural environment allows this to happen. Only patient education with strong and ethical professional medical leadership, can prevent this kind of surgical abuse.

Low back pain

Readers will remember Denis Dutton reporting his experiences with an episode of low back pain, or lumbago (*Skeptic* 24). A Canadian study (*British Journal of Industrial Medicine* 1993; 50:385-8) found that the best treatment for uncomplicated lumbago was to remain active. The traditional treatment of bed rest was thought to encourage chronic invalidism.

This theme was continued by Robin McKenzie (*Press* 11/6/93) who attacked the current traditional approach to low back pain. Of physiotherapy, he said "it had for 75 years relied on unproven methods and 'hocus-pocus' electrical gadgetry" and he went on to say that "doctors should prescribe active rather than passive therapies." Most controversial was

his statement that "50% of workers on compensation were feigning illness."

I am sure that there is an element of truth here. Physiotherapists use a wide variety of treatments and machines, many of which have not been adequately tested. It is too easy for people to refuse to accept responsibility for their own recovery and become chronically dependent on ACC. This applies not only to back injuries but other conditions such as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and occupational overuse syndrome (OOS).

Work-related illness

Readers will be familiar with my position with respect to OOS, which has its roots in abnormal illness behaviour and psychological factors. It is interesting to compare it with the "sick building syndrome" (SBS), another new age medical invention. At last someone has done a trial of randomly increasing the ventilation rate while getting workers to report their perception of the indoor environment. (*NEJE* 328: 821-7)

To quote the authors: "Increases in the supply of outdoor air did not appear to affect workers' perceptions of their office environment or their reporting of symptoms considered typical of the sick building syndrome."

I would like to offer what I regard as a more likely explanation of the SBS which also relates to OOS. People crowded into a large building, working at VDUs and perhaps isolated from each other are always going to be vulnerable to a belief that the working environment is

in some way responsible for vague and ill-defined malaise.

A report of a survey in the *Christchurch Press* (21/5/93) confirmed a high level of stress and dissatisfaction in the workplace. Half of the respondents said they would change jobs if they could and many felt that changes in conditions had resulted in more work for less pay. Most felt that they had less power to control their work environment.

Such surveys are extremely valuable because they provide a clue to the origin of conditions such as CFS, SBS, and OOS. I have no difficulty in accepting job-related stress, but I would prefer to see some honest acknowledgement of this by patients and doctors instead of the fraudulent collusion which creates mythical conditions as CFS, SBS and OOS.

Placebo controlled trials

Since such trials appeared in the late 1940s they have continued to be a valuable tool for investigating the efficacy of new treatments and drugs. Fish oil supplements were tested against placebo capsules for the treatment of psoriasis and there was no significant improvement in either group (*NEJM* — reported in *GP Weekly* 7 July 93). Refer also *Skeptic* 27 for an excellent review of the placebo effect by Dr Bill Morris.

Weight loss delusions

The diet industry is worth millions as women strive to achieve the impossible standards set by the fashion industry. Journalists have even invented a new term for fat, "cellulite," which apparently looks and feels different from other body fat. (*Marlborough Express* 24 Sep 92) It can be removed by massage and body treatment

products. Obese subjects can pay \$180 to be blasted with water jets which "eliminate fat deposits and excess fluid" while hydrotherapy with miracle algae can "restore a balanced energy flow to the body." (*New Scientist* 1 June 1991 p47) I hope this particular clinic has good grease traps in its drains.

Other researchers try and tell us that obesity is inherited and therefore nothing can be done. This ignores the success of weight-watchers and the obvious argument that if weight can be gained it must also be able to be lost.

A study (*NEJM* reported in *Patient Management* June 1993) found that diet-resistant patients under-reported their actual food intake by 47% and over-reported their physical activity by 51% and "diet-resistant patients were significantly more likely than control subjects to believe that they had a genetic or metabolic cause for their obesity, and to describe their eating behaviour as relatively normal." This important work clearly demonstrates yet again the importance of patient beliefs in relation to illness behaviour.

While on the subject of over-eating, I note that a typical cat living in Britain is given twice as much protein a day as that eaten by a typical poor African. (*BMJ* Vol 306 p1078)

Homeopathy

In *Skeptic* 26 I offered to go into business with anyone prepared to join me in selling pure water labelled as "homeopathic preparations." Two homeopaths were indignant about the use of active ingredients in the case of herbal medicine poisoning I described in *Skeptic* 28 and one went on to say "it is absolutely

unethical for any medicine to be sold as natural and especially as homeopathic if it were to include pharmacologically active ingredients." (Letters — *BMJ* Vol 306 p656)

I still think it would be a bit of fun to sell some pure water (labelled as homeopathic preparations), invite prosecution and argue it out in court. It could prove to be a more useful arena in which to examine the enduring scam of homeopathy. I could enjoy hearing homeopaths being cross-examined by a skeptical lawyer. At least selling pure water is honest!

Poached Tiger?

Not content with exterminating tigers in their own country, the Chinese have over 110 factories turning tiger bone into tablets, wine and various confections. Presumably the ingestion of such products is believed to confer some of the vigor and vitality of the unfortunate tiger. There are only about 6,000 tigers globally and trading in tiger products is banned by international convention. What a monumental folly that these magnificent and intelligent animals end up being turned into useless traditional medicines because of human stupidity and superstition. (*Lancet* Vol 341 p46)

"How happy are the astrologers! who are believed if they tell one truth to a hundred lies, while other people lose all credit if they tell one lie to a hundred truths."

Francesco Guiccardini, mid-sixteenth century, quoted by James Randi in *The Mask of Nostradamus*.

New Age Internationalist?

by Peter Lange

The New Internationalist Review, a magazine not normally known for gullibility beyond the political, decided not all that long ago to examine the paranormal. Our intrepid reporter Peter Lange decided to have a look.

Last year the *New Internationalist* gave over an entire issue (November) to the subject of the paranormal in what seemed to be an effort to keep readers' interest over 12 months of fairly heavy political going — a bit like the cream buns halfway through bible class. It seems to be a good-hearted publication, and in this case under the editorship of Chris Brazier it has attempted to research several popular aspects of the paranormal and tried to sum up without favour. The result is disappointing.

The journalistic approach goes like this... set the scene with a cloyingly cute question-and-answer dialogue with an imaginary reader, add one solitary article by a skeptic (the excellent Susan Blackmore), then a series of ten articles supporting the paranormal, and end with a statement by the researching journalist Brazier: "Something happened, I just don't know what. And I'm afraid that could serve as an adequate summary of human understanding of the paranormal."

The photographs include: a levitating mystic (India, 1936), two of Einstein (one before and one after discovering relativity, and you can see the difference), Uri Geller looking aghast at a bent spoon, two African women studying bones they have just dropped (maybe the spoon carrying them had bent), and a woman in Algeria grimacing with pain while the head of the Virgin Mary materialises out of

the side of her neck. And I don't blame her for feeling out of sorts. Why do such undignified phenomena always involve the Virgin Mary and never Groucho Marx? He could carry it off so much better.

Susan Blackmore's article is strong — it offers (unfortunately) mundane explanations for a variety of strange experiences — out-of-body travel, coincidence, memory tricks, near-death-experiences — all the areas that create so much interest and confusion.

The next article is by the editor and is a slightly humorous account of trying to induce an out-of-body experience by following a set of commercial instructions. He fails, and of course blames himself rather than the nonsense put out in the best-selling book.

Next, a European woman describes sleepwalking in darkest Africa: "My friend Femina was found running through the village one night naked, with teeth marks on her cheek and neck — she wouldn't tell me what happened to her." I'm not surprised. Her car's headlights mysteriously go out while driving between two haunted rocks, she finds a dead chicken in a closed hut with its feet inexplicably removed, and so on. All serious evidence of forces outside her comprehension.

Next, an article on shamanism (written by a shaman) ingenuously explaining the taking of the hallucinogenic "yakoana" ("which produces effects like

the spirits coming with huge machetes, cutting out your tongue, and putting your head upside down inside your body") and then declaring the whole business an inexplicable mystery. Most Sixties children would find it fairly easy to explain.

Then follows an article on CIA remote viewing or "psychic spying" by a director of an American Institute of Parapsychology. It seems to work well as long as the enemy uses only a house, boat or tree for military purposes. A series of small text blocks is next, on everything from astrology to levitation to dowsing to incombustibility among the Maori people of New Zealand. All of them without exception support the paranormal claims, and there is evidence to show that if Winston Peters is sentenced to burning at the stake for heresy, it will be a waste of good firewood.

The most hilarious one is by Nina Silver, a New York channeler, who channels not through the normal dead characters like Winston Churchill or Egyptian kings, but through "a particle of gold light" — a female light, incidentally, and a committed feminist particle. She found herself on the outer with other channelers, who felt threatened by her liberated, often raunchy, luminous girlfriend who obviously didn't fit into the staid and patriarchal Association of Channellees.

Chris Brazier then completes his investigation by attempting to meet his "spirit sister Marie"

whom Nina has located, and then spends three hours working on it, culminating in a surge of energy coming down through the top of his head as the spirit enters his body and possibly his wallet. Having got in, the spirit fails to perform. Still in New York (could this be relevant?) he repeats the incoming spirit experience, but back in England the effect fails to recur.

Brazier is entirely convinced by the research of J.B. Rhine and his followers purporting to show that ESP and psychokinesis are possible, but admits that the evidence for the paranormal is anecdotal. "One thing is clear," he says, "science can offer no explanation ... except ... when science itself becomes almost mystical." Ahem.

The magazine is worthy, full of good political and environmental intentions, but in this case journalistically suspect and unbalanced, and inclined to put the sensational case before the rational. It sinks to the level of the *National Enquirer* for one of two reasons — an almost endearing ingenuousness or a cynical need to titillate and retain readers.

Amazing James

Tune: "Amazing Grace"

Amazing James, at last he came
to inspire a wretch like me;
I once was cool, but now I flame
thanks to (Amazing) James Randi!

T'was James who bent a tablespoon,
melting the heart of Kim Hill.
He could change a watch from nine to noon
and teach us all his skill.

He tuned us in, to a healer odd
who knew more than he should know,
and the healer's wife, "the Voice of God"
talking to him by radio.

He showed us how the psychics work
quackery in the Philippines;
sticking in his fingers, out he'd jerk
chicken's guts and blood in streams.

Amazing James is in no way slack
to advance the skeptical art,
yet admires the Morning Glory's knack
of opening at sparrow fart.

Amazing James, at last he came
to inspire a wretch like me
I once was cool, but now I flame
thanks to (Amazing) James Randi!

Hugh Young (idea by Eileen Bone)

As anyone who attended one of James Randi's lectures will attest, this is a true and accurate record.

Church Hit With Judgement

A jury which in August ordered the Christian Science church to pay \$US5.2 million (\$NZ9.6 million) in damages in the diabetes death of an 11-year-old boy followed this by adding a further \$US9 million in punitive damages.

A juror told reporters after that decision that the issue was not one of freedom of religion, but whether the boy had any choice in determining medical care which could have saved his life.

The boy's mother had turned to the faith healing teachings of the church instead of traditional medicine when he fell ill.

The Hennepin County District Court jury had considered the punitive portion of the damages for several days after the actual damages award

against members of the church, following a trial lasting five weeks.

The case involved the 1989 death of Ian Lundman of Independence, Minnesota, who succumbed after a sudden four-day bout with juvenile onset diabetes.

The boy's father, Douglas, sued the boy's mother — his ex-wife Kathy McKown — and her current husband William, as well as a nursing home affiliated with the First Church of Christ, Scientist, as well as a nurse, a church practitioner and another church official, charging negligence.

Lundman's lawyers said it was the first US civil action involving a death and the church to go to trial.

Reuter

Physical and Financial Health?

by Jay D. Mann

On Thursday, 19 August 1993, the Christchurch *Press* carried a full-page advertisement for the initial New Zealand opening of the "Matrol Opportunity."

The product, Matrol-Km, was described as "a unique nutritional supplement comprised of a synergistic combination of 13 botanical ingredients that produces an unusually powerful bond at the molecular level." It was developed over 60 years ago by Dr Karl Jurak (PhD, University of Vienna, 1922), originally for his own use.

We were told that the product "has been tested in the most demanding laboratory in the world — the human body — for over 70 years." The goal of the company "is not to see how many distributors we can sign up. Our goal is to *impact world health*. [italics original] Matrol is unique in that its distributors are emotionally tied to its product. They are unwavering in their commitment to use the product daily and reap its health benefits on an ongoing basis. Which means that each distributor is his or her own best testimonial!"

In case the rather vaguely described health advantages of the product weren't enough, the ad pointed out that Matrol offers "*one of the most generous compensation plan[s] in the network marketing industry*". This seems to be 25-40% profits, plus additional 5% commissions on sales made by "supervisors" under you.

I was intrigued enough by the claims of an unusually powerful molecular bond to attend

the evening meeting. Unfortunately the nature of this bond was not mentioned at the meeting, although the herbal ingredients were.

Matrol-Km consists of a dark-coloured, admittedly unpleasant-tasting liquid, which you are supposed to take daily for at least a month to be assured of achieving health effects (although some persons respond inside a day), and which you can then expect to take for the rest of your life. This costs \$NZ90 per month per person, unless in self-defense you become a Matrol reseller to obtain wholesale discounts.

The health benefits were not much specified at the meeting. Phrases used included "extra energy," "better sleep," "look younger, feel younger," "clarity of mind," "an insurance for good health." I was impressed by the frequency with which speakers talked of having encountered Matrol-Km at financial and/or emotional low-points in their life. We were reminded that the product is for both physical and financial health, and there was to my mind considerable intermingling of the two concepts.

The bottles themselves (one month's supply, 946 ml), give an admirably thorough list of ingredients, presumably in order of diminishing concentration: water, caramel, potassium citrate, glycerophosphate, calcium glycerophosphate, magnesium glycerophosphate, potassium hydroxide, potassium glycerophosphate, iron glycerophosphate, followed by 13 herbs, plus traces of clove and pepper-

mint oil as flavourings. The mixture, which is non-alcoholic, is preserved by paraben and methyl paraben. Below, I've summarised the Matrol claims for each herb as given on a sales pamphlet, and the descriptions given by S. Talalaj and A.S. Czechowicz in their book *Herbal Remedies: Harmful and Beneficial Effects*.

(1) Chamomile flowers (*Matricaria chamomilla*).

Matrol: consecrated to the Egyptian Gods; used by Romans for nutritional properties; used to make a tea; high in calcium, magnesium, iron and trace minerals.

T&C: active ingredients are matricine, a volatile oil (1%) containing bisabolols and chamazulene... Also glycosides apigenin, apigetrin, rutin, coumarins, and flavonoids. Pharmacological action: anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic ("cramps"), carminative (anti-farting), sedative, antiseptic, vulnerary (promotes wound healing). A "therapeutically valuable remedy" with mild calming effect useful in treatment of nervous conditions, excitement, and restlessness... Harmless even if taken over a prolonged period.

(2) Saw palmetto berry (sabal, *Serenoa repens*).

Matrol: N American Indians made tea from berry, which contains many primary nutrients and elemental minerals.

T&C: Active constituents are oestrogen-like steroidal glycosides. Low-toxicity plant, but its use should be discussed with a medical practitioner because of the oestrogen-like effects. Has been used to treat chronic

cystitis, might show beneficial effect in treatment of benign enlargement of prostate.

(3) Angelica root (*Archangelica officinalis*).

Matrol: regarded as holy plant, chewed regularly by Laplanders, rich in essential oils, calcium, vitamin E and vitamin B-12, which is rare in vegetation.

T&C: Active constituents are volatile oil, furanocoumarins, resin, bitter principles, and triterpenoids. Relatively safe in moderate curative doses. ("Fresh root is extremely toxic and is used as a homicidal poison among Canadian Indians.") Pharmacological action is to increase gastric secretions, anti-spasmodic, diuretic, sedative. Has mainly been used in treatment of indigestion and flatulent colic... stimulates the appetite in anorexia nervosa, also used for treatment of cystitis and urinary inflammations. Decreases muscular tension and exhibits a mild sedative action....

(4) Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*).

Matrol: Signifies graceful elegance in Greece, bravery in European chivalry. Abundant in thiamine, also B-complex, vitamins C and D, and trace minerals.

T&C: Active constituents volatile oil (2-3%)... Also tannins (10%), saponins, flavonoids. Harmless when used in a low dose (oil highly toxic when digested in ml quantities). Pharmacological actions are antiseptic, anthelmintic (intestinal worms), astringent, expectorant, carminative. Has been used in treatment of cough, whooping cough, bronchitis, dyspepsia and stomach disorders, occasionally as anthelmintic.

(5) Passion flower (*Passiflora incarnata*).

Matrol: cultivated and used by Indians of Virginia (US). Plentiful in nutrient complexes, especially calcium and magnesium. T&C: Active ingredients indole alkaloids (0.1%) including harmine, harmaline and harman. Also flavonoids, steroidal substances, cyanogenic glycosides and saponins. Harmless if used in a low curative dose, but should only be used under medical supervision. Reputation of being an effective sedative.

(6) Gentian root (*Gentiana lutea*).

Matrol: popular in Europe as mid-day tea. Rich in B-complex nutrients, vitamin F, niacin, inositol and many trace elements.

T&C: Active constituents are bitter glycosides, also alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins and mucilage. Harmless in low therapeutic doses, but should be avoided in cases of acute gastritis, stomach ulcer, and haemorrhages in gastro-intestinal tract, also by patients with excessive number of red blood cells. Not advisable in breast-feeding women because breast milk may become bitter. Popular bitter gastric stimulant, used as appetizer, to increase gastric secretion in dyspepsia, and to relieve flatulence, also useful for gall-bladder dysfunction and liver problems.

(7) Licorice root (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*).

Matrol: used anciently in China, Greece. Contains vitamin E, B-complex, biotin, niacin, pantothenic acid, lecithin, manganese and other trace minerals. T&C: Active constituents are triterpenoid saponins... also flavonoids, oestrogen-like steroids, coumarins, tannins and volatile oil. No adverse effects in low curative doses. Pharmacological action as anti-inflam-

matory, expectorant (loosens phlegm), anti-spasmodic (cramps), demulcent (eases irritation of skin and lining of digestive tract). Popular remedy mainly for gastric ulcer. Shows beneficial anti-inflammatory effects, reduces gastric acid secretion and promotes ulcer healing. Also used for cough, bronchitis and allergic skin disease.

(8) Senega root (milkwort, *Polygala senega*).

Matrol: valued by N American Indians for its refreshing mint-like flavour and for many nutrients. Rich in magnesium, iron and other trace minerals.

T&C: Active constituents are triterpenoid saponins (up to 10%) including senegin... Also sterols, resin, and methyl salicylate (oil of wintergreen). Toxic when used in an excessive dose, may cause vomiting diarrhoea, vertigo, visual disturbances, and inflammation of the oesophagus. Should be avoided during pregnancy and G-I inflammation or stomach bleeding. Mainly used to treat cough and chronic bronchitis, often in combination with ipecac, or in combination with other plants as an asthma remedy.

(9) Horehound root (*Ballota nigra*).

Matrol: member of mint family, praised 4 centuries ago by Gerard for its usefulness. Rich in Vitamins A, E, C, F and B-complex, also contains iron and potassium.

T&C: Active ingredients are flavonoids, "bitter principle" and volatile oil. No adverse effects reported. Used for dyspepsia, flatulence and anti-emetic in pregnancy.

10) Celery seed (*Apium graveolens*).

Matrol: in use for centuries from Central Europe to East In-

dies and South America. Seed contains a group of useful organic compounds called phthalides, also vitamins A, B, and C, and iron.

T&C: Active ingredients are volatile oil (3%) containing mainly limonene and selenin, also flavonoid glycoside apiin. A low toxicity plant, but excessive doses should not be used during pregnancy. Mainly used to treat inflammation of urinary tract and cystitis, regarded as an effective urinary antiseptic. Also used to treat arthritis, rheumatism, gout, asthma and bronchitis.

(11) Sarsaparilla root (*Smilax officinalis*).

Matrol: used by early Americans as "spring tea." Spanish Conquistadors recorded its [unspecified] legendary qualities. Contains vitamin C and B-complex.

T&C: Active ingredients are steroidal saponins... and parillin. Also tannins, resin and sterols. A low toxicity plant, but excessive dose or prolonged internal use should be avoided. Should not be used in cases of kidney disorder. Pharmacological action is carminative, diuretic, diaphoretic (causing profuse perspiration), antirheumatic. Once had a great reputation in the treatment of rheumatism and skin disease, especially psoriasis.

(12) Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*).

Matrol: revered by ancients as "King of Plants," an excellent source of easily assimilated vitamins and minerals. Contains 14 of the 16 principal mineral elements and all known vitamins, but is especially rich in some amino acids and vitamins A, D and K, and iron.

T&C: Active constituents are oestrogen-like isoflavonoids,

alkaloids, carotenoids (provitamin A), and vitamins B1, B2, K, C and D. Also coumarins and mineral salts of calcium, potassium, iron and phosphorus. Excessive doses taken internally can cause flatulence and diarrhoea. Long term application can produce reactivation of systemic lupus erythematosus and produce skin ulceration. Excessive doses can also produce an oestrogen-like response. Pharmacological action as anti-anæmic, nutritive. Mainly used as a nutrient for convalescent patients.

Note that this is just about the only case where the Matrol literature agrees with Talalaj and Czechowicz.

(13) Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*)

Matrol: Rich in vitamin complexes, choline, a B-vitamin, and a main component of lecithin. Also contains vitamins A and C, and essential linolenic acid.

T&C: Active ingredients are taraxacin, inulin (a fructose polymer), potassium salts, and vitamin A. Harmless. Used for liver ailments and gallstones.

The remarkable thing about the Matrol descriptions is that they concentrate, rather boringly, on the mineral and vitamin contents of their herbal ingredients.

Minerals and vitamins are easily obtained, in relatively cheap multi-purpose vitamin pills, if not in our ordinary diet. In any case, Matrol-Km must contain more potassium, magnesium, calcium, and iron in the form of a glycerophosphate complex than would be contributed by the tinier amounts of herbs. What is special about herbs is their content of pharmacologically active ingredients. I would be flabbergasted if the grossly impure (oops,

"complexly formulated") mixture of chemicals in a given herb is optimal for a particular treatment.

Why doesn't the Matrol literature mention the pharmacology of their herbal ingredients? Perhaps that would amount to making medical claims. Does Matrol-Km contain enough herbal content to have a pharmacological effect? If so, the foregoing list suggests there could be something beneficial for everyone, although the bitter stomach-stimulating actions of gentian would seem to be fighting the stomach-soothing actions of licorice.

One might be concerned at the oestrogen-like properties of a number of ingredients. Since oestrogens are used in hormone-replacement therapy for menopausal women, could this account for some of the beneficial effects of Matrol-Km? Is it safe for a man to take it? Where is the medical study that shows this mixture is safe for lifelong ingestion? (I'm not even asking for evidence about efficacy!)

After studying the list of ingredients, I'm personally convinced that the original mixture of Dr Jurak might have been useful. In fact I'm going to pick up most of the herbal remedies at the health-food section of the supermarket next week, just to have on hand as cheap try-it-and-see remedies in case mild episodes of the pertinent illnesses arise, say, on a weekend.

I dare say it will cost far less than \$90, and I'll use just the herbs that seem appropriate to a given requirement rather than a shot-gun mixture.

Jay Mann is a plant biochemist.

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New Zealand Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (Inc.)

NZCSICOP is a network of New Zealanders—including scientists, educators, health professionals and many others—dedicated to increasing public awareness of the dangers and inanities of pseudoscience and bogus paranormal claims. Through meetings and its regular periodical, The New Zealand Skeptic, the group encourages informed, critical examination of the claims of fringe and quack medicine, astrology, so-called creation science, supposed extraterrestrial visitations, psychic phenomena, and associated "New Age" gullibility.

Annual membership is \$25; students and unwaged \$10. For further information, write to B.H. Howard, Secretary NZCSICOP, 150 Dyers Pass Road, Christchurch 2.