

Editorial.

This issue contains three varied articles on medicine, all by members. They are meant to be provocative and I hope that members will respond. Member Jim Woolnough of Auckland kindly sent me the October issue of "The N.Z. Psychic Gazette". At only 80c an issue it is value packed and I urge all members to buy one copy. This issue is worth the money for the front page poem about one's best friend, the dog (I'm clumsy and sweet and get under your feet, etc). There are articles on numerology, the psychic aura of animals and photographing ghosts. There are also the advertisements for psychic counselling, postal psychometry, Karma destiny, holistic spiritual massage, for pendulums and reflexology balls (no jokes now, please).

However, the reason that this publication was sent to me was an article by John Milne reprinted from the Evening Post Weekend magazine of August 23. The article is supposed to be debunking the skeptics but turns out to be a collection of unsupported trivia. There is an offer of \$392,000 to any skeptic who can prove that he or she does NOT have psychic abilities. (The writer does not say what he will accept as proof so don't be too quick to bank the money). There is continual pride in not being logical and praise for intuition which the writer says requires a mix-

ture of 'relaxation and indifference'. This phrase is picked out by Ron Gibbs, editor of the Psychic Gazette, as 'one of the best descriptions of the state of mind needed when developing many phases of mental mediumship'. Now it is easy to make fun of these people but my main reaction is one of infinite sadness. My reason for mentioning it is to remind readers of what we are up against. The Gazette contains 24 pages, in three columns, it is published every month so is a much bigger operation than the Skeptic (it is, however, too small to involve GST). The Gazette has advertisements for some 30 spiritualist churches and I guess that each one has a bigger membership than CSICOP in this country. My local library contains all the writings of Doris Stokes, despite all my entreaties to the librarian.

Everywhere, unreason reigns. Which leads naturally enough to my usual plea for material. I would like to have an issue on 'why people believe?' or alternatively, 'Why does every university bookshop in this country have an extensive section on the occult?' or 'What is the subject matter of the biggest non-fiction section at The Corner Bookshop and why?'. I myself am going to England via the United States soon and I hope to visit skeptics there and bring back goodies for this publication. May I wish you all a very joyful Christmas and thank you all for the encouragement and friendliness you have given me since I became editor. Best Wishes to you all. Keith Lockett, 72 Awanui St, New Plymouth.

"The Road to En-Dor"

After we have marvelled at the endurance shown in 'The Wooden Horse, and thrilled to the weekly plottings of 'Colditz,' can we be expected to be interested in yet another prisoner-of-war story? Especially if it all happened nearly seventy years ago? For readers with a skeptical interest in matters clairvoyant, the answer in the case of 'The Road to En-Dor' would have to be an emphatic 'Yes'. This book, by E.H. Jones, was originally published in 1919 by the Bodley Head, and it went through many printings. If my account intrigues, it might be found still in libraries or used book shops. It is well worth the search.

Jones was one of a number of British officers captured during the Mesopotamia campaign of 1916, and imprisoned at Yozgat in central Turkey. To while away the tedium of the idle life in the camp, a relative suggested in a letter from England, why not make a Ouija board, and try to communicate with the spirits? Desperate for some new amusement, the prisoners made a board, with its circle of letters, from the most highly polished piece of wood available (a packing case top), and found a glass tumbler that would slide around easily on the board. For weeks, taking turns two by two, with each man of a pair placing one finger on the glass, patient scribes noted down the meaningless strings of letters touched by the glass as it slid around the circle.

And then, in Jones's own words, when the party was on the verge of giving the whole thing up, "the Devil of Mischief that is in every Celt whispered to me", and presto, the glass immediately began to spell out sense, and a lively female spirit named Sally began at once to flirt with the woman-starved prisoners.

Such was the sensation created by this event that Jones did not dare to tell his comrades what he had done. Instead, his deception proceeded almost against his will, until not only the prisoners but the guards, and even the Commandant, were convinced Jones was in touch with the spirit world. This gave him the determination to persist, and to use the awe in which 'The Spook' was held to arrange his escape.

During these developments, Jones found an ally in Hill, an Australian, and a skilled conjuror. Between them they astounded all with their "psychic" powers - finding hidden objects, 'foretelling' the outcome of battles far away, and identifying possessions of fellow prisoners in the audience while blindfolded (the number of variations on 'Now tell me what is this I have in my hand?' which can be used as a code is limited only by the

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

(N.Z. Skeptics)

MEDICINE: ORTHODOX, FRINGE & QUACK

Medical graduates and workers in related fields
are invited to a meeting to be held on

Saturday 6 December 1986

Rolleston Lecture
Christchurch School of Medicine

Chairman: Dr D.L. Dutton
Senior Lecturer in Fine Arts, University of Canterbury
and Chairman of N.Z.C.S.I.C.O.P.

PROGRAMME:

- 9.15 a.m. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION
Skepticism and Medicine
- 9.35 a.m. SCIENCE, PSEUDOSCIENCE AND MEDICINE
Professor B.H. Howard, Lincoln College
- 9.55 a.m. THE BRYCH AFFAIR: A JOURNALIST'S VIEWPOINT
Mr Greg Ansley, Christchurch Star
- 10.20 a.m. NUTRITIONAL SCIENCE AND PSEUDOSCIENCE
Mrs P. Williams, Christchurch Hospital
- 10.45 a.m. REFRESHMENTS
- 11.05 a.m. FRINGE AND QUACK MEDICINE AND THE LAW
Prof G.F. Orchard, Faculty of Law, Univ of Canterbury
- 11.30 a.m. ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE IN THE UK IN THE 1980s
Dr B. Robinson, Christchurch Hospital
- 11.55 a.m. FRINGE MEDICINE - A FAILURE IN EMPATHIC
UNDERSTANDING?
Dr B.L. Jones, Waltham Medical Centre, Christchurch
- 12.20 p.m. GENERAL DISCUSSION
Chairman's concluding remarks

A CHARGE OF \$2.50 WILL BE PAYABLE AT THE DOOR

To assist us with catering numbers please advise of your intended
attendance by telephoning The Postgraduate Office, Christchurch
School of Medicine, 792-900 by Friday 28 November, 1986

Further programme details from Professor Howard 34-521

memories of the two accomplices - Jones gives a table containing 80 items which he says is only one-sixth of their complete scheme).

The main object of dislike for the prisoners was the camp interpreter, a rascally fellow, and H. & J. took particular satisfaction in duping him, and using "The Spook's" influence over him to ameliorate their conditions.

This story from so long ago and so far away illustrates all the tricks we see practised by present-day "psychics" - cold reading, sleight-of-hand, the encouragement of credulity. The apparently most "scientific" of Jones's fellow officers, the doctor, was the most readily taken in.

"And what about the escape?" you will ask if you have read this far. Yes, H. and J. did get out of Turkey. How they did so is not only a story to rouse the admiration of skeptics, but is also a tale of hardship and heroism worthy of comparison with better known, more recent escapes.

B.H. Howard



Big Time Faith Healing, Well intentioned or deliberate Fraud?

Barend Vlaardingebroek

Faith healing, like the fundamentalism it is often associated with, is a generic term, rather than a specific one. The New Guinea tribesman consulting a witch doctor for a potent spell to cure him, the quiet prayer meeting for a friend in hospital, the Indian girl who immerses herself in the waters of the Ganges to aid her infertility are all exercising faith healing. The oft-reported efficacy of placebos on people suffering from chronic pain serves as a reminder that the power of faith may sometimes outdo rational, modern medicine.

I have used to term 'big time' in my title because it is not the cultural attitudes of Melanesia or India towards disease or the quiet meditation of the worried friend that should concern the skeptic. Intrusion into these fields may appear culturally insensitive and even callous. Of far greater concern to me personally are the en-masse "healing" activities of the "professionals". As with many other businesses, there are some well-known persons who have made a very fine living out of their globe-trotting faith healing, like Osborne and Roberts. Mimicking them are many smaller-scale practitioners including one very wealthy Auckland business man, one of whose meetings I attended. Fear of legal proceedings prevents me being specific in terms of names. Suffice it to say that the meeting I attended was one of several drawing a few hundred people about nine years ago. I went with a university acquaintance who called himself a 'born again Christian' and who challenged me to 'see for myself'.

We arrived early to find the hall already jam-packed with chorus singing people. The lights were dimmed except for those above the stage, which was brightly lit. At the appointed time, the healer appeared to cries of "hallelujah", "praise the Lord" and similar utterances. He shouted through the microphone that the devil would be exorcised and that the Spirit would come. First, however, Jesus would have to come. For the next three-quarters of an hour, he traversed the stage continually shouting slogans from the King James version of the Bible as the congregation became increasingly vocal.

After about an hour, the spirit came. People started raising their arms and waving them from side to side. We were told to raise our hands and hold the hands of those on either side of us. Soon the hall was alive with frenzied, shouting people, waving clasped hands above their heads. The unmistakable uninhibited staccato of glossalalia filled the place. Two people up front flung themselves off their chairs and writhed on the concrete floor, "Jesus is here", the healer announced, "Listen, are you here, Jesus?" The healer spoke to Jesus and in the next period of comparative calm, my eye fell on a thick curtain, behind which was some movement. It was in a dark rear corner of the hall. I went over to it and flicked the curtain aside to see a somewhat angry young man fiddling with electronic sound gear from which wires trailed to the stage.

It was now time for the miracles to begin. The sick were preceded by witnesses. One had had cancer and had

stunned doctors by his total spontaneous cure; This was a young fellow of about 25 who I had seen with the acquaintance who had brought me. A sobbing girl told of her deliverance from an incurable skin disease and others followed. Each story was almost drowned by cries of praise and shrieking entreaties, amongst which I was starting to pick out re-curring voices strategically placed around the congregation.

The first sick (sic) folks to come up onto the stage for healing were rather young and healthy looking and played their parts to perfection. Each was placed between the healer and a strong young man whose function was to catch the patients as they fell. The "patient" was asked to tell what was wrong, the healer would shout for deliverance, congregational frenzy would rise to pandemonium as the demons were ordered to come out of the sufferer. The afflicted person would then fall into the brawny person's arms, who would then lay him/her on the stage where he/she would writhe about frighteningly for perhaps quarter of a minute. Then he/she would wake up and then be asked if cured. The answer was always 'yes' and to this the audience responded frenziedly and ecstatically. Then came people who were mostly older and who did not look healthy. About half went through the fainting stage but very few followed this with the writhing act. The other half did not respond to the treatment at all and were whisked off the stage quickly, having been told that they lacked faith or that Jesus had other plans for them.

After about two and half hours, a succession of about 4 or 5 people failed to swoon and be healed. Exhaustion was also taking its toll of the audience and the emotionally charged atmosphere was tangibly weakening. The healer faced us and announced that "the demon of doubt" was present. "There is someone here who doubts" he said. From the corner of my eye, I saw a shadowy hand beckoning my way. People turned to face me and there were voices of anger and dismay. I kept quite still as the healer preached to the recovering audience. When they had regained their earlier energy and enthusiasm, I was forgotten and the healing continued.

When the queue had been worked through we were invited to pray for those who had not gone forward. In the ensuing fanatical frenzy, I saw a little old woman trying to hoist herself out of her wheelchair. She slumped forward and struck her head on the back of a chair and was hurriedly replaced in her wheelchair by a couple of young men who quickly appeared. The healer came off the stage and went among the crowd. He stopped at another elderly woman who sobbed into the mike that one of her legs was several inches shorter than the other. The lights above were brightened and the crowd flocked round. I was about two-and-a-half metres

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away. He took the long leg and with a quick flick of the wrist loosened the shoe away from the heel. He took the other leg and placed it beside the long one, with the toes up and the heel forward. To onlookers' cries of wonder and shouts of praise, he slowly pushed the shoe back towards the heel. Unfortunately, the woman was not convinced. Cries of anguish arose and the healer turned squarely to me and bellowed that he would not continue his ministry while Satan was present. I was taken outside by several powerful young men and told that the Devil was in me and made me see

things. One of them told me that the woman had been seen walking by several people, but as Satan had distorted my vision I had seen her fall. I was 'advised' not to return.

Not that I intended to. I went with an open mind, expecting to encounter well intentioned love in action. What I saw was a sickening display of mass emotional manipulation aided by electronic tinkering, professional actors and a strategically placed claque, a gross insult to human dignity and to genuine religion.

The Evening Post, Thursday, October 2, 1986 23

NEWS

Sceptic wants esp test

The battle lines are drawn between sceptic and believer, and \$392,000 is at stake.

Former New Zealand Skeptics chairman David Marks and a Wellington man, John Milne, are the contestants.

The recent inaugural New Zealand Skeptics' conference in Dunedin unveiled an offer of \$160,000 to anyone who could prove extrasensory perception (esp) and \$232,000 for demonstration communication with spirits under controlled conditions.

These amounts came from several noted international sceptics and included \$25,000 from the pocket of Mr Marks — now head of psychology at Middlesex Polytechnic in England and chairman of the British Skeptics.

Mr Milne, an art teacher, then made a counter-offer in the Evening Post of \$392,000 for any sceptics who could prove they had no psychic abilities.

Now Mr Marks has accepted the challenge. In a letter to the editor of the Post, he said:

"I would like to gratefully accept John Milne's offer as I am

certain that I do not have any psychic ability in the generally accepted sense of the term (ie esp, precognition or psychokinesis).

"In contrast with the vast majority of self-proclaimed psychics and mediums, I am happy to offer myself for testing under appropriately rigorous and controlled conditions.

"John Milne's amateurism and confusion in the field of intuition (which he naively equates with esp) seems to have let him down badly this time, because he is shortly to lose a large sum of money. (Assuming, of course, that he honours his side of the contract.)

"I hope his challenge is a genuine one and that he has sufficient funds to make good his offer.

"An impartial body of qualified investigators should be appointed so that the tests of my claim to have no psychic ability can be fairly and properly authenticated."

He concludes: "I am sure other members of the New Zealand Skeptics would also be delighted to take up Mr Milne's generous offer."

Mr Milne replies: "What David Marks is offering — and I admire his cockiness — is an unprecedented expose of how human perception works.

"The results will shake our society to the core. Churches will close, parliamentary prayers will cease, love will be seen as a quirk of chemistry and life itself will be recognised as a mere hiccup in a mindless cosmos.

Rally to cause

"It is not a fair fight — Marks is the formidable professor who describes me as confused, naive and amateur. I hope that supporters of confusion and naivety will rally to the cause. I could use a bit of support from scientists, too.

"My original challenge places the onus on the contender to supply the proof, although I will be as helpful as possible.

"I am also extremely reasonable and see no need for an 'impartial body of qualified investigators.' In my confused way I am at a loss to understand what would constitute impartiality or what would be a relevant qualification.

"If this is going to create difficulties, I am willing to spread the decision-making process in 392,000 shares, available from me to any takers at \$2 per share.

"This is not intended to seem frivolous and I am open to negotiation on all points. In essence I am merely inviting people to be equally sceptical about science and psychics.

"I do not have answers and I conceded that David Marks might indeed be soulless. But there is still a long way to go before we break free of the Scottish verdict of 'not proven.'"

New Zealand Skeptics chairman Dennis Dutton, of Christchurch, calls Mr Milne's offer a "meaningless challenge until he has the money to put up and is willing to lay down conditions which could be fulfilled.

"He needs to come up with suggestions for a specific test so people can know what constitutes proof."

Dr Dutton said he and other sceptics would be delighted to be tested under reasonable conditions agreed on by the two parties.

Need Doctors Cringe?

L.M.Franklin, DPH FRANZCP, retired, Nelson

When I entered medicine more than fifty years ago, few maladies could be effectively treated. Lobar pneumonia, diabetes, pernicious anaemia, malaria and a few others. Patients with other disorders received careful medical attention while the illness ran its natural course, unless the doctor made it worse. A warm relationship with the doctor eased the burden of serious illness for the patient and his family. Relentless killers which raged then have now vanished; poliomyelitis, tuberculosis, diphtheria, syphilis and smallpox. Childbirth was hazardous to mother and baby. There was no specific treatment for psychotic illness. Psychiatric research related mainly to taxonomy. A quarter of asylum inmates had general paresis, which killed them in a few years; today, thanks to penicillin, it is rare. 50 years ago, surgeons could treat many life-endangering conditions. They thought that physicians were pretentious tinkers whose professional high spot was a brilliant diagnosis confirmed by a brilliant post-mortem.

Anti-medicine today: The triumphs of modern medicine have not won universal acclaim. Kind, thoughtful people, many of whom might not be alive but for modern medicine, deride what they refer to as 'the medical industry. It is seen as a fault that a patient can be cured of a dangerous disorder with only a brief contact with a doctor. There are complaints about the scientific nature of modern medicine, which are like the cockney's complaint

about caviare: "This'ere jam tastes fishy". Educated people who are highly critical of medical science may embrace uncritically any form of 'alternative medicine' and readily fall for quackery. The Milan Brych saga was instructive.

Scientific medicine provokes ill-informed hostility. Some organised opposition always tries to obstruct every effective advance in preventative medicine. They vary in seriousness from the anti-fluorididationalists who may have caused avoidable tooth ache to the anti-vaccinationists who are quiet now with the eradication of smallpox from the world. Their successors today, having learnt nothing, oppose present immunisation programmes for children. Today's most deadly anti-health lobbies are probably the tobacco and alcohol industries.

Health misinformation: It is not surprising that educated and thoughtful people are medically ignorant. The news media, with a few happy exceptions, provide sensational misinformation. People are not to know that they are living through a medical revolution. If one believed the mass media, one might think that society is threatened by AIDS, the Dalkon shield, Tapanui flu and RSI, after miraculously surviving the toxic shock syndrome.

How doctors react: A conventional doctor may express contempt for the critic's ignorance. A doctor has had a long training in scientific medicine and has to maintain continuous self education to keep abreast. He has to run to stand still. This background makes it difficult for her or him to understand what the critic is on about with seemingly arcane complaints about the failure of modern medicine to treat the whole person. The critic sees this as doctor-knows-best arrogance. More sensitive and socially

aware doctors try to meet their critics half way. They are open minded about 'alternative medicine' and may try to use its methods, such as homeopathy, acupuncture, health food and fitness fads. They feel they should spend more time talking to their patients and may practice meditation or any of the endless variants of individual and group psychotherapy whose value is unproven and probably untestable. Dedicated doctors give their spare time to attend Balint groups. Some give credence to the exaggerated claims of osteopaths and chiropractors. The response of these conscientious doctors may look like a cringe. Most doctors probably make a different and more low-key response which attracts little attention. They simply try to give medicine a more human face.

Modest Pride. A medical woman or man today can feel modest pride in the profession. They are the most privileged doctors in history. Science has given them unprecedented power to fight disease and they inherit a proud tradition of service. This was exemplified by the doctors who stayed in plague stricken London in the seventeenth century to min-

ister to plague victims. It matters not at all that their courage did nothing to halt the disease. Today, the doctor tries to provide the patient with scientific medical care supported by a warm doctor-patient relationship. Such doctors must be commoner than critics would allow, otherwise they would not so often specifically exclude from their strictures their own doctor, who is the one they know best. Progress in medicine to date and its increasing pace justify outrageous optimism. At present 80% of all deaths in New Zealand have three principal causes:- cardiovascular disease, malignant disease and injury. It is likely that injury will become the commonest cause of all deaths, as it is today for young adults. The rate of progress makes it likely that young people alive today may yet live in society relatively free from disease.

Acknowledgement. This paper owes much to two small lucidly written books by Lewis Thomas, a self-styled medicine watcher:

"The Medusa and the Snail", Penguin Books, Harmondsworth. 1981;

"The Youngest Science", Oxford paperbacks, 1985.

From the newspapers

Paranormal power

SIR, M L Lester (Post, Sept 26) says "The New Zealand Skeptics Society has repeatedly claimed that there is a widespread (nationwide) problem here in New Zealand with fake psychics, mediums, magicians and so on".

In an earlier letter (Post, Sept 16) M L Lester said "I would ask the Skeptics to quote specific examples, otherwise they should stop all this ballyhoo and stirring." I think the debate (if that's the word) would be assisted if M L Lester himself was specific in his charges against the New Zealand Skeptics. I have never heard any of their spokesmen complain about magicians. On the contrary magicians have often been the allies of skeptics.

The rest of M L Lester's remark sounds like an exaggeration to me and I would like to see his evidence for it.

Of course whether something is a problem or not is more a value-judgment than a matter of empirical fact. The exploitation of people's gullibility is wrong in my view. The questioning of those who claim paranormal powers is a welcome counterbalance to the uncritical

SIR, As a Christian and for the good and prosperity of the country of New Zealand I appeal to the authorities to cease the shipping of live sheep to Iran for sacrificial purposes. God has blessed our land with an abundance of meat and produce, so let not that which He has blessed us with be used as sacrifices to the God of Iran. The sacrifices under the Levitical law are done away with in Jesus Christ and the New Testament. Anyone under the law (the Old Testament) are still under God's curse, because it was not possible for sinful man to fulfil the whole law. Jesus our Passover (the lamb of God) has been sacrificed for us, therefore we keep the feast (Communion Table). We are not under God's law but under God's grace (1 Cor 5 v 7, Romans 6 v 14).

D Friend

Skeptics

SIR, I write in the hope of reassuring John Milne (Post, Oct 2) and Martin Lester (Post, Oct 10) about the aims of the Skeptics.

We are not out to "make fun of peoples' beliefs." Rather, we want more information to be available to the general public. We want to see claims of psychic ability properly and seriously tested. If such claims stand up to testing,

then people's faith in them will be increased not decreased. We are happy to encourage people to enjoy their ideas, even where these may seem fanciful to others.

Some groups can be expected to oppose our activities. These include "scientific" creationists who would like to misuse science to get their particular religion introduced as science into secondary schools. Iridologists would rather we did not publicise the failure of iridology in carefully conducted tests in West Germany. Water diviners would rather we did not advertise their failures in Australian tests (I personally was surprised they didn't do better than chance). People who falsely make claims of psychic powers, to make money from the bereaved or others in crisis, might also resent being asked to show they can actually do what they claim.

We are sceptical also about our own activities and scientific abilities and we welcome constructive criticism. We are not "witch hunters." We work with ideas and words not flame. In fact it was the skeptics who saved the witches. The "true believers" wanted to burn them.

Perhaps our views could be summarised by saying that we want to be tolerant of faith and intolerant of

nonsense and we welcome discussion on what the difference is.

Gordon Hewitt, chairperson, Wellington Skeptics.

Entitled to their faith

SIR, I would like to offer my full support to John Milne in his battle with the Skeptics (Post, Oct 2), and would hope that many more New Zealanders will rally to John's support. It is not difficult to see what this group is really all about.

A short time ago, a friend of mine dared criticise the New Zealand Skeptics Society, and was asked to declare what he considered their real motives were. My friend said he believed they were out to publicly ridicule and make fun of people's beliefs, and this I think sums up their activities.

Ordinary people in this country who like to go to church on Sunday, or pray now and again in times of bereavement or other crisis, or just those who prefer to live their lives with a little hope and faith, should be very wary and mindful of skeptics who cannot see past their test-tubes and white-walled laboratories.

Martin Lester



THE PARANORMAL

Sir, - I too was interested in Dr Marks' Skeptic's Society, and wonder how much research was done, and over what period of time. I have been associated with the Spiritualist Church (emphasis on church) for more than 30 years, and have seen many mediums at work within the church. Genuine mediums do not "perform" for money ever, or come forward for a cash offer. To do so means the loss of their developed power. Hence, "showbiz" people usually resort to fakery.

I wonder if Dr Marks knows of the Highland folk in Scotland who have "the gift of the second sight"? Hopefully one day he may have a meaningful spiritual experience that will make him a fuller, richer (spiritually) person. The world is full of surprises.

Granny MacSpook.

[Dr Marks is now living in England. The chairman, New Zealand Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, Dr D. Dutton, replies: "Research into spirit mediums goes back more than a century. In 100 years, mediumship has increasingly shown itself to be a depressing morass of fakery and self-delusion. It is not something which we view as inspiring to spiritual persons eager to know the truth. Nevertheless, hope is eternal, which is why we have assembled an enormous cash offer for anyone who can demonstrate clairvoyant abilities. Nothing crass in this: by all means, the money can go to the clairvoyant's favourite charity or church. If there are any sincere, legitimate spirit mediums in New Zealand, surely they could overcome their shyness long enough to benefit a worthy charity. Why not? Why has not a single spirit medium in this country come forward to be tested?" - Ed.]

Holistic Health.

by Dave Hill of Dunedin

Your state of mind can make you sick or speed your recovery from illness. This idea is hardly new but only now is it gaining respect and attention from Western doctors. The result is a variety of new medical therapies being developed for the future. This approach, called holistic medicine, is based on four general principles.

1) Your mind and body are inseparable. Therefore, not just the disease itself must be treated, but the entire you. This may entail having to change your self-image and your outlook on the future, as well as on your immediate disease.

2) You have the power to heal yourself and the power to remain well. This 'power' involves the will-power to treat your body to wholesome eating, drinking and living.

3) A positive, supportive relationship with your doctor can be more beneficial than drugs in curing diseases, particularly mental ones.

4) Emphasis should be placed on preventive medicine through better understanding of nutrition and a healthy life-style.

Dr Jerome D. Frank, Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry at the John Hopkins School of Medicine has studied the mind-health connection and documented many cases that illustrate how the mind can play the major (or sole) role in a cure. "The Medical power of faith", Human nature, August 1978, p.45 is an article by Prof Franks and gives an excellent overview of the role of drugs and the environment in mind-body healing. A slightly more technical paper, also by Prof. Frank, is "Mind-body relationship in illness and healing", Journal of the International Academy of Preventive Medicine, vol 2, no 3, 1977.

From The Chairman.

About the time this newsletter arrives, the New Zealand Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal will have sponsored its first special-issue conference. The half-day meeting at the Christchurch Clinical School is entitled "Medicine: Orthodox, Fringe, and Quack," and it brings together a diverse group of people on an important set of concerns. We hope that the next number of the "Skeptic" will have reports, both from us and from the press, to indicate that the meeting was a success.

Medicine is an area in which pseudoscience, antiscience, and the occult often meet. Fueled by wishful thinking, frequently on the part of both patient and practitioner, and the natural healing powers of the body itself, fringe medicine continues to flourish. Admittedly, many orthodox doctors don't much care. One remarked to me not long ago that he was far from upset by the fact that there were so many practitioners of alternative medicine about: it kept the hypochondriacs off his back, he explained. While I cannot agree with his cynicism, I can understand it. At the same time, and while trying always to remain open to any medical advances of substance which fringe or alternative medicine may offer, we must also realize that fraudulent or self-deceived practitioners of alternative medicine can bilk desperate people, and worse, can delay the application of effective treatment.

The issues, however, are enormously complex. While it is not the ambition of the New Zealand Skeptics to save the world, or New Zealand anyway, from worthless medical treatments, we certainly believe that there is something to be gained by greater critical public discussion of the benefits and harmful effects, real or imagined, of alternative or fringe medicine. We believe as well that the context for such discussion should not be simply a matter of airing the opinions of the alternative practitioners themselves and interviewing their (doubtless) many satisfied patients. We must always keep in mind the kinds of extreme fraudulence and victimisation that are possible in the medical field. Hence the appearance on our Christchurch panel of Greg Ansley of the Christchurch "Star", whose knowledge of the background of the Milan Brych affair will be most edifying. Jerry Orchard's contributions from the legal end will also prove interesting in this regard.

In the next issue of "The Skeptic" we hope to have a report of the activities of our Treasurer, Bernard Howard, in pursuit of the crystal healer Mr. Edmond Herold. Also, an energetic contribution from George Pirie taking to task Don Beavan's comments on quack medicine in our second issue, with special regard to chiropractic.

Please continue to provide cuttings which might be of interest for the Bent Spoon or Journalistic Excellence awards. I must say that since our announcement of the award in August, there has been a relative paucity of really outrageous reportage of items paranormal in New Zealand. Could it be that we're actually already having an effect? I honestly doubt it, but the idea is not out of the question.

Denis Dutton
School of Fine Arts
University of Canterbury

Sir, — It is disappointing to hear from Miss S. Stevens (September 3) that "spiritually advanced" persons who believe they have psychic abilities are uninterested in the enormous cash offers available for anyone who can demonstrate such powers. Strange indeed that psychic powers can easily be summoned for a client to part with \$25 or \$50 for a "psychic reading" yet evaporate as soon as our committee offers \$160,000 for a successful demonstration under controlled conditions. It is very much in the interests of the Skeptics to prove that someone has psychic or paranormal powers — a momentous scientific discovery, worth every penny of the cash award. The money can go to the psychic's or clairvoyant's favourite charity or church; what could be more attractive to a "spiritually advanced" person? Since making our offer, only one self-proclaimed psychic, Collin Amery, has come forward to be tested. No clairvoyant or spirit medium in New Zealand has volunteered. Why not? — Yours, etc.,

Dr DENIS DUTTON,
Chairman,
New Zealand Committee
for the Scientific Investigation of Claims
of the Paranormal, Inc.
September 3, 1986.

Sir—Miss S. Stevens (September 3) promotes a totally unacceptable argument in favour of the unqualified acceptance of spoon-benders and other quacks. Thank goodness for the N.Z. Skeptics and the work they are doing in exposing the facts about psychic practitioners. Of course, the classic defence of psychic cultists is that they and their adherents are the only ones qualified to judge — a sort of incestuous self-appraisal. Unfortunately, these people are so blind to reason that even when exposed they cling to their beliefs. They can have their intellectual self-deception. All power to B. H. Howard and the N.Z. Skeptics. When can I join?—Yours, etc.,
JOHN WELCH,
Picton,
September 3, 1986.

17 Aug 1986

Strange world

MARTIN LESTER, Upper Hutt:

We have been bombarded with media reports on the activities of a group calling itself NZ Sceptics Society. The Sunday Times published a feature on them earlier this year. The group has issued bent spoon awards to journalists and is offering large sums of money to show that psychicism and the like is a load of old bunkum. The group is aligned with similar groups overseas, notably the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal headed by Michigan sociologist Paul Kurtz which has already used the tar-brush attack on astrology and parapsychology.

I suppose one should admire these sceptics' determination to expose frauds and fakes but I find their obsession to discredit anything remotely paranormal bordering on paranoia.

It would be a dreary old world if we didn't have some of "the strange, the bizarre and the unexpected" as Robert L. Ripley so aptly puts it. The NZ Sceptics Society consists mainly of university lecturers and other intellectual types, who seem determined to admonish anyone who has belief in anything, which cannot be scientifically proven. They should give people credit for some intelligence and approach the paranormal with less fear and more of an open mind.

There have already been discoveries and happenings which science can't explain, and no doubt there will be more. Regardless of what the Sceptics may think this is a strange world we live in.

Proving scepticism

MARTIN LESTER, Upper Hutt:

I think Duncan Hall's riders to the aims of the New Zealand Sceptics Society (ST 31/8) would be more acceptable, were it not for the contrary (and sometimes misleading) statements issued by the group. For example Dr David Marks recently claimed that the majority of New Zealanders are gullible on paranormal matters and are being ripped off in great numbers by magicians, charlatans, mediums, psychics and so on.

Dr Dutton, the new chairperson-secretary of the group, has made public statements claiming that the country is literally swarming with these "undesirables". I have found little evidence to support either of these claims, and incidentally, neither Marks nor Dutton are New Zealanders.

Perhaps the sceptics would gain greater public support if they informed us of "proven" instances where fraud and deception is taking place, and allowed for the law to take its proper course and prosecute in these areas.

SPACE SPIRIT

Creda, August 10, featured an interview with a medium who claimed to have a "space control". Spirituism is not as far as one knows less likely to be true than any other religion, but it differs from most in making testable claims. It is a great pity that the interviewer made no effort to exploit this.

The major claim of the medium was that his control, a being from another universe, had special knowledge not possessed by the medium. This claim should have been tested. Why were some questions not asked in Russian and Chinese? An intelligent being from another universe would presumably learn not only English but all other major languages.

The truly universal language, however, is mathematics. Both interviewer and "space control" had the mistaken belief that although space control's universe had five dimensions, this one only has three. In fact a universe with only three dimensions would be so far different from ours as to be beyond most people's comprehension. (A K Dewdney had published a fictional description of such a universe, but he has exceptional imagination.) A number of scientists have suggested that our universe has more than five dimensions and an intelligent being from another universe would obviously be able to make a useful contribution to this debate.

I suggest this as a general rule: if we find an entity ignorant of mathematics, we can safely conclude that we have been visited by an intergalactic moron and any apparently profound statements may be safely ignored.

Jim Ring
(Nelson)

Wooden spoons

THE NZ Woman's Weekly was recently awarded a bent spoon by a rather nefarious group of academics called the NZ Sceptics. May I suggest the Weekly return the compliment, by awarding a wooden spoon to this group, for the year's best example of an insult to peoples' intelligence.

— R.D., Wellington

NZCW 23/8/86