Comments and Communications

Of Spots Before the Eyes

THE observation of so-called flying disks in so many areas and the relative consistency in the description of these objects have led the writer to wonder whether they may not represent some form of natural phenomenon. Should these ephemera exist in the macrocosm, it is likely, if they are indeed natural phenomena, that they would be known to astronomers, meteorologists, and other observers of the atmosphere. Since the scientists have given no explanation of the oft-reported disks, it is necessary to ponder the problem of their existence in man himself and in spheres other than the psyche. A ready and reasonable explanation may be found in a smaller orbit, the eye of man. *Muscae volitantes,* the flitting flies we have all seen, may well be the "saucers" we wonder about.

Muscae volitantes is the term employed for the appearance of spots (motes) before the eyes. . . . They are caused by the shadows cast upon the retina by the cells normally found in the vitreous and are present in all eyes under certain circumstances, such as exposure to a uniform bright surface, or when looking through a microscope. They are found more frequently in errors of refraction (especially myopia), and the symptom may be aggravated temporarily during digestive derangements. They are annoying and sometimes alarm the patient, but are of no importance and do not affect the acuteness of vision. The treatment consists in correcting errors of refraction, or in relieving the disturbance of digestion. They often persist until the patient ceases to look for them and thus forgets their existence (*1*).

Anyone who has observed this visual phenomenon will recall that the object seen is brilliant and that it moves erratically, its erratic motion being a compound effect related to the motion of the shadow on the retina and associated movements of the eyeball and head. These objects also agree with some "observations" made on flying disks in that it is impossible to judge their distance or speed.

Another visual phenomenon which may be observed in the dark, as well as in the daylight, is the scintillating scotoma. Scotomata may be of various colors but otherwise are of uniform appearance as judged by the descriptions given by many persons suffering from migraine. They are of fairly consistent duration, usually lasting about 20 min, with an initial period of increasing density, then of stable appearance until they fade away. They are thought to be of cerebral origin (*2*).

It is thus likely, in the opinion of the writer, that flying disks are motes in the eyes of a dyspeptic microcosm or perhaps some abnormal cortical discharges in the migrainous.

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References

1. MAY, C. H. *Manual of Diseases of the Eye,* 264 (1941).
2. ALVAREZ, W. A. *Oxford System of Medicine,* VI, 936 (9).

Editorial Prerogatives

EDITORIAL NOTE: *The Editorial Board has reluctantly but unanimously agreed to publish the following letter from K. H. L. Key, solely because it raises an issue on which the board members themselves are not in complete agreement, and which is bound to benefit from free and frank discussion. Dr. Key has informed the board of the name of the journal to which he refers—and the board has stipulated that its name shall be announced at the same time his communication is published. Although he has demurred, he has not withdrawn his request for publication, and the board persists in its stipulation for two reasons: It refuses to be party to the guessing game that would ensue if charges are made against an unnamed scientific periodical and it insists that fair judgment of any dispute depends upon the simultaneous presentation of both sides. For these reasons Dr. Key's charges are followed by a rejoinder from the editors of the* Quarterly Review of Biology.

FIVE years ago R. W. Gerard (SCIENCE, **106**, 289 [1947]), made some excellent observations on the editing of scientific papers and editor-author relationships. I had made use of some of his points in trying to influence editorial practices in Australia, but it was not until some time later, when I came to submit a paper to a highly reputable American biological journal, that I was able to appreciate fully the criticisms made by Gerard of the methods of some editors. My experiences with that journal show that the arguments of Gerard and others have had no effect at all on some editors. A simple recital of the events as they occurred will, I think, be as effective as any amount of pleading, for they carry their own emphatic condemnation. They may perhaps serve to bring once more to the attention of scientists the very unsatisfactory situation that still exists in editor-author relations.

I submitted my manuscript—a lengthy review article—in July 1949. In November 1949, I was informed by the editor that it would be accepted for publication, subject to certain alterations that were necessary in order that the paper should conform to the style of the journal (e.g., deletion of the summary, incorporation of footnotes into the text, and changes in the list of references). The request for such alterations was, of course, reasonable and normal, and I met it fully. In January 1950, the editor informed me that he was now turning the altered manuscript over to an associate editor for "editing for the printer." In my innocence I imagined that this would mean the insertion on the manuscript of instructions to the printer regarding type style, spacing, etc.

To my complete surprise, in October 1950, I received a letter from this associate editor stating that the galley proof was on its way to me, and that it incorporated a number of changes that *he* had made in the manuscript. He outlined the principles he had followed in arriving at these changes, all of which related only to my use of English, and said he hoped