

EDITORIAL

By Ian Wilson

Very Like a Whale...

There is one important principle pertaining to the Shroud, which I learned very powerfully when I had my first viewing of it back in 1973. You can only see its image properly when you step back some distance from it. If you happen to live in Australia you can step back a very long way indeed, from which vantage-point you see, with what can only be considerable sadness, that there are some who have got far too close to the subject to be the best observers.

Thus one of the most widespread of recent press reports on the Shroud has concerned American claims, apparently carrying the authority of a distinguished Israeli botanist, that the images of some 28 different varieties of Israeli flowers can be seen on the Shroud, along with many dozens of other varieties. Not only are we assured that if we look really closely there will loom into our vision image after image of flowers that were once laid on the Shroud, there are also apparently a nail, a hammer, a piece of rope, a ring of thorns and a sea sponge attached to a reed.

Although the sincerity behind the claims is not doubted, are we not reminded of that brilliant exchange between Hamlet and Polonius:

Hamlet: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in the shape of a camel?

Polonius: By th' mass, and 'tis like a camel indeed

Hamlet: Methinks it is like a weasel

Polonius: It is back'd like a weasel.

Hamlet: Or like a whale?

Polonius: Very like a whale

The plain fact is that if we truly care that the Shroud really *might* be authentic, despite the carbon dating carried out in 1988, then we do ourselves (and far more importantly, our subject), absolutely no favours by paying Polonius-like lip-service to the inclusion of such elements in the Shroud debate. I personally view other recent claims, such as of the Pontius Pilate coin inscriptions (see Letters p.46), and of Greek and Latin letters identified on the Shroud (see p.7), very much in the same mould. To be fair, the British Society for the Turin Shroud was founded, along the lines of Britain's Society for Psychological Research, to have no party line on the subject, and to be open to all shades of opinion, a stance which necessitates making at least reasonable allowances for *some* way-out ideas.

Next year, however, for better or for worse, the eyes of all the world, including the most cynical of sceptics, are going to be turned again upon the Shroud. And it behoves those responsible for conferences and journals on the subject to favour those presenting

findings from within their own area of expertise that anyone, whatever their standpoint, can view with genuine respect.

And very similar concerns pertain to the 'Nelson's eye' disinclination among many prominent 'Shroudie's to recognize that there might be anyone in their midst who could have anything but the most honourable of intentions and motives. As members will be aware, it recently fell to this Newsletter, uncomfortably alone of all Shroud publications, to draw attention to the serious shortcomings of the previously much-vaunted Russian scientist **Dr.Dmitri Kouznetsov**, and it is a matter of no little frustration that this message has not been sufficiently heeded in some quarters. Nor has this been all. In this issue readers may find equally uncomfortable the case of an apparent attempt to mislead the Nice Symposium. The events in question are told on pp.11-15.

The lesson of all this, as stressed in the previous Newsletter, is that there is a war on, in which the promulgation of woolly-headed and downright dishonest information purporting to support the Shroud's authenticity should, if anything, be far more of an affront to us than the arguments of the Shroud's honest detractors . But thankfully not all is doom and gloom. This Newsletter continues to grow, this issue being the biggest ever. In September my wife and I attended a most pleasant and strictly informal meeting in Kaufman, Texas, hosted by **Michael Minor**, with a view to discussing how we could best use the latest communications technology to make Shroud resources scattered around the world easily and freely available to all. For **Barrie Schwartz's** excellent account of this, with sentiments I can only echo, see pp.15-17.

Also our General Secretary **Dr. Michael Clift**, whose sudden health breakdown we noted in the last issue, has made an excellent recovery, and is very much back to his normal cheerful form. He has even written a 'scurrilous' booklet about the goings-on in his local church that is sending ripples of merriment throughout the by-ways of Gloucestershire. For details see p 27.

And next year, on the subject central to us all, I am optimistic that we might have some truly *welcome* surprises....