

Historic Hoaxes Dr. Cook's North Pole Exploit Ranks With the Great 'Moon Hoax,' 'Cardiff Giant,' the 'Keely Motor' Fakes and Other World-Famous Frauds



Dr. Cook at the Grand Reception of Honor in Brooklyn, Wearing the Victor's Garlands of Triumph.

DR. COOK'S reported discovery of the north pole and the acceptance of the "fact" by the King of Denmark and the University of Copenhagen is an episode that now takes its place with the celebrated hoaxes of history.

From time to time certain men of amazing impudence have with fraudulent or humorous intention practiced deceptions that have misled whole nations, kings, universities, academies and other august bodies.

It is significant that America has produced the most remarkable hoaxes, although perhaps fewer in number than those of other countries, which is natural when we consider the comparative briefness of our history.

The moon hoax was one of the most celebrated and successful ever perpetrated in this country. The true perpetrator of hoaxes aims to delude the scientist and university professor. This was done to perfection in the moon hoax. There is a wicked pleasure in deceiving those whose business it is to be wise.

The moon hoax consisted of a series of articles published in the New York Sun August 26 to 31, 1835, under the title, "Great Astronomical Discoveries Lately Made by Sir John Herschel, L.L.D., F. R. S., Etc., at the Cape of Good Hope."

Fascinating Story of the Moon Men

These articles professed to be reports of the remarkable observations and discoveries concerning the moon made by Sir John Herschel at the Cape of Good Hope with his new telescope.

The article opened with an account of how Sir John Herschel, with the assistance of David Brewster, had invented an apparatus by which the magnifying power of an immense telescope could be sufficiently increased to allow of the detection of minute objects on the moon.

On the night of January 10 the telescope had been employed upon the moon and a wonderful vision revealed. Basaltic rocks covered with popples, fields, trees, rivers, amethyst mountains and verdant valleys spread before the eye. Even the animals were brought into view—a bison, a unicorn, a pelican, a griffin and finally winged creatures, were seen alighting on the plains, creatures that were something between a human being and an orang-outang, with wings like a bat. These had been straightway christened "vesperillo homo," or the "batman."

"We were thrilled," said the writer, "with astonishment to perceive the successive flocks of large winged creatures, which were wholly unlike any other kind of birds, descend with a slow, even motion and alight on the plain. A lens was introduced giving a fine half mile distance, and we counted high in the parties of these creatures, each walking erect. Dr. Herschel exclaimed, 'I was content to have seen a few of these beings in human shape it would have been a long time, and that they would give their Creator with some extraordinary powers of locomotion.' They were like human beings, for the wings had now disappeared and their attitude in walking was erect and dignified.

"Another lens brought them within eight yards. They averaged four in height, covering except on the face, with short and glossy copper-colored hair, and had wings composed of thin membranes, white out hair, lying snugly upon their backs, from the top of their shoulders to the calves of their legs.

"Their faces, which were of yellowish flesh color, were a slight improvement over that of the orang-outang, being more open and intelligent of expression, and having a much greater expanse of forehead. The mouth, however, was very prominent, relieved somewhat by the thick beard on the lower jaw."

All Scientists Deceived

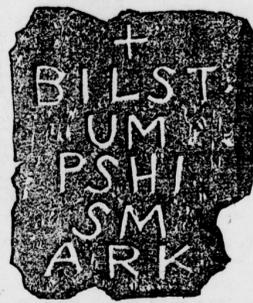
The articles set the entire scientific world agog, and everybody practically credited the story. Those who were most credulous were the scientists. M. Arago, the most famous French scientist of the time, went so far as to request the French academy, of which he was a member, to send a deputation from that body to confer with the English astronomer at the Cape.

Edgar Allan Poe, who had just written a story of a similar character himself, was further convinced of the enormous success of what he saw was a hoax, and endeavored to expose it, but no one would listen to him. When the mails arrived from the Cape of Good Hope a few weeks after the publication, everybody realized that the articles were a hoax and the present feelings of the King of Denmark and the University of Copenhagen, concerning Dr. Cook, were widely felt by scientists of that time. The articles were written by Richard Adams Locke and Lewis Gaylord Clark.

The Cardiff Giant Hoax

Almost equally famous was the "Cardiff Giant Hoax." George Hull, a tobaccoist, of Binghamton, N. Y., and the Rev. John Turk, of Ackley, became involved in an argument over the existence of giants in prehistoric times. Mr. Turk maintained strongly that they existed. Mr. Hull determined to make his adversary a laughing stock by inducing him to declare a block of stone to be a gigantic human fossil.

Hull spent two years preparing his hoax. He procured a slab of stone 13 feet long, four feet in width and 22 inches thick. From this a giant form was carved in such a way as to arouse if scientific dispute over the question whether it was a fossil or a prehistoric sculpture. Hull



The Famous Inscription Found by the Pickwick Club, Based by Dickens on a Real Hoax at Banbury, England.

pricked it with pores to make it look like worm holes, rubbed it down with sand till some of the features were almost obliterated, bathed it in sulphuric acid and gave it a course of treatment that produced the appearance of great age.

The giant was shipped to Cardiff, N. Y., and buried on the farm of a relative of Hull, named Newell, in October, 1869, it was discovered by men who were digging a well. Archaeologists generally accepted it as a relic of prehistoric times. One clergyman even ventured the opinion that it was the identical pillar of salt into which Lot's unhappy wife was changed. It was publicly exhibited in all of the principal cities of the United States and was accepted as genuine by the leading men of science, including President White of Cornell university.

It was some years before the imposture was detected and it became known that the giant was carved from gypsum. The most remarkable hoax of its kind ever perpetrated in this country was perhaps the Keely motor, which he claimed was capable of generating its own power, without fuel, in other words, he had discovered the secret of perpetual motion. He called his machine "The Pneumatic Pulsating Vacuum Engine," and pretended that it depended for its power on the harmonic vibrations of the universe. Although scientists did not generally believe in this machine, large numbers of prosperous, well educated persons did so, and continued to do so in spite of all the warnings of science. From 1872 to the time Keely died, in 1899, his followers continued to believe in him and supported him with their money. Mrs. Bloomfield Moore, of Philadelphia, a widow with a fortune of five millions, was one of his most generous supporters. It is estimated that he made over \$200,000.

The Manuscript of Moses

The history of deception offers no more remarkable case than that of Professor M. V. Shapira, a Polish purveyor of spurious antiquities, who persuaded the British museum to agree to buy a manuscript of the bible. In July, 1883, Shapira offered the British museum for the sum of 1,000,000 pounds sterling (about \$1,800,000) a number of strips of leather bearing in archaic Hebrew characters matter similar to, but with many variations from, the sayings of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy. Shapira declared that he had received these strips from a Bedouin who had found them in a cave in Moab.

Clermont-Ganneau was commissioned by the French government to investigate the authenticity of Shapira's discovery, but at the request of Shapira, the British museum refused to allow Ganneau to see the strips. Nevertheless, from the examination of the strips that were exhibited to the public Ganneau was able to show convincing proof that the strips were of a spurious nature.

The forger had taken the lower margins of some scrolls of the law and written his variants of Deuteronomy upon them, but they still showed traces of the styles used to mark off the original columns, over which the new writing extended without regard to them.

In the history of art perhaps the most noted imposture was the sale of a tiara, termed "The Tiara of King Saitapharnes," to the Louvre by a dealer in Vienna named Hochmann for \$10,000. Hochmann claimed that it had been found in the sepulchre of Saitapharnes, a third century ruler of a Greek colony, in the Crimea, and he accounted for its remarkable brilliancy by the fact that during all the years it had lain protected from the light by the close confines of the tomb.

M. Clermont-Ganneau thought it strange that the tiara had suffered so little from the ravages of time and he examined it more closely. Many little indications he found pointing to the probability that the tiara had recently been made, and he sent for a jeweler in a city named Rouchnowski.

He promptly admitted that the tiara had come from his workshop and he furnished ample proof of his claim, even going so far as to allow the authorities of the Louvre to confine him in a cell while he made a segment of the tiara for purposes of comparison.

Early in the nineteenth century an enthusiastic band of archaeologists exploring the town of Banbury, in England, came upon an ancient stone bearing the following inscription: "SEGEH GREVE ERHIC WICISME VAHL LAH SEHS SES OTHREH NOS GNIR DNA SRE GNIF REHNOS GNIRE ROHYER GAN- OED IRYD ALE NIFAE ESOTS SORCY RUB NABOT ES ROIKH CO CAED IR."

This was debated for a long time as a specimen of some ancient forgotten language. Then the man who had first pointed out the stone sent a communication to the meeting of the Antiquarian society, suggesting that if they read the inscription backward some light would be thrown on it. They then found it was merely the old nursery rhyme: "Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross to see a fine lady ride on a grey horse. Kings on her fingers and queens on her toes, she shall have music wherever she goes."

This occurrence was the basis of the very amusing episode dealing with Charles Dickens in "The Pickwick Papers," when the Pickwick club discover an ancient inscription which proves to read "Bill Stumps, his mark."

One of the most successful impostors of history was the Russian known as "The False Demetrius," who actually reigned through Poland for three years. He pretended to be the son of the Czar Ivan the Terrible, supposed to have been murdered by Boris Godunoff. He exactly resembled the dead prince and was greatly beloved by the people during his rule, although he incurred the enmity of the nobility. His wife, the daughter of a Polish prince, suspected his deception and believed that an old woman whom he called his nurse was really his mother. The old woman was afraid to do this, and thus condemned her own son. This episode is shown in an accompanying illustration. It led to the exposure and death of poor Demetrius.

Up to a few generations ago hoaxes and practical jokes of a robust type were the commonest form of humor. The most famous of these was the "cat hoax," perpetrated in the city of Chester, England, in 1815, just previous to the banishment of Napoleon I to the island of St. Helena. Handbills were distributed over the city, and that three dollars would be paid for every full grown tomcat, two dollars for a half grown tomcat, and a half for every full grown female cat, and in exchange for every kitten that could feed itself. On the day appointed nearly all the cats in England were brought into Chester. The city was filled with men, women and children carrying cats.

When the people found that no one was there to buy the cats a riot took place, and the cats escaped. Five thousand and many others were drowned, and since then the neighborhood has been unusually well supplied with cats.

One of the most entertaining frauds of the eighteenth century was executed by George Pseimanzar, who pretended to be a native of Formosa, an island now belonging to Japan, about which practically nothing was known at that time. He made long addresses in the language of his alleged country, which were listened to with great interest by the scholars of the University of Oxford. In fact, he was adopted as a sort of protege of the university. He was a scoundrel, a Frenchman, and probably had a little



A MOON CREATURE BY JOHN BARRYMORE.



THE TIARA OF SAITAPHARNES A MODERN WORK SOLD TO THE LOUVRE AS AN ANCIENT GREEK.



JOHN W. KEELY AND HIS FAMOUS PERPETUAL MOTION MACHINE.



The False Demetrius, Who Ruled As Czar of Russia for Three Years.

The Cardiff Giant, Carved by George Hull, and Accepted by the Leading Scientists of America as a Prehistoric Fossil Man.