

MOON MADNESS? *(Originally published July 1963)*

Some of the intriguing daydreams of our era are those clothed in the authority of scientific research. Americans, particularly, are prone to accept anything expressed in the terminology of science as true gospel. To express disbelief, at times, will almost rank as heresy of the gravest sort. The doubter of some prediction, say, from the Space Administration Department of Research, will often find himself looked at suspiciously as if he might be one of those Radical Rightists, or, if you carry the criticism a step further, even an Anti-American, which is another way of saying communist (formerly left).

We have been reading some lately about the lunar project. Conservative estimates about the cost of placing one live American on the moon's surface vary between thirty (30) and forty (40) billion dollars. A single billion dollars is a lot more money than the ordinary American (even) can visualize. The lunar attempt will represent a tremendous lot of money, not to mention a tremendous expenditure of human time and effort.

We have also been reading lately a few, sober, scientific articles about what earthbound man may expect to find once he lands on the moon. There are equally sober analyses about what he will find on the planets of Venus, Mars and other nearby globes of our puny solar system. If a trip to the moon will cost billions, a trip to Mars will cost multiple times these billions; a trip out of our circumscribed solar system off into the vast, limitless interplanetary world of science fiction might, when you get right down to it, be more than most people could afford.

Yet to the average American, this commuting between planets and universes seems no more unrealistic than Columbus' plans might have seemed to his well-wishers of medieval Europe. It may be that the financing of Columbus' trip seemed just as astronomical to the economists of his day as do our multiple billion dollar appropriations today. This, however, we doubt, for if we are to believe our history books, the finances were at least partially solved by the good Queen Isabella hocking some of her jewels. She apparently didn't even have to hock them all, because she was still functioning in queenly circles, and in no evident financial or jeweled distress, after three such voyages.

We have also read about atmosphere, temperatures and other unpleasant environmental hazards so antagonistic to the support of human existence that it will necessitate the spending of countless more millions and billions to create the artificial enclosures with built in human conditions, to sustain our moon ad-venturers. No one really tells us how, or, who will be up there on these planets to help build, assemble and

maintain these things that will keep our one or two moon men happy. But maybe this is just an inconsequential detail. Maybe if we can just get up there, first, of course so that we may have the pleasure of sticking our tongues out at the Russians, all the rest will come easily and at a cost of hardly more than a billion-billion-billion.

While the environmental conditions on these planets may not be exactly favorable for man, this does not seem like an insurmountable obstacle to the average, red-blooded American dreamer, or to the indoctrinated science fiction buff. Just another goal that man (superman) will one day inevitably conquer in his ever onward, God blessed and sanctioned destiny.

No one apparently ever stops to recall that there are many places here on earth, man's home base, where he has probed occasionally, and which, so far, he has not seen fit to habitat, colonize or exploit in spite of their fabulous untouched resources. For example, if it is unbearable heat and poisonous gases that man is after, he could invest a few billion and construct a nice, well-insulated capsule and lower himself deep into the molten lava of some active volcano. Or, if it is cold and lack of oxygen he seeks, for a few billion he could construct a fine plastic bubble with an enclosed subdivision and shopping center and set it down on top of Mt. Everest; after all he has already been there. Then there are all these unexplored expanses of sea bottoms, full of minerals and all sorts of untold wealth, waiting to be developed, right out from his front doorstep; several nice colonies down there are well within imagination and he wouldn't even have to manufacture oxygen, he could pipe it down right from his own earth atmosphere at a saving of millions monthly.

And how about the North and South Poles, where we already have footholds? So far we have not been aware that there has been any great rush on the part of the eager, science loving, masses of Americans to get in on the ground floor and colonize the poles. Think of all those dazzling, underground, iced alleyways, brilliant in cold splendor! Why hasn't some enterprising travel agent come up with an all-expense-paid, three-week vacation at Antarctica? The lucky fellows who spend time in these spots always seem to have to be sent or assigned there at extra pay, and with a promise that they won't be kept there too long.

Through the ages all these challenges have been close within man's reach. All of these places, where man's needs center only on the control of oxygen, temperature and pressure, and not on these same factors plus numerous other known and unknown elements capable of destroying him. All have been investigated, tentatively at least, by man. Yet man has always been sensible enough before to know that while human existence under such conditions is theoretically feasible, the existence would be

miserable, grossly impractical and not worth a serious sustained effort.

These days, to question that man should reach the moon, to question that if he does reach it, perhaps it would not be worth the risk. To say these things in our piously, scientific time puts the doubter in the same category as the citizen of 1900 who maintained that the automobile would never replace the horse. It is doubtful if the automobile ever could do so today, since the resultant upheaval of our economic balance might be decided by our welfare-minded, administration economists to be "working against the Public Interest." We would still have subsidized livery stables and plowed under Fords, with everyone's right to his job at the stable protected by the federal Labor Relations Board. To express any thought today that our venture into space might be foolhardy, costly or impractical, would characterize the exponent as anti-American, anti-progressive, anti-New Frontier, or at least, as a Neanderthal, moss bound conservative. He might even be accused of wanting to vote for Goldwater!

And yet, when you think about it, where have all the bright and brilliant scientific advances of our glorious and enlightened country taken us? About to be crowded off the earth by overpopulation? Or do you prefer the brink of atomic annihilation at the whim of some egomaniac?

We wish we could help you decide. Or, if you can figure it out, we wish you could help us. Those 285-degree-below-zero nights on the moon don't appeal to us. The projected hole in our tax paying pocketbook appeals even less.

(c) *The Bulletin of the Muscogee County (Georgia) Medical Society*, "Doctor's Lounge", Jul 1963, Vol. X No.7, p.14