

A Word With You

ALL of a sudden, we are within sight of the Age-of-Science-Fiction-Come-True. That far-fetched dream of man, travel through space to other worlds, is close to reality, we realize with a jolt.

Then we are brought up with another jolt—it's not just a matter of Man Conquering Space, it's a matter of Americans vs. Russians.

* Too bad it can't be a cooperative endeavor of Man, but that's the kind of world we're living in. It's just one more poignant development of the two conflicting tendencies of our time—great strides in technology and science, shameful backwardness in human relations. We can harness the atom but we can't decide whether to use it for peaceful progress or to blow the world to smithereens. A man-made satellite in 90 minutes can circle a globe festering with a thousand age-old varieties of man-made hatred, tyranny, conflict, poverty and chaos.

Even in the face of the awe-inspiring possibility that man may soon reach other worlds, it doesn't look, at the present rate, as though he will be ready to behave sensibly as a social being.

What will man do when he sets foot on another planet? What decisions will be made as to who owns what, who does what, and who gets what? I suppose we should ask, what will Americans do if they get there first, or what will Russians do?

If they follow true to form, the Americans will follow the good old rule, "first come, first served." Speculators will sell acreage in advance on the moon and on Mars. (They're doing it already). The choicest planetary lots having been appropriated, there will be a great appeal for good old

American enterprise to come along and really make things hum and pay rent to the planet-owners. (I am presuming we will by this time have either annihilated the natives, confined them to reservations, or given them jobs in the molybdenum mines—unless of course, they are super-men and teach us a thing or two).

As for the Russians, there won't be speculation, or enterprise, or anything but state, state, state. Directives from Moscow will prescribe what, who, how, when and where—but not why. Commisars, collective farms and communism will duplicate the dreary performance behind the Iron Curtain.

Both these ways look pretty stupid when you imagine them taking place on those twinkling lights in the sky millions of miles away. There's a third way, the way of Henry George. Make the planets the common heritage of mankind, as indeed our own planet should be. Give each individual the freedom and scope to produce and develop, and let him keep the product of his labor. Let people pay into the common treasury a rental for their use of the planets.

Really, now, looked at from an astronomical perspective, that's the only sensible way.

But why do we have to wait for space travel to apply it?

—Robert Clancy

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