

THE INDIAN OCEAN BUBBLE

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WITH this last issue of THE INDIAN OCEAN BUBBLE, the editorial offices close. The editor has maintained a gently pejorative tone throughout the brief lifetime of this journal - it would have become a clergyman. But when one criticizes too often it tends to take on a petulant ring. Since your editor has essentially a sunny disposition, he has elected to retire from the field - secure in his cloak of anonymity - some day, perhaps, to appear again in a dramatic way (as a Black Knight ?) to do battle with Sin.

THOSE readers who have enjoyed these baleful columns will perhaps be consoled to hear that two new books containing materials for further study have recently been published:

THE TRAGIC HISTORY OF THE SEA C. R. Boxer, Camb Univ Press 1959
(Three accounts of disastrous early Indian Ocean Expeditions)

THE SOUTH SEA BUBBLE John Carswell, Cresset Press, announced for the spring of 1960 (A general, popular account of an early venture, to which we owe the inspiration of this now defunct journal)

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A letter to the EDITOR:

The preliminary prospectus (dated 21 January 1960) for the International Indian Ocean Expedition has now been circulated by the Coordinator, Dr. Robert G. Snider, and comments have been invited.

The total proposed budget for all nations is \$13,400,000, by present day standards a fairly modest undertaking. I imagine that the work done will be of a fairly routine nature - largely straight hydrographic survey work - like the IGY oceanographic survey of the Atlantic Ocean, and this will be valuable to have done in such a relatively unexplored area as the Indian Ocean. The prospectus goes on to imply that a number of special studies will also be done - for example, to measure the variation of current with depth throughout the seasonal wind changes. We do not have much of an idea of the distribution of currents with depth in other oceans, or how to get at it (one has only to read Ekman's illuminating and frustrating attempts to interpret his current measurements made on the Armauer Hansen in 1930 to appreciate the difficulties). And to impute that the scientific program is aimed at uncovering "cause" and "effect" in ocean currents is sheer poppycock. It seems quite sufficient to me to plan the Expedition as a simple survey - that should be sound and worthwhile all by itself.

Just how individual scientists and institutions are going to participate in this Expedition without being swindled is difficult for me to see. The publicly avowed policy of U.S. private institutions is that the individual scientist has complete "academic" freedom. But an individual who participates in this Expedition is going to be responsible for a great deal of routine (albeit important) work that is bound to conflict with his freedom. Many were

willing to submerge their own immediate interests to the needs of the IGY surveys. Now another highly organized Expedition comes along and perhaps this is just a forerunner of things to come. Some way must be found to perform these necessarily routine and regimented tasks without involving individual oceanographic scientists too much. Perhaps this is the time to begin to think about establishing a national Oceanographic Survey Office, with professional surveyors. Otherwise our research institutions are going to be pressed into service.

Finally, I think I want to say something about certain moral issues raised by implications made under the heading "Socio-economic characteristics" in the prospectus. I think that there is only a very remote chance that the Expedition will help improve fisheries and alleviate the poverty of the people in many Indian Ocean countries. It is disheartening to see oceanography join the long line of pressure groups acting - under the guise of humanitarianism - to advance their own interests; in themselves legitimate, but essentially unrelated to the moral and "socio-economic" issues which they pretend to serve. Were the Expedition really motivated to help feed starving populations it would be planned quite differently - specifically to subserve these noble ends. But as these ends are palpably not the main goal, would it not be more ethical to refer to them in a place less prominent than the first page of the prospectus?

Yours truly,

Henry Stommel

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