

Quacks

By ELIZABETH TERRY

In 1865, the following article appeared in an Eastern paper. It was reprinted in the Los Angeles *Herald-Express*, December 4, 1936:

"A man about 46 years of age, giving the name of Joshua Coppersmith, has been arrested in New York for attempting to extort funds from ignorant and superstitious people by exhibiting a device which he says will convey the human voice any distance over metallic wires so that it will be heard by the listener at the other end.

"He calls the instrument a 'telephone' which is obviously intended to imitate the world 'telegraph,' and win the confidence of those who know of the success of the latter instrument, without understanding the principles on which it is based.

"Well-informed people know that it is impossible to transmit the human voice over wires as may be done with dots and dashes and signals of the Morse Code, and that, were it possible to do so, the thing would be of no practical value.

"The authorities who apprehended the criminal are to be congratulated, and it is to be hoped that his punishment will be prompt and fitting, that it may serve as an example to other conscienceless schemers who enrich themselves at the expense of their fellow creatures."

A few years earlier, Samuel F. B. Morse, inventor of the electric telegraph, was also accused of being a "quack." His first appeal to Congress for aid in developing the telegraph was flatly refused. He spent

his fortune and four heart-breaking years before his invention was approved.

Another "quack" was Thomas A. Edison. It took him fifteen years, from 1870 to 1885, to overcome the prejudice of his countrymen and get them to install electric lights.

William Roentgen, German scientist, discoverer of X-rays, was another "quack," much criticized in the papers because it was said he would invade the privacy of the boudoir with invisible rays.

Galileo, Italian astronomer, now called the "father of modern science," was called a "quack" by his people. He was thrown in prison for "heresy" and tortured until he renounced his scientific beliefs. His story is well known.

Charles Goodyear, who gave the world vulcanized rubber, is another famous "quack." He was called a fool and an imbecile by an unsympathetic public. Without funds he almost starved rather than give up his search for better rubber and at last was successful.

Many of his experiments were made in prison.

Another quack said tomatoes could be eaten as food.

The baby buggy was invented by a "quack" named Charles Burton. His invention was outlawed as a "traffic men ace."

American newspapers refused to publish the fact that on December 17, 1903, the Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville, had flown a heavier-than-air machine. The brothers offered the United States War Department control of all rights to

the invention. Uncle Sam's boys were too shrewd to be taken in. Leading scientists had explained that flying machines were impossible and the Wright brothers' letters went in the "crank file."

In 1908, the Cleveland, Ohio, *Leader*, wired a reporter to "cut out the wildcat stuff," when he sent in a story about the Wrights' flying machine.

The owner of the New York *Herald*, James Gordon Bennett, a flying enthusiast, sent Byron R. Newton, their star reporter to see what was going on at Kitty Hawk. William Hoster, of the New York *American*, Arthur Ruhl of *Collier's Weekly*, news photographer James H. Hare, and a few others hid in the pine woods and looked through field glasses. On May 14, 1908, they saw with their own eyes as two men got into the strange contraption and it rose from the ground by its own power.

The next day front page headlines in New York newspapers announced that men could make themselves wings and fly. Reporter Newton also sent a story to a magazine. The rejection slip said his story did not seem to qualify either as fact or fiction. They simply could not believe it.

If people fifty years ago could not believe that man could make a plane that would fly, need we be surprised when people still cheat themselves by their unbelief and prejudice?

Winston Churchill truly said, "Men occasionally stumble over the Truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened."

Only those whose minds are prepared can recognize TRUTH.

Robert Quillen said, "Man has always

fought fiercely to preserve his ignorance."

"There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all argument, and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance. That principle is condemnation before investigation."—*Herbert Spencer*.
