

TOPICS OF THE TIMES.

A Severe Strain on Credulity, As a method of sending a missile to the higher, and even to the highest, part of the earth's atmospheric envelope, Professor GODDARD's multiple-charge rocket is a practicable, and therefore promising, device. Such a rocket, too, might carry self-recording instruments, to be released at the limit of its flight, and conceivably parachutes would bring them safely to the ground. It is not obvious, however, that the instruments would return to the point of departure; indeed, it is obvious that they would not, for parachutes drift exactly as balloons do. And the rocket, or what was left of it after the last explosion, would have to be aimed with amazing skill, and in a dead calm, to fall on the spot whence it started.

But that is a slight inconvenience, at least from the scientific standpoint, though it might be serious enough from that of the always innocent bystander a few hundred or thousand yards away from the firing line. It is when one considers the multiple-charge rocket as a traveler to the moon that one begins to doubt and looks again, to see if the dispatch announcing the professor's purposes and hopes says that he is working under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution. It does say so, and therefore the impulse to do more than doubt the practicability of such a device for such a purpose must be—well, controlled. Still, to be filled with uneasy wonder and to express it will be safe enough, for after the rocket quits our air and really starts on its longer journey, its flight would be neither accelerated nor maintained by the explosion of the charges it then might have left. To claim that it would be is to deny a fundamental law of dynamics, and only Dr. EINSTEIN and his chosen dozen, so few and fit, are licensed to do that.

His Plan Is Not Original. That Professor GODDARD, with his "chair" in Clark College and the countenancing of the Smithsonian Institution, does not know the relation of action to reaction, and of the need to have something better than a vacuum against which to react—to say that would be absurd. Of course he only seems to lack the knowledge ladled out daily in high schools.

But there are such things as intentional mistakes or oversights, and, as it happens, JULES VERNE, who also knew a thing or two in assorted sciences—and had, besides, a surprising amount of prophetic power—deliberately seemed to make the same mistake that Professor GODDARD seems to make. For the Frenchman, having got his travelers to or toward the moon into the desperate fix of riding a tiny satellite of the satellite, saved them from circling it forever by means of an explosion, rocket fashion, where an explosion would not have had in the slightest degree the effect of releasing them from their dreadful slavery. That was one of VERNE's few scientific slips, or else it was a deliberate step aside from scientific accuracy, pardonable enough in him as a romancer, but its like is not so easily explained when made by a savant who isn't writing a novel of adventure.

All the same, if Professor GODDARD's rocket attains sufficient speed before it passes out of our atmosphere—which is a thinkable possibility—and if its aiming takes into account all of the many deflective forces that will affect its flight, it may reach the moon. That the rocket could carry enough explosive to make on impact a flash large and bright enough to be seen from the earth by the biggest of our telescopes—that will be believed when it is done.
