ETHNOLOGY

San Blas Indians Fated

If the San Blas Indians of Panama could be left alone for the next few centuries, they might develop a unique culture, like the famous Maya of Yucatan. But this interesting scientific experiment has little chance of taking place, since alien tribes are steadily encroaching on the land occupied by the San Blas.

The situation among these Indians, who have become widely known in this country through the visit of the "white Indians" of their tribe, is described by Herbert W. Krieger, ethnologist of the U. S. National Museum, in a new government publication on the people of southeastern Panama.

The San Blas, who are a link between the Peruvians and the Maya in their characteristics, have not amalgamated with other tribes since very early times, Mr. Krieger says. Watchmen of the tribe guard the coast and trail any strangers who come to a native village, and any attempt to stay over night is discouraged. But the Panamanians are trying to force this independent and self sufficient group to accept their government and to send their children to school, and it is only a matter of time before they will give in and will blend with other tribes.

The only measure which might enable the San Blas to remain isolated would be to establish a reservation. And while this might solve the problem to the satisfaction of the San Blas, Mr. Krieger says, so far as science is concerned it would really come too late now for the tribe to develop its own culture, since they trade with the Negro and other foreigners, and are absorbing alien ideas.

"The reason why they have not perfected a system of writing, a calendar, or other developments of a high civilization may be that they have never gathered into large communities," Mr. Krieger believes. "Instead, they live in small villages of the islands of the Panama coast, and commute to the mainland where they cultivate plantations.

"The first step toward a system of recording time is shown in the turtle calendar of the San Blas. This consists of a stick worn around the neck, with which to keep account of the time of hatching of the turtle eggs. When a turtle comes ashore to build its nest, the Indian fisherman begins cutting notches in the stick until 14 days have gone, when he knows the turtle will again come ashore to visit its nest and the eggs can be taken from the nest and eaten."

The beginnings of an alphabet may be seen in their system of mnemonic or memory writing which is a highly developed form of picture writing intelligible to the initiated and used to record lore concerning treatment of disease, religious practices, and tribal history.

Science News-Letter, October 9, 1926

PSYCHOLOGY

Tense Muscles Aid Thinking

The thinker who draws himself up tense in his efforts to solve a puzzle or to concentrate on a clerical task is not so wasteful of his energies as some advocates of relaxation have believed, according to experiments at the University of Chicago.

Results of the experiments reported by Arthur G. Bills of the department of psychology, indicate that an individual's mental power is greater when his muscles are tense than when he works in a relaxed state.

The forty students who took part in the tests were set to work learning series of nonsense syllables and adding columns of digits. Part of the time they worked while exerting a constant grip of eleven pounds, and part of the time they worked in an ordinary relaxed state. Both speed and accuracy increased when the students worked on a tension.

Science News-Letter, October 9, 1926

ZOOLOGY—PESTS

Golfers Fight Grubs

Golf courses in parts of the East now have to be sprayed to keep their turf intact. Probably because the grass roots are kept tender and succulent by constant watering, the greens have an especial attraction for the omnivorous Japanese beetle larvae which have become a serious pest in the region centering around New Jersey.

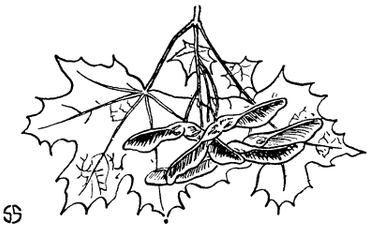
Front yards and fairways can now be preserved, however, from the hungry army of grubs, experts at the U. S. Bureau of Entomology say, by spraying the grass with a mixture of carbon disulphide and water. Various forms of arsenic mixed with the soil in the infested territories have also proved a disastrous diet for the voracious insects. Care must be exercised, the experts point out, that just the prescribed proportions of either poison should be used in order to make sure of killing a maximum of grubs without injuring the grass.

Science News-Letter, October 9, 1926

BIOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By Frank Thone



Autumn Flights and Falls

We creatures that go about on two legs but experiment also with every other mode of locomotion we can think of, rather pride ourselves on our ingenuity; and latterly especially we have plumed ourselves on succeeding to the mastery of the air, for which a long line of our ancestors, beginning with Daedalus, have striven and failed. Yet many of our most ingenious devices for getting off into the unsubstantial fluid that surrounds us, and making it bear us up on our artificial wings, seem poor and trivial when compared with the devices of dumb animals and even of unthinking plants.

Winged seeds, for example, exist in an almost endless variety of patterns, though they reduce themselves in the end to two main types; the parachute and the glider or airplane. The parachute is simulated with much success by such plants as the thistle, dandelion, milkweed, fireweed and cottonwood. In this type the seed is very light and the wing-spread diverse and very broad and buoyant, so that such seeds may rise to great heights on uprushing air currents.

The airplane type of seeds, however, seldom rise higher than their parent branch. The seeds are relatively heavy, and the supporting surface compact and flat, and relatively limited in area; good examples are the seeds of maple, box-elder, linden and ash. They do not leave the parent plant as easily as do the parachute seeds, but require the tug of a fairly stiff breeze. But in a good wind they come loose in great numbers, and go spinning down to leeward in long, slanting showers, sometimes hundred of feet.

The fall of the leaves from the trees is one of the most striking of natural phenomena; so much so, that it has given the present season of the year its name, which most of us use in preference to the more correct "autumn." A red or yellow leaf,

(*Just turn the page*)

Nature Ramblings This Week

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clinging precariously to the tree or breaking off and fluttering to the ground, is such a different thing from the green leaf it was during the summer, that we always look at it with a bit of awe, as if it were a part of a mystery.

And indeed it is more than a little mysterious, for botanists as yet know little as to the causes of the processes of autumn alchemy, though they have become fairly well informed about the course of events.

When the short days and cool nights give warning that winter is coming, the first thing that happens in the leaf is a general dissolution of all the valuable food materials—and the passing of the rich sap into the wood of the trunk and branches, where it is stored against the coming of spring, with its heavy demand for material for new leaves. The fragments of living stuff left in the leaves break up into various chemical compounds, and in doing so undergo the color changes that give the autumn woods their poetic glory. It is a gorgeousness, but it is the gorgeousness of death, like the rainbow colors which the dying dolphin is said to display. Finally, the tree builds a layer of cork cells straight across the stem, making a weather-proof seal, so that when the leaf drops off the scar is already cleanly healed, and stray spores of disease-fungi have no chance to enter.

Science News-Letter, October 9, 1926

The guayule shrub of the southwestern states produces more rubber per acre per year than rubber trees.

A memorial in Paris to Marcelin Berthelot, pioneer in developing modern synthetic chemistry, is being planned.

An experiment in refrigeration was made in the sixteenth century by Francis Bacon, who tried to preserve a chicken by stuffing it with snow.

Safety pins were used in the prehistoric Age of Bronze, and the modern safety pin is a faithful representation of one of the ancient types.

The millions of pounds of carbon dioxide used in soft drinks in this country come from flue gases given off when coal is burned.

The Algonkian and some other tribes of the far north believe that bears get nourishment during hibernation by sucking their own paws.