

Ancient Arab Customs

Scientists puzzling over cuneiform documents and ruins of Babylonian cities may turn to the living Arabs of the countryside for new light on customs of ancient Babylonia. This is the finding of Dr. Raymond P. Dougherty, who has spent several months making an archaeological survey of southern Mesopotamia, while on leave from Goucher College at Baltimore.

Dr. Dougherty, who has returned to this country to become professor of Assyriology at Yale University, reports that the study of existing Arab life in southern Mesopotamia, including the customs of the Marsh Arabs, indicate that the present is saturated largely with the past.

"A striking proof of this was noted in structures with slanting sides and recessed panels, reminding one of the old Sumerian and Babylonian temple towers," he said. "Other evidences of the survival of ancient ways of doing things were found in existing methods of soil cultivation, irrigation, and navigation. So clear are these resemblances to old practices that cuneiform documents, recovered from ruined cities and deciphered by scholars, gain new meaning from a study of present conditions."

The area explored by Dr. Dougherty was centuries ago an important part of Babylonia. The survey was for the purpose of determining the archaeological possibilities of the region, and he reports that numerous sites, some known before, others freshly discovered, are capable of yielding rich rewards to the excavator's spade. Some objects of antiquity, such as seal impressions, seal cylinders, decorated pieces of pottery, stone implements and worked flints, were obtained and brought to America for future study.

"Scores of city mounds, some of them representing debris from 3,000 to 4,000 years old, were visited and investigated," said Dr. Dougherty. "For many days the expedition waded its way through a district which was very populous in antiquity, because it was irrigated by the Euphrates river and its branches. Now the land is barren and deserted, due to the absence of water in old channels and artificial canals.

"During the last week of the survey there was opportunity to study the picturesque life of the Marsh Arabs who dwell in reed huts in the swampy sections of southern Mesopotamia."

Science News-Letter, October 16, 1926

Football In Good Old Days

For as concerning football playing I protest unto you that it maie rather bee called a friendlie kinde of fight than a plaie or recreation; a bloudie and murtheryng practise than a fellowlie sporte or pastyme. For doeth not everyone lye in waight for his adversarie, seekyng to overthrow hym and to picke hym on the nose, though it bee uppon harde stones, in ditch or dale, in valley or hill? In what place so ever it bee he careth not, so he mav have hym downe: And he that can serve the moste of this fashion, he is counted the onlie fellowe, and who but he? So that by this meanes sometymes their neckes are broken, sometymes their backes, sometymes their legges, sometymes their armes, sometymes one parte thrust out of joynt, sometyme another; sometyme the noses gush out with bloud, sometyme their eyes start out; and sometymes they are hurt in one place, sometymes in an other. But who so ever escapeth awaie the best, goeth not scotfree, but is either sore wounded and bruized, or els scapeth every harlie. And no marvaile for they have sleightes to meet one betwixt two, to dash hym against the harte with their elbowes, to hitte hym under the shortte ribbes with their griped fists, and with their knees to catch hym upon the hip, and to picke hym on his necke, with an hundred such murtheryng devices: And hereof groweth envie, malice, rancour, cholour, hatred, displeasure, enmitie, and what not els? Any sometyme fightyng, braulyng, contention, quarrell pickyng, murther, homicide, and great effusion of bloud, as experience daily teacheth.

—Philip Stubbs,
Anatomy of Abuses
(Sixteenth Century)

Science News-Letter, October 16, 1926

MEDICINE

After 500 Years

It is recorded of Methusalem, who, being the longest liver, may be supposed to have best preserved his health, that he slept always in the open air; for when he had lived five hundred years an angel said to him: "Arise, Methusalem, and build thee a house, for thou shalt live five hundred years longer." But Methusalem answered and said: "If I am to live but five hundred years longer it is not worth while to build me a house; I will sleep in the air as I have been used to do."

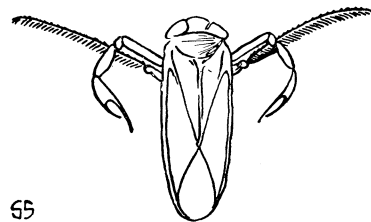
—Benjamin Franklin.

Science News-Letter, October 16, 1926

(43)

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



55

Autumnal Arthropods

On the whole, aquatic insects survive longer in autumn than do those of the land, probably because water radiates its acquired heat more slowly than do soil and rock, thus giving its lesser cold-blooded denizens a longer lease of life. Among the last of the insects to disappear is the water boatman, and when he does vanish it is only to hibernate in the slime at the bottom of his pond, so that on mild and iceless winter days he may sometimes come up to the surface for a look around.

The water boatman should have been christened the submarine boatman, for he does but little skimming of the surface. Every couple of hours he comes up for air, for he is still as much an air-breather as a butterfly, for all his diver's life. But the rest of the time he spends on the bottom, clinging to stems and roots with his tong-like middle pair of legs, while he scoops up quantities of ooze with his front pair, which are spoons. He spills this unsavory-seeming mess in front of his face incessantly, and out of it he sorts tiny animals and plants with his mouth.

The third pair of legs are what give him his distinguishing name, for they are perfect oars. Straight and stiff on the sweep, they are pulled forward on the return with but little resistance. And their feet are equipped with automatic paddles which set themselves athwart the water on the stroke, but fold up on the return—a faultless "feathering" arrangement.

But some of the multi-legged creatures of the land do survive. Which of us, young or old, does not remember the incantation proper to the finding of a Daddy-Long-Legs:

"Grand-daddy-long-legs, where is my cow

"Tell me right now

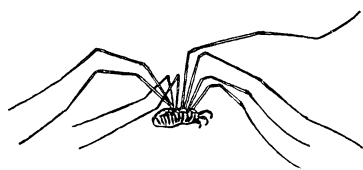
"Or I will surely mash you!"

And all too often we young savages used to carry into effect this sanguinary threat, in spite of the fact that

(Just turn the page)

Nature Ramblings This Week

(Continued from page 43)



§

Daddy-Long-Legs

we had no cow, and that the helpless creature we had cornered or captured could have had no knowledge of her whereabouts in any case. But if the strange, long-limbed, spiderlike thing that was not a spider raised a tentative leg and pointed waveringly, it mattered not in what direction, the ritual requirement was satisfied and the captive was set free.

Daddy-long-legs was also useful for the terrorizing of small and despised girls, who didn't know it wasn't spider anyway and screamed at the threat of having those quivering, wiry legs dropped on their necks. The poor arachnid was probably as badly frightened, but couldn't scream, so we gave no thought to his feelings. Children, at least young male ones, are *not* gentle, poets to the contrary notwithstanding.

Some of us knew daddy-long-legs as "harvestmen;" but that was a "grown-up" name, given because the creatures become very abundant in autumn. Even now that some of us have become grownups ourselves there is still a fascination about these odd, ineffectual, harmless, seemingly useless relatives of the spiders who wander through the dying lesser world among the grasses and stubble, like philosophical specters on stilts.

Science News-Letter, October 16, 1926

PAST VOLUMES

Nine volumes of the SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER have been issued in mimeographed form. Volume I consisted of numbers 50 to 90, inclusive, including the period March 13 to December 30, 1922; thereafter volumes consisted of 26 numbers covering half-year periods, with the exception of Volume IX which consisted of numbers 273 to 285, inclusive, and included the three-month period of July, August and September of this year. Volume X began with No. 286, the first to be printed, and will cover only the three last months of this year. Thereafter volumes will cover half-year periods. The pages in each volume will be numbered consecutively.

Science News-Letter, October 16, 1926

SCIENCE SERVICE

Science Service is a unique institution, established at Washington for the purpose of disseminating scientific information to the public. It aims to act as a sort of liaison agency between scientific circles and the world at large. It interprets original research and reports the meetings of learned societies in a way to enlighten the layman. The specialist is likewise a layman in every science except his own and he, too, needs to have new things explained to him in non-technical language. Scientific progress is so rapid and revolutionary nowadays that no one can keep up with it from what he learned at school. Science Service endeavors to provide life-continuation courses in all the sciences for newspaper readers anywhere in America without tuition fees or entrance examinations.

In a democracy like ours it is particularly important that the people as a whole should so far as possible understand the aims and achievements of modern science, not only because of the value of such knowledge to themselves but because research directly or indirectly depends upon popular appreciation of its methods. In fact the success of democratic institutions, as well as the prosperity of the individual, may be said to depend upon the ability of people to distinguish between science and fakes, between the genuine expert and the pretender.

Science Service spares no pains or expense in the endeavor (1) to get the best possible quality of popular science writing and (2) to get it to the largest possible number of readers. If in doing this it can make both ends meet, so much the better. If not, it will do it anyway.

Through the generosity of E. W. Scripps, Science Service has been assured of such financial support as to insure its independence and permanence. Mr. Scripps's long and wide experience as a newspaper editor and proprietor had convinced him of the importance of scientific research as the foundation of the prosperity of the nation and as a guide to sound thinking and living and he realized the need for an independent agency that would bring the results of research to the attention of the entire people so these could be applied to the solution of their personal, social or political problems.

Science Service is chartered as a non-profit-making institution and all receipts from articles, books, lectures and films are devoted to opening up new avenues for the diffusion of knowledge and developing promising methods of popular education. Although Science Service has a philanthropic purpose, it is conducted on business principles, with the aim of making each branch of its activities ultimately self-supporting so far as possible. All ac-

ceptable contributions are paid for and all published articles are charged for.

Science Service is under the control of a Board of Trustees composed of ten scientists and five journalists. The leading national organizations of all the sciences, the National Academy of Sciences, the National Research Council, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, appoint three trustees each.

Science Service is not a governmental institution, but it is in close contact with the numerous governmental bureaus of research. It is not under the control of any clique, class or commercial interest. It has no connection with any particular publisher or syndicate. It will supply any news agency or newspaper on even terms. It is not the organ of any single scientific association. It serves all the sciences, It engages in no propaganda, unless it be called propaganda to urge the value of research and the usefulness of science.

Science News-Letter, October 16, 1926

News-Letter Features

Born over four years ago, on March 13, 1922, of the demand and interest of those individuals who had caught a glimpse of *Science Service's* news reports to newspapers, the SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER has since proved interesting to laymen, scientists, students, teachers and children.

Into the pages of the NEWS-LETTER are fed the cream of *Science Service's* output directed at the newspapers of the world. To this is added material especially prepared.

Turn the pages and note:

It is a *separable* magazine. You can clip or tear out any article without losing or damaging another article on the other side.

Each article is automatically *indexed* by the key word printed above its heading. (See page 20 for explanation.)

Each article is automatically *dated* by its last line.

Books are *reviewed in brief* as they are received from the publishers.

The classics of science and striking passages from current books, addresses and periodicals are carefully selected and published.

Important *anniversaries* of science are appropriately noted week by week in a special department.

Regular articles tell of the happenings in the *skies* and in the great *outdoors*.

Photographs aid in the telling of the week's science.

Science News-Letter, October 16, 1926