

First Glances at New Books

APPLIED X-RAYS—George L. Clark—*McGraw-Hill*. An account of recent applications of the youthful science of X-rays to problems of industry.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

CHAUCER AND THE MEDIAEVAL SCIENCES—Walter Clyde Curry—*Oxford* (\$2.50). An illuminating study on the scientific beliefs of the time of Chaucer.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

APPLIED CHEMISTRY EXPERIMENT SHEETS — Martin Mendel — *Globe*. (\$0.93). A series of experiments and questions planned for high school chemistry courses with blank data sheets on which to record the observations of each experiment.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

CLINICS, HOSPITALS AND HEALTH CENTERS—Michael M. Davis—*Harper* (\$5). Reviews the history of outpatient work and clinics in this country, and outlines their underlying principles of policy and organization.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

A TREATISE ON PNEUMONIC PLAGUE—Wu Lien-teh—*Health Section of the League of Nations*. An invaluable collection of the available information on pneumonic plague gathered from widely scattered sources and brought up-to-date from the pre-Black Death era.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

PROPERTIES OF INORGANIC SUBSTANCES—Wilhelm Segerblom—*Chemical Catalog Co*. An invaluable handbook giving the chemical formulae, common trade names and properties of some 1,500 inorganic chemical compounds revised and brought up-to-date.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

THE UNIVERSITY AFIELD—Alfred L. Hall-Quest—*Macmillan* (\$3).

A careful and thorough-going examination of the university extension movement, and an estimate of its value and possibilities as a means of adult education.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

FARM POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES, 1920—Leon E. Truesdell—*Government Printing Office* (\$1.75). What is happening to people on the farms is shown in many tables of figures in this census monograph. A useful sourcebook of facts and figures for those interested in social and economic problems.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

PHYSICS

Radioactivity and Mythology

Quotation from *THE INTERPRETATION OF RADIUM, AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE ATOM*. By Frederick Soddy. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922. Prof. Soddy is one of the British pioneers in discovering the nature of matter.

It is curious how strangely some of the old myths and legends about matter and man appear in the light of the recent knowledge. Consider, for example, the ancient mystic symbol of matter, known as Ouroboros—"the tail devourer"—which was a serpent, coiled into a circle with the head devouring the tail, and bearing the central motto, "The whole is one." This symbolizes evolution; moreover, it is evolution of matter—the very latest aspect of evolution—the existence of which was strenuously denied by Clerk Maxwell and others of only last century. The idea which arises in one's mind as the most attractive and consistent explanation of the universe in the light of present knowledge is, perhaps, that matter is breaking down and its energy being evolved and degraded in one part of a cycle of evolution, and in another part, still unknown to us, the matter is being again built up with the utilization of the waste energy. If one wished to symbolize such an idea, in what better way could it be done than by the ancient tail-devouring serpent?

Some of the beliefs and legends which have come down to us from antiquity are so universal and deep-rooted that we are accustomed to consider them almost as old as the race itself. One is tempted to inquire how far the unsuspected aptness of some of these beliefs and sayings to the point of view so recently disclosed is the result of mere chance or coincidence, and how far it may be evidence of a wholly unknown and unsuspected ancient civilization of which all other relic has disappeared. It is curious to reflect, for example, upon the remarkable legend of the philosopher's stone, one of the oldest and most universal beliefs, the origin of which, however far back we penetrate into the records of the past, we do not probably trace to its real source. The philosopher's stone was accredited the power not only of transmuting the metals, but of acting as *the elixir of life*. Now, whatever the origin of this apparently meaningless jumble of ideas may have been, it is really a perfect and but very slightly allegorical expression of the actual present views we hold today. It does not require much effort of the imag-

(Just turn the page)

The Biologist's Pastoral

(It is often said that a scientist falls in love with his work, and why should not he therefore write a poem to it and the place where he has wooed more knowledge?)

O come with me and be my love
And we will all the pleasures prove
Of kymograph and microtome,
Immersion oil and chromosome.

We'll feed thyroids to pollywogs
And watch them changing into frogs.
They say that thymus makes 'em fat
But we must prove the truth of that.

We'll spend a portion of our lives
In grinding up our section knives,
And when at last they'll clip a hair
Some *Ascaris* we will prepare.

Through woods by rippling brooks
we'll wander,
And catch the squirming salamander.
Ohio's muddy streams shall lure us
To where perhaps we'll find *Necturus*.

We'll scramble up the mountain side,
To caverns where *Spelerpes* hide;
And snakes look out in wonderment,
To guess our purpose and intent.

Then with the mechanistic faction
We'll live by chemical reaction,
For naught can charm a mechanist
Save make researches and exist.

A balanced ration must suffice,
No matter if it isn't nice.
Till with Pure Science as our goal,
We reach the haven of Woods Hole.

If this of use to science prove,
Then come with me and be my love.
Philip Pope.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

HORTICULTURE

Male Asparagus Best

Male asparagus plants have it all over the females of the species.

Records of experimental planting of asparagus made in California show that male plants have a much greater yield than the female ones. Some 372 pounds per acre go to the credit of the male plants the first year as against 278 pounds on the part of the female asparagus. The second year the masculine preponderance was even greater, being 2,556 versus 1,612 pounds per acre.

Methods for determining the sex of the young asparagus seedlings while still in the nursery are being studied in the California laboratories so that in the future only male plants will be set out.

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More Eyes and Ears---

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Radioactivity and Mythology

(Continued from page 105)

ination to see in energy the life of the physical universe, and the key to the primary fountains of the universe today is known to be transmutation. Is, then, this old association of the power of transmutation with the elixir of life merely a coincidence? I prefer to believe it may be an echo from one of many previous epochs in the unrecorded history of the world, of an age of men which have trod before the road we are treading today, in a past possibly so remote that even the very atoms of its civilization literally have had time to disintegrate.

Let us give the imagination a moment's further free scope in this direction, however, before closing. What if this point of view that has now suggested itself is true, and we may trust ourselves to the slender foundation afforded by the traditions and superstitions which have been handed down to us from a prehistoric time? Can we not read into them some justification for the belief that some former forgotten race of men attained not only to the knowledge we have so recently won, but also to the power that is not yet ours? Science has reconstructed the story of the past as one of a continuous Ascent of Man to the present-day level of his powers. In face of the circumstantial evidence existing of this steady upward progress of the race, the traditional view of the Fall of Man from a higher former state has come to be more and more difficult to understand. From our new standpoint the two points of view are by no means so irreconcilable as they appeared. A race which could transmute matter would have little need to earn its bread by the sweat of its brow. If we can judge from what our engineers accomplish with their comparatively restricted supplies of energy, such a race could transform a desert continent, thaw the frozen poles, and make the whole world one smiling Garden of Eden. Possibly they could explore the outer realms of space, emigrating to more favorable worlds as the superfluous today emigrate to more favorable continents. The legend of the Fall of Man, possibly, may be all that has survived of such a time before, for some unknown reason, the whole world was plunged back again under the undisputed sway of Nature, to begin once more its upward toilsome journey through the ages.

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