

THERE was once a hen who laid an egg. If the hen had not come from a far land and if the egg had not been strange in color, the hen might have cackled, someone might have eaten the egg for breakfast and that would have been the end of the incident.

As it was, a newspaper reporter heard about the egg, a news photographer captured for admiring millions the portrait of the interesting object and the proud producer, and the purely domestic accomplishment became a matter of public note and comment.

It was a fine story. The hen, so the reporter said, laid a green egg. March 17 was approaching. Some readers of the reporter's article may have jumped at the conclusion that the hen was responsive to the feast day. In reality, she was not. She was not even Irish.

The guardians of the hen searching through the tomes in which the habits and peculiarities of such creatures are recorded and preserved noted that that particular sort of hen lays blue eggs. A controversy resulted. Was the scientifically green

reporter or the blue book of science right?

Fortunately the egg itself was available. Careful eyes had pronounced it greenish blue or bluish green, according to lights and opinions.

Nevertheless, one believer of science insisted that the egg should be described as blue, as the book had said. The reporter had erred in describing the egg as of a color pleasing to St. Patrick's memory. The scientist who wrote the description was, *jure divino*, right.

And that is the point of this story. Unfortunately, scientists are not infallible. Science, like a timetable, is subject to change without notice. The atom (from the Greek, uncut, indivisible) is composed of electrons whirling around a complex nucleus. Where now are the truths of Aristotle who swayed the intellectual world for two millennia?

Science is not a creed to be worshipped. Scientists are not wisemen and priests who learn rituals. A school boy may find a flaw in a classic of science or discover new truths that perfect some of the handiwork of the pioneers.

Editorial

Science News-Letter, March 31, 1928

Not a Night Picture

Physics

Though it looks at first glance to be a picture of snow-covered trees, taken at night time, the cover illustration this week is of vegetation full of green foliage, taken with light vibrating too slowly to be visible to the eye, the so-called infra-red rays. Though the eye cannot detect them, these rays can be focussed through a lens, over which is placed a screen to cut out the more rapid, and visible, rays. Photographic plates can be sensitized so that they record this image, though even at best, and on a bright day, a long time exposure is required.

This photograph was taken by that ingenious American physicist, Prof. Robert Williams Wood, of Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore. One application that has been made of such methods of photography is to photograph the stars in full daylight. The light from the sky is almost completely deficient in these rays, hence it appears black in the picture. But the stars send out infra-red light, as well as the visible kind, so that if the visible glare from the sky is eliminated by suitable screens, the delicate infra-red rays of the stars can be made to write their own records on the sensitive emulsion of the plate.

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In This Issue—

Presidents die young, p. 195—*Big Dipper* guides, p. 197—Glucose treatment, p. 199—Chemistry of sex, p. 199—*Perfect diet* too good, p. 199—*Harmony*, p. 203—*Mayas* celebrate, p. 205—Alias "*Coronium*," p. 205—Keeps on *evolving*, p. 205—"My love's an *Arbutus*," p. 207—March *pneumonia*, p. 207—New record in *earthquake* reporting, p. 207.



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