

Quack Character Tests

CHARACTER analysts who measure the skull by one of the latest systems of phrenology and who interpret their measurements to show the skull owner's special abilities have been tested and found wanting.

A report of the test, in Personnel Research, indicates that any one who would like his abilities sized up might almost as well draw colored marbles, representing different degrees of ability, out of a box and set down his ability on each trait according to the marbles drawn in the lottery. This marble test was actually used by Adelbert Ford, of the University of Michigan, to determine how the character reading system in question compared with pure chance in its success at "hitting the nail on the head." The system proved a negligible shade more accurate than random chance.

"The prevalence of large numbers of individuals and organizations aiming to sell systems of character analysis to employment departments justifies an occasional check of the value of such enterprises, and repeated warning to the psychologically untrained that these activities illustrate good salesmanship but poor science," Mr. Ford states.

Psychology

Science News-Letter, September 13, 1930

Parents to Blame

WHY boys and girls leave home to spend their playtime somewhere else is told plainly in a straw vote taken among 10,000 Massachusetts girls and boys in their early teens.

Among other questions the children were asked, "Where do you prefer to spend your play time: near or in your home, or away from home?—Why?" Less than half of the boys, 47 per cent to be exact, preferred home. Sixty per cent of the girls voted home more fun for leisure time.

Faults in the home itself are responsible for the majority of its failures to hold children, a statement to the American Home Economics Association concludes. The investigation was made under the auspices of the Massachusetts Department of Correction, to obtain information linking with the idea that lack of parental hold on children plays a part in juvenile delinquency.

The children set very high the importance of home companionship with parents, brothers, sisters, and friends. Lack of friends was a frequent cause of disliking home and, on the other hand, permission to entertain friends was frequently mentioned as a cause for liking to stay home. Good equipment for play proved important to the boys, whereas freedom to do as one pleases meant more to the girls. Parental restraint which the boys and girls thought too strict led 16 per cent of the boys and 14 per cent of the girls to find amusement elsewhere. Dullness at home was another conspicuous criticism.

A small percentage of the children evaded home because of chores and errands, but a much larger percentage liked home for the interesting things they found to do there and indicated that household tasks are attractive if presented so.

Sociology

Science News-Letter, September 13, 1930

Ancient Forest Fires

EVEN before the white man came, with his saws and his fires, the primeval forest of the Northwest seldom reached its full development, said Director Thornton T. Munger of the Pacific Northwest Forest Experiment Station at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science at Eugene, Ore.

Forest fires started by lightning and by Indians swept the woods frequently, and the trees would have to start all over again. The result was that the forest consisted to a very considerable extent of Douglas fir, whereas the "climax," or most completely developed forest type possible in the region, is represented by a mixture of western hemlock, western red cedar and balsam fir.

But with the coming of white men, lumbering operations have set the forest type back from a half-grown forest to none at all. It is the practice in northwestern lumbering to cut clean and burn the discarded tops and branches. These fires leave no living seed in the ground. "Seed trees" left standing help a great deal toward the regeneration of the forest, but the cones are produced in abundance only once in three to five years, and in lean years birds, insects and rodents get most of the seed. Hence Mr. Munger called for revision of methods of logging that will give the forest a better chance to come back.

Forestry

Science News-Letter, September 13, 1930

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Your Smoking Chimney

CONVICTION that one's own chimney smokes as much as the other fellow's would very nearly put an end to the smoke nuisance, Victor J. Azbe of the Citizens' Smoke Abatement League of St. Louis believes. And he has convinced many of his neighbors by showing them successive pictures of their smoking chimneys taken at the rate of one a minute.

Mr. Azbe uses an automatic camera to take a picture every minute for several hours of smoke belching from stacks belonging to the reluctant, he has reported to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. A strip of these movie-size pictures sent the owner usually attracts a surprising amount of attention because the method is novel and leaves little ground for argument.

Such statements as: "We shall stop the smoke, but please don't take any more pictures" are becoming common results of this work of the St. Louis Smoke Abatement League.

Engineering

Science News-Letter, September 13, 1930

Healthier Babies

THE death rate of babies during the first year of life has decreased considerably in this country during the last fifteen years. At present the rate is 67 per 1,000 births. This does not yet equal the very low rate of New Zealand which has for years held the record in the matter of a low infant death rate. There the present rate is 36 per 1,000.

"This means that only three and one-half per cent. of all the children born die before the year is out," a report by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company explains. "In our own country the figure is nearer 7 per cent. but this represents the very remarkable gain of 33 per cent. since 1915 when the Birth Registration Area was established and infant mortality figures became available for large parts of the United States."

Our present rate compares favorably with those of most other advanced countries.

Public Health

Science News-Letter, September 13, 1930

CIENCE FIELDS

Wisdom of Woodpeckers

CALIFORNIA woodpeckers know enough to get in out of the wet. In a study of a woodpecker community at Grass Valley, up in the foothills near Berkeley, Calif., Dr. Wm. E. Ritter of the University of California found that the birds usually chisel out their nests on the north sides of the telephone poles they choose for habitations. They apparently prefer the poles to the natural trees when the former are available. Dr. Ritter's study is discussed in the current issue of the *Scientific Monthly*.

Why 92 out of a total of 131 holes counted should be on the north sides of the poles is understandable when we learn that the bulk of bad weather in California blows from the south. The woodpeckers have somehow learned this and cut their front doors accordingly.

But though they are canny in arranging their homes, the California woodpeckers are not always wise in their food-storing habits, Dr. Ritter finds. They lay by great quantities of acorns, hammering them firmly into holes which they bore, or into natural cracks and crevices in the bark of trees. But when they store acorns in the cracks of telephone poles they hammer them in just as firmly, during the dry season when the cracks are at their widest. Then come the rains, and both wood and acorns swell, until not even a strong hand with a corkscrew could get them out. The savings of the poor woodpeckers, due to their owners' lack of foresight, have become "frozen assets."

Ornithology

Science News-Letter, September 13, 1930

Ages of Love

THE DISTINCTION between sexuality and erotics, which denotes only the mental complex in sexual relations, was emphasized by the Finnish physician, Dr. Carl Bruhn of Aggleby University, at the Second International Congress for Sex Research held in London.

Erotic emotion awakens first at the end of infancy when the first child-love occurs. At about the tenth year a new phase begins, that of the second child-love or the first shy love. The

approach of puberty causes timidity in the relations of the two sexes, leading to a period of sexual isolation, when boys and girls try to avoid each other. This timidity is gradually followed by the full youthful love round about eighteen. Then the individual reaches the phase of maturity when he can approach the other sex on terms of equality.

The apparent purpose of this mental, if not sentimental development, is to prevent premature sexual relations and perhaps also to enrich the emotional life. Thus, Dr. Bruhn explained, erotics can aid, but can also prevent sexual life in harmony with the physical needs of the individual.

Physiology

Science News-Letter, September 18, 1930

Green Germ Killer

WOUNDS in surgical operations may soon be sewn with bright green catgut affording to patients the greatest possible protection against infection, according to reports to the American Medical Association, from Odessa, where Dr. S. Baccal has been experimenting with powerful antiseptics.

Dr. Baccal covered the lips of a wound with brilliant green, an aniline dyestuff, and the wound remained sterile during a period of seven days after the operation and it was impossible to obtain germ-colonies from samples taken from the wound. Brilliant green kills all bacteria promptly, in smaller amounts and in more dilute solutions than any of the antiseptics known previously. It is not irritating; it can be applied to mucous membranes, it can be even placed in the eye. In the surgical clinic of Odessa it is now exclusively used for washing the surgeon's hands before operations, because it never leads to infections.

Dr. Baccal also found that the saturation of silkworm catgut with alcohol and brilliant green did not make this suture-material less soft, elastic or pliable, and at the same time increased its safety causing no suppuration whatever.

This brilliant stuff has only one defect, it stains the hands of the surgeon a bright green, which cannot be washed away for several days. Dr. Baccal is therefore anxious to find a formula for a bleach, which will remove the color.

Chemistry—Medicine

Science News-Letter, September 13, 1930

Arlington Bridge

THE new Arlington Memorial Bridge across the Potomac River at Washington, one of the world's finest examples of stone arch spans, will very probably be ready for use with temporary approaches on the Virginia end, where much filling must be done, for the 1932 bicentennial celebration of the birth of George Washington.

"I expect to have the bridge itself done sometime this autumn, by the end of this working season," Lt. Col. U. S. Grant 3rd, director of public buildings and parks of the capital, recently told a congressional committee. "Then we will be able to haul earth from both banks and make our fill on Columbia Island and the approach on the Virginia shore. We hope to have it available for traffic over unsurfaced roads—that is, the first temporary covering of the fill—by the end of the 1931 working season."

The project of building the bridge and highway approaches in Virginia and widening nearby streets in Washington is now in its fifth year. As adopted by Congress it is to be completed in another five years.

The bridge itself is 1,858 feet long and is composed of eight masonry arches of Stone Mountain granite and a ninth central double leaf bascule draw span. The spans have a clear width from inside wall to inside wall of from 165 to 180 feet.

Engineering

Science News-Letter, September 13, 1930

Fatal Sulfur

SULFUR, the element traditionally associated with things infernal, has a blighting and fatal effect on some of the fungi responsible for plant diseases. But to do its work a particle of the solid sulfur itself must come into contact with the thread-like body of the fungus.

This has been discovered by Dr. William Goodwin of South Eastern Agricultural College, Wye, England, who reported on his experiments to the International Botanical Congress at Cambridge. Dr. Goodwin's work was designed to settle the disputed question whether sulfur volatilizing by heating could also kill fungi; he found that it could not. He also found that the effectiveness of powdered sulfur in washes and sprays is heightened by the presence of an alkali.

Botany

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