



THE INSECT MENACE

By L. O. HOWARD

"One of the most important scientific books of the year."

Dr. Howard, former Chief Entomologist of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, tells here the complete story of the insect empire and its constant threat to man. "Written in a personal, reminiscent and conversational style, it rivals the best of the murder mystery stories," say the editors of the Scientific Book Club who chose it as their September selection.

The book is filled with countless curious facts and incidents of insect life and cunning. It tells of the adventures of entomologists all over the world in search of insect parasites that will feed on and destroy other dangerous pests and it describes three successful ventures in this country. "Every page . . . is illuminating and delightfully alive . . . and should be read by everyone who gives any thought whatsoever to the present and future welfare of mankind."

A book "to be placed on your bookshelf along with the other great insect books of the world—Fabre's, Sharp's, Maeterlinck's and Huxley's."—*Knickerbocker Press*.

"His half century of study of insects has stored his mind with a marvelous treasure and his book is for the layman a fresh wonderland."—*N. Y. Times*.

"... the pages are filled with many astounding things and extraordinary things which would make good source material for Ripley's 'Believe It or Not.'"—*Columbia Sunday Record*.

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PHYSICS

Action of Steel Under Stress Revealed in Writing on Sand

HOW solid steel softens and flows like wax when compressed or stretched is being shown to the naked eye by Dr. A. Nadai at the Research Laboratories of the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company, at East Pittsburgh, Pa.

A new branch of engineering is growing out of the realization that when hot steel is rolled or when a steel structure under stress yields and collapses the metal becomes, in places, soft like clay. In these cases after the disturbing force has been removed the steel "stays put."

A material showing this behavior is said to be "plastic." Ordinarily steel undergoes "elastic" deformation, that is, the steel returns to its original form after the removal of the strain. Dr. Nadai is a leading investigator of the phenomena of plastic flow of metals.

Strange patterns of great regularity are found on the surface of pieces of materials subjected to severe stressing. Dr. Nadai has devised a method of investigating these patterns optically.

In his new apparatus a beam of light is reflected from a highly polished surface of the metal specimen which is being compressed or twisted. Definite markings called "slip lines" appear.

Studied Intensely

These slip lines are now the object of intense study by engineers and mathematicians, as they indicate how a machine part of this shape is stressed in its interior. They can also be detected by etching with acid the surface of the metal which is undergoing strain.

Dr. Nadai has now also ingeniously shown that the formation of these strain lines can be studied or imitated by models. He makes a thin card of the same shape as the cross-section of the bar which is being twisted. This is then dipped into fine sand and raised in a horizontal position so that a neat pile of sand is left on top of it. The slopes of this sand cake give a picture of the stresses within the bar and can be used to test theories of the strength of such a bar under torsion.

Old rocks found on the top of mountains of much younger rocks are probably to be accounted for by the same general principles, Dr. Nadai believes.

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One layer of rock probably slips over another along definite surfaces of slip when the stress exceeds a certain amount.

The science of plasticity has many problems to face in geology. The results of engineering laboratory tests will be used, says Dr. Nadai, to test Prof. A. Wegener's interesting idea that the continents are not firmly anchored but drift slowly away from each other in the course of ages.

Science News Letter, November 28, 1931

PLANT PHYSIOLOGY

Coal in Small Doses Stimulates Plant Growth

EXERTING a mysterious stimulating action on plants causing them consistently to increase their yield by more than a fourth, coal may find wide use as a fertilizer. This is the belief of Dr. Franz Fischer, director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Coal Research and noted authority on coal and its uses, as expressed before the Third International Conference on Bituminous Coal at Pittsburgh.

"As the result of experiments that have already been made," Dr. Fischer declared, "it is beyond doubt that fertilizing with coal may play an important part in the near future."

"A particularly favorable example may be given," he continued. "Tobacco seedlings were planted in groups of three in pots, each containing three kilograms of earth. As a fertilizer each pot received, in addition to potash and phosphorus, two grams of ammonium nitrate; and, in addition to this, the second pot received seven-thousandths of one gram and the third pot seven-hundredths of one gram of dissolved brown coal. The weights harvested amount to 55 grams in the first case, more than 92 grams in the second case, and nearly 130 grams in the third case.

"Of course, such increases in yield can be obtained only in exceptional cases," Dr. Fischer explained, "but cases where this increase amounts to thirty to forty per cent. are frequent."

Scientists cannot account for the stimulating action of coal on plants, Dr.