

largely made up of dead or dying bacteria.

The method consists of treating the bacteria, either as they are growing in cultures or after they have been smeared on slides for microscopic examination, with the sterilized filtrate from a growth of streptococci from milk. This treatment changes the way the dead bacteria react to certain stains and thus gives a means of estimating the numbers of living and dead bacteria in the culture.

Acidophilus milk, which is akin to buttermilk and prescribed for certain

digestive ailments, is better stored at the temperature of an ordinary room rather than in an ice box or refrigerator, it appears from studies reported by Drs. Lenore M. Kopeloff, John L. Etchells and Nicholas Kopeloff, of the Psychiatric Institute and Hospital, New York City.

The micro-organism which sours the milk and which is considered valuable in treatment of digestive disorders, survives much better when the milk is stored in the room than when stored in the ice box, the investigators found.

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## ETHNOLOGY

## Humans, Not Animals, Main Actors in Negro Folk-Lore

**W**IDESPREAD interest in Uncle Remus' stories about Br'er Fox and Br'er Rabbit has given animal personalities more prominence than they deserve in Negro folk-lore, Dr. Melville Herskovits of Northwestern University told the American Folk-Lore Society meeting at Columbus, Ohio.

Animal tales are essentially an educational device among Negro people, he has found, from his studies of Dahomean folk-tales from West Africa and tales from Dutch Guiana. Collections of stories obtained by Dr. Herskovits in these countries reveal more stories about human beings than about animals. Some of the most important cycles in African folk-lore deal with human characters.

The Cinderella type of story is often found, he reported. Stories about orphans, told with the moral that a child who has lost its mother must not be mistreated, are widely spread through African folk-lore.

Extensively told, too, are historical tales dealing with the adventures, often supernatural, of important persons in the history of a given people.

"The animal tales, essentially educational, are told to children," Dr. Herskovits explained. "Children also repeat them in story-telling contests that delight the young people in Africa and the West Indies. Whether or not such story-telling evenings, where each child demonstrates how many tales he knows, occur in the United States is not known.

"Older people in West Africa and Dutch Guiana, at least, do not tell stories of this kind. Among them, story-

telling has the purpose of keeping alive the mythology and history of the people, or to amuse the dead at funeral wakes.

"It would seem therefore that a re-evaluation of the incidence and significance of tales other than animal stories in collections of Negro folk-lore already made should be undertaken. New collections of tales among Negroes of the United States may well reveal many more stories of non-animal types than have been published."

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## NAVIGATION

## Polarized Light Aids Observations At Sea

**S**EXTANTS and binoculars used by the Navy and on ships at sea can be improved for observations under certain light conditions by attaching to them polarizing prisms, Dr. E. O. Hulburt of the Naval Research Laboratory, told the American Physical Society.

Such a device admits light that vibrates in only one direction. It has long been known, Dr. Hulburt said, that the light of the sea and of the sky is a mixture of plane polarized and unpolarized light. He found that a polarizing prism properly oriented would darken the sea relative to the sky, reduce the brilliance of the sun path and render the horizon more distinct. In bright weather it increased the visibility of objects against the sea background. This is expected to make observations at sea more accurate.

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## BIOLOGY

## Poisonous Plant Explains Mysterious Bee Disease

**L**OCO WEED, prime trouble-maker to Western horses and cattle, is poisonous to much smaller animals as well, according to a report presented before entomologists at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Boston. G. H. Vansell and W. G. Watkins, of the U. S. Bureau of Entomology working at Davis, Calif., told how they have found dead and dying bees in and near the flowers of the spotted loco, one of the more abundant and poisonous species of the weed in certain parts of Nevada.

Before the death of the bees was traced to this poisonous plant, it was blamed on a new and mysterious disease, which discouraged many of the Nevada bee-keepers and caused others to move their apiaries out of the region.

Loco poisoning of bees, Messrs. Vansell and Watkins found, is most common after the first cutting of the alfalfa crop and before the second growth of this principal honey plant produced a new crop of flowers, especially if sweet clover is scarce and the loco weed plentiful. Sometimes weather conditions cause a scarcity in the loco weed, after which the bees do not die off so rapidly.

Not all the bee-keepers' troubles can be traced to the loco, however, the two investigators warned. Bee-keeping, like any other branch of agriculture, is governed by a whole complex of factors, and it is not safe to assign any given effect to one single cause.

*Science News Letter, December 30, 1933*

## ▼ IS OUR CLIMATE BECOMING MILDER?

**R** an address by

**J. B. Kincer**

**A** Chief, Division of Climate and Crop Weather of the U. S. Weather Bureau

**D** Wednesday, January 3, at 4:30 p. m., Eastern Standard Time, over Stations of the Columbia Broadcasting System. Each week a prominent scientist speaks over the Columbia System under the auspices of Science Service.

