

ing ships, holding a compass true, and steering airplanes and torpedoes.

The impish physicist has put a gyroscope into a small handbag, together with a motor for running it. When he goes on a journey, he starts the motor as he prepares to leave the train, and asks the porter who takes his grips to follow him closely. Then he proceeds to take a course around as many corners as possible—and at each turn the porter finds that accursed bag trying to pull his arm off. Probably more than one red-cap has become convinced that the thing is full of "ha'nts."

### Play That Paid

Sometimes a thing that starts more or less as a joke turns into a real scientific discovery. Several years ago, a young chemist named Dr. A. L. Fox, working in one of the du Pont laboratories at Wilmington, Delaware, was investigating the properties of a complex chemical known as p-phenyl-thio-carbamide.

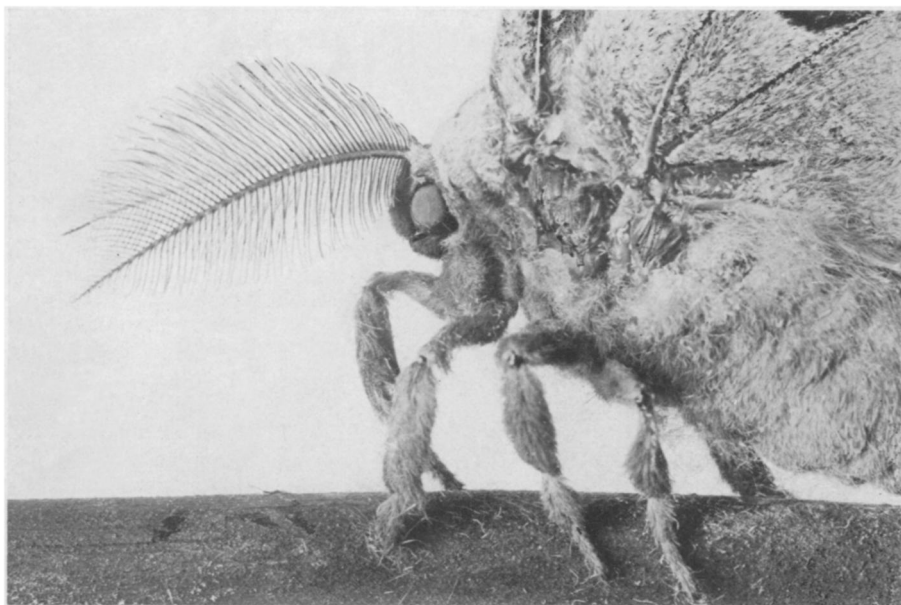
Two of his co-workers accused him of "poisoning the air with that stuff," making it taste bitter. Dr. Fox was incredulous. He put some of "that stuff" on his tongue. He could taste nothing. His two protesting companions also tried it. To them, it was more bitter than quinine. They wouldn't believe he could not taste it.

Really, it was a most remarkable thing, for until then all things that had a taste at all tasted alike to everybody. Dr. Fox had stumbled upon the strange phenomenon of "taste-blindness."

For some time, however, he did not regard it as anything more than a curiosity, and a chance to have a little fun with his friends. If he could get two persons to try the stuff, and one of them turned out to be a non-taster, a lively argument was likely to ensue. He tried it on two Chinese waiters in his favorite chow-mein establishment. One could taste it, the other could not. The resulting flow of Celestial language was something awesome to hear.

Then a science-writing newspaperman got wind of the thing. He broadcast it through the press; other scientists became interested. Physiologists, psychologists, geneticists worked at different angles of the phenomenon, and a tidy bit of research was carried on. The joke had become a serious matter.

Scientific jokes may become serious matters in quite another sense, if attempted by persons who have only that little learning that is proverbially a dangerous thing. That is why student jokes are so much more likely to end in disaster



### MOTH'S MESSAGE-DETECTORS

*In the earliest days of wireless telegraphy, long before radio became a popular means of entertainment and information, the wires strung aloft to catch the fleeting waves out of the ether and lead them down to the receiving instruments were named antennae. Aptly named, too, for the "feelers" of insects do much besides just feel. Moths, probably, do not use them for that purpose at all, but as a means for detecting odors so subtle that they are almost the chemical analogues of the far-travelled Herzian waves of the radio. This photograph is by Cornelia Clarke.*

than are the more carefully controlled jokes of their professors.

There is, for example, the tragic tale of the erratic but otherwise harmless anti-evolutionist antiquarian, who was steered by a group of mischievous students to a place where they had planted some fake fossils baked out of clay. On finding some of these inscribed with the Hebrew name of God, the poor old professor was tremendously excited, and published his discovery broadcast. It ruined his career and shadowed the last years of his life when the hoax was uncovered. The students were sorry, but could not undo the harm they had done.

Sometimes, however, a professor quite deliberately "sticks out his neck." A few years ago, newspapers published the old, hardy-perennial yarn about wheat from an Egyptian tomb being planted by a professor in a Pacific Coast university, and bearing a crop of good grain. Such wheat is frequently found in Egyptian tombs—but always where it has been put by some wily guide with an eye to bigger and better baksheesh. The luckless professor in the present case was not in the science department; if he had asked a botanical colleague about his wheat, he could have escaped being played for a sucker.

One of the most deliberately planned of professorial jokes was perpetrated years ago, in Yellowstone National Park.

by a scientist who had better remain nameless, lest even now he incur the wrath of the National Park Service.

This professor, then arranging his honeymoon trip, packed in his grip a pint jar of fluorescein, a powerful, intensely blue dye. Standing alone with his bride on the brink of Morning-Glory Pool, a remarkably blue hot spring that opens out into a deep, funnel-shaped basin some thirty or forty feet deep, he waited until he heard a tourist party approaching.

Then he fished the jar out of his pocket, and heaved it into the pool. It sank from sight into the depths just as the tourists came up. The dye, quickly dissolved in the hot water, came welling up from the spot where the jar had disappeared.

"This, ladies and gentlemen," the tourists' guide was saying, is Morning-Glory Pool, famed for its deep, intense blue . . ."

"Oh, look!!!" gasped a lady tourist, as the pool turned bluer than a tub of washday bluing.

The guide forgot the rest of his speech.

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Air conditioning is proving popular in Argentina.