



### What Is a Worm?

"WORM," to most of us, conjures up first of all an image of the humble, wriggling creature that we spear on a fish-hook, or see a luckless prey in the beak of a robin, or find drowned out of its burrows, by hundreds, in summer rain-showers. So familiar is this figure that we usually call the creature just "worm" and let it go at that. Prodded, we may consent to qualify it as angle-worm, fish-worm, earth-worm or rain-worm.

But zoologists will not admit that it is a worm at all! To them it is an annelid, an evolutionary cut or two above the true worms, which they call helminths. True worms, zoologists tell us, don't have those little rings around their bodies. They are smooth, slippery, slender creatures, exemplified by the vinegar-worms (vinegar-eels) sometimes found in a cruet that has stood too long, or the eelworms that attack the roots of plants. True worms also are the queer, creeping flatworms sometimes found in wet places, and (less agreeably) the worms that make life miserable for Towser and Tabby, and even occasionally for ourselves.

However, if you ask an etymologist, he will tell you that the zoologist's no-

tions are all wormy. "Worm" originally meant serpent, in the old Saxon vocabulary. Hence, it also meant dragon, for that imaginary monster had a good deal of the serpent about him.

An entomologist, being of the zoological clan, will take issue with the etymologist. Still, he'd prefer not to have the various "worms" that have been wished into his bailiwick by common usage. Any wriggling, immature insect is likely to be called a worm. We have grub-worm, cabbage-worm, tobacco-worm, inch-worm, caddis-worm, screw-worm and a hundred other "worms" that are really maggots or larvae, destined to grow up into insects.

The same tendency to look upon any cylindrical, wriggling object as a worm is responsible for the naming of the slow-worm and blind-worm, which are really limbless amphibians, related to frogs and salamanders. They are usually mistaken for snakes by their infrequent finders. Similarly, the destructive boring animals that cause tremendous losses to marine piling, wooden ships' bottoms and other timbers immersed in salt water have become known as ship-worms, although they are really mollusks, related to oysters and clams.

Well then, you answer: What is a worm?

*Science News Letter, August 16, 1941*

### MEDICINE

## Two-Party Political System Prescribed for AMA

### Physicians Urged to Encourage Differences of Opinion And To Make Contests Respectable and Honorable

**L**AATEST diagnosis of the American Medical Association's ailments is made by Oliver Garceau, Harvard University instructor in government, who gives a detailed and revealing case report, makes a hopeful prognosis and writes a prescription for three rather drastic medicines in his book, *The Political Life of the American Medical Association* (Reviewed, SNL, this issue).

"In internal politics the AMA is not mortally ill; it is suffering from a chronic disease, dangerous only if too long neglected," is Mr. Garceau's prognosis.

His prescription for cure of the ailment calls for: 1. More politicians within the organization, not less; 2. Abandonment of the present insistence on a united group with one mind and one voice; 3. Organization of a two-party political system within the organization or at least allowing organized contests for power within the group to be "brought to the surface, made respectable and honorable."

AMA members who want the organization to survive must learn to deal with the active political minority within the group, "not to accept them passively or go on a campaign to scalp them all," Mr. Garceau declares. The taboo against medical politicians must be cast out and more politicians developed.

AMA dislike of washing its dirty linen in public is understandable, says

Mr. Garceau, but there has been too great a tendency to handle all differences of opinion as dirty linen, he charges. Many constructive proposals for handling serious problems confronting the association have been treated as if they were dirty linen and buried or somehow killed by the powerful reference committees.

The Committee of Physicians, which Mr. Garceau shows up as a vague and ineffectual body, might have developed the two-party system within the AMA, he thinks.

"The AMA owes to itself and to the public a better performance than it has recently achieved," he concludes. "It will be a tragedy for the whole community if the AMA fails to elicit public respect. The answer lies in the political life within the AMA itself."

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The *United States* normally uses about 60% of the world's rubber production, 40% of the nickel, 40% of the tin, 45% of the chromium.

### ● Earth Trembles

Information collected by Science Service from seismological observatories resulted in the location by the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey of the following preliminary epicenters:

*Saturday, August 2, 6:41.5 a.m., EST*

In the Pacific Ocean, near Kermadec Island, about 700 miles northeast of New Zealand. Latitude, 30 degrees south. Longitude, 179 degrees west. Strong shock.

*Wednesday, August 6, 1:15 a.m., EST*

In the Pacific Ocean, off the coast of the Alaska peninsula. Latitude, 54.5 degrees north. Longitude, 160 degrees west. Strong shock.

For stations cooperating with Science Service, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, and the Jesuit Seismological Association in reporting earthquakes recorded on their seismographs, see SNL, July 19.

### ● RADIO

*Thursday, August 21, 2:45 p.m., EST*

On "Adventures in Science," with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over Columbia Broadcasting System.

John H. Baker, executive director of the National Audubon Society, will describe the work of the Society and of the Audubon Junior Clubs that are forming in America.

Listen in each Thursday.