



Wisdom From Grasshoppers

➤ GO TO THE grasshopper, thou busybody, consider his ways, and be wise: such might well be the text of *The Grasshopper Book*, by Wilfrid S. Bronson, (Harcourt, Brace, \$1.75).

Mr. Bronson disagrees with Aesop in the latter's judgment of the worthlessness of grasshoppers, and with both Aesop and Solomon in their overweening opinion of the superlative virtues of the ant.

"As a boy I didn't really know just why I felt that Aesop's fable was unfair," he states. "But now I do. Whoever studies insects soon finds out that, though many kinds of ants work hard, other kinds are thieves, slave-makers, murderers, and cannibals, and do no work at all. Then, if he looks up the grasshopper's list of relatives, he discovers that it also has both good and bad, like everybody else.

"Hard work is well worth while, of course. But music is important, too. No ant can fiddle, but a grasshopper can."

The real crux of the matter, the author contends, is not how well any creature shows (or seems to show) qual-

ities which we human beings consider admirable, but how well it meets the problems of getting a living for itself and of propagating its species.

"Men, ants, and grasshoppers," he points out, "preserve their kind, each in its own special way. Since each succeeds age after age, why should one be praised more than the other?"

Mr. Bronson, who is an artist as well as a naturalist, has kept insects of the grasshopper tribe in cages in his house, so that he might study their structure and behavior intimately and exactly. He graphically shows how a grasshopper's long hind leg, for example, is a multi-purpose tool fit to delight the heart of the most ingenious Yankee tinkerer: it

is a combination catapult, landing gear, fiddlestick, pole climber and scratching apparatus.

In the more complex field of insect behavior, Mr. Bronson's observations and drawings are no less exact and entertaining. He tells of a male field cricket that displayed very evident jealousy when another male was introduced into the cage with him and his mate, yet was not above trying what looked a bit like a tentative flirtation with a completely exotic female, a red-legged locust. And the series of little sketches showing how this same insect cleans his legs, antennae and body remind one irresistibly of the grooming antics of a small dog.

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VOLCANOLOGY

Allies Gain Volcanoes

The Eolian Islands, recently mopped up by the Allied forces, are the home of two volcanoes which are unique among fire-mountains.

➤ IN PICKING UP the Eolian islands, that lie in the angle between Sicily and the toe of the Italian boot, United Nations forces have taken into custody two volcanoes with claims of their own to uniqueness among fire-mountains.

Vulcano, on the island of the same name, may be regarded as the "type specimen" of its class, for its particular name obviously is the general name for all volcanoes. Why this particular cone should have come to be par excellence "the" volcano, especially with the much more impressive peaks of Vesuvius and Etna not far away, it is hard to guess. The evolution of geographic names, through the often obscure course of history, is often anything but logical.

Stromboli, which has also given its name to its island, is famed for a different reason. Of all volcanoes, it comes

nearest to being incessantly in action. It booms and rumbles day and night, though seldom blowing off violently enough to cause harm. It used to be claimed that it never stopped, but it is now known that Stromboli has occasional periods of quiescence, sometimes several months in length.

Stromboli, with a height somewhat over 3,000 feet, compares fairly with Vesuvius, which is just under 4,000, but not at all with Etna's towering 10,000. Vulcano, with its highest point only a little more than 1,600 feet above sea level, is relatively a dwarf.

Volcanoes were regarded in ancient mythology as the chimneys of Vulcan's forge. By transfer, they became in medieval and early modern times the chimneys of hell. Something of this notion lingers still in the rather widespread impression that they are direct vents to the molten interior of the earth.

While it is true that the ultimate source of a volcano's heat is the interior heat of the earth, the connection is not so simple as this picture would make it. Modern geological research indicates that volcanoes are more or less localized affairs, and that molten rock that flows from them is produced on the spot by local causes.

The modern picture is something like this: Surface layers of rock are pushed into folds by the mountain-forming shifts and shrinkings of the earth. Deep

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