

Hermit Crab

► CRABS are delicacies of the dinner table, usually served, for the sake of "atmosphere," cooked and stuffed back into their own shells. The edible crabs of the world belong to a relatively small group of species. The inedible kinds of crabs outnumber the species of positive economic value many fold and include a host of species of interesting and often weird appearance.

Among these are the hermit crabs. They are not really crabs at all in the true sense, although they have been given that name in common parlance. They probably originated from burrowing ancestors whose tails had become soft and flexible. When they gave up burrowing, they had to protect their tails by pushing them into shells.

The hermit crab can often be seen among the rocks during a seaside vacation. In spite of the name, it cannot be truly said to have a crusty disposition, except perhaps about its head and claws. This lack of the natural crust with which all other crabs are endowed is what determines its peculiar custom of inhabiting the deserted dwellings of departed sea snails.

If you see a small curled sea-shell hustling along in a shallow tidal pool, at a good deal faster clip than its proper owner could ever have carried it, the present tenant is almost certain to be a hermit crab. If you capture such a shell and try to pry the

little creature out, you will have no luck, for the crab sticks as tight in the shell as did the snail that grew in it originally. If you persist, you can pry the crab out—but it will be in pieces.

Hermit crabs grow, just as other crabs do, but instead of cracking a shell and molting, or shedding it, the hermit must abandon his adopted quarters when they begin to cramp him and seek new ones.

This is because his body is permanently in the unprotected "soft-shell" state. The search for new living quarters is a time of anxiety for the temporary-homeless crab. Sometimes, two houseless hermit crabs, happening simultaneously upon a suitable empty shell, will stage a fierce battle for its possession. For this pugnacity, the species is sometimes called the soldier crab.

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ARCHAEOLOGY

Whistling Jar a Clue

► AN ANCIENT double pottery jar that whistles as liquid is poured from one side to the other may provide scientists with a clue to the connection between early peoples in America.

The whistling jar was just brought to the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles from Peru. It is the work of early residents of Peru, probably of the Chimú period.

The jar is black and the twin bowls are shaped and indented with "eyes" to represent potatoes. They are joined at the base by a heavy tube and have long necks resembling a modern water carafe. One neck is open, the other, which emits the whistle, is closed by two modeled figures seated on top. These depict a medical scene. A surgeon is extracting from the foot of a boy the egg sack of the sandflea. This insect is a common pest along the coast of Peru. If the egg-sack is not removed before the eggs hatch, an infection

may result which is serious enough to cause the loss of the foot.

The humor of the artist is revealed by the expressions on the faces. The surgeon is described as being in "almost diabolical good spirits while the patient with pursed lips simulates indifference.

When the jar is tilted so that the water runs from one side to the other a clear whistling sound is given out at a vent at the base of the seated figure.

Such an ingenious and elaborate device as this whistling jar is not likely to have been invented twice, it is pointed out by Dr. George W. Brainerd, in reporting the acquisition in *THE MASTERKEY* (Jan.-Feb.).

The fact that similar whistling jars have been found in Middle America, dated as between 2,000 and 3,000 years old, points to some interchange between the people of Middle America and Peru in early days.

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PSYCHOLOGY

Use Old People Wisely

► A PRACTICAL approach to the problems of old age, for the sake of the nation and its oldsters and their families, was urged by Dr. E. V. Cowdry of the Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis.

We should "keep our eyes glued on the main chance," Dr. Cowdry declared in his keynote address at the opening of the second medical research conference on the Clinical Problems of Advancing Years in Philadelphia. The conference was sponsored by Smith, Kline and French Laboratories.

Without belittling "what is commonly known as fundamental research," Dr. Cowdry nevertheless insisted that we should try to distinguish between what has the most and the least utilitarian value. Otherwise any direction of research on problems of aging will be "altogether superfluous," he declared.

The nation's oldsters are facing a call to serve their country today as they did during World War II. But to avoid haphazard and thoughtless use of these additions to our man and womanpower pool, we need a simple effective test for determining the

working capacity and aptitudes of individual old men and women.

In 1890, Dr. Cowdry reminded doctors at the conference, 70% of the men and women over 65 years were employed. In 1950, it is estimated that only about half this proportion, or 36%, were employed.

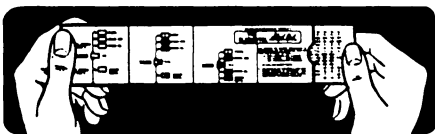
Intelligent employment of old people, Dr. Cowdry said, will not only benefit the nation but will improve morale of the old people, relieve their families of strain and probably reduce the demands on the medical profession. With large numbers of younger physicians being called to military service, this last effect becomes more important than ever.

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Silica sand, suitable for making the best grades of glass, is to be obtained near Ottawa, Canada, from deep underground sandstone in the region.

A British merchant vessel is being equipped with *gas turbine* power, marking a forward step in the use of this type of engine in marine applications.

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