

PHYSICS

What Is Matter Made of? It's Discussed Secretly

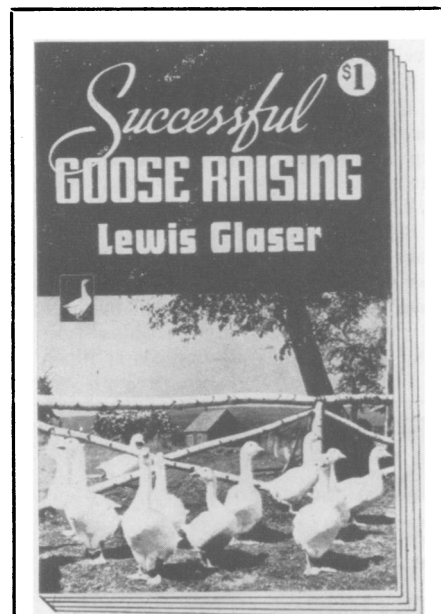
► **WHAT MATTER** is made of, a fundamental question, was discussed by about 150 nuclear physicists of the United States and 11 non-Iron Curtain countries meeting at the University of Chicago. The conference was behind closed doors although only non-secret nuclear physics was allowed on the program.

Fear that some newspaper reporters, if allowed at the sessions, would give the impression that atomic secrets were being revealed is the reason that the discussion was secret, it was stated officially in a telephone interview with **SCIENCE SERVICE**.

The Chicago sessions were jointly sponsored and financed by the Office of Naval Research and the Atomic Energy Commission.

Fifteen fundamental particles so far are known to make up atoms, exist in cosmic rays often for only fleeting fractions of a second, or are theoretically necessary. The latest of these is the anti-proton, the counterpart of the hydrogen atom. The anti-proton will probably receive major discussion.

Science News Letter, September 29, 1951



GEESE AND GANDERS

The raising of geese is much more than a profitable and fascinating activity on the farm or on the lawn. Right now we Americans are asked to produce an enormous volume of goose down and feathers for aviators' suits, mountain and Arctic sleeping bags for our Defense Forces. The need is urgent, vital, and very critical!

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Wild Asters

"But when the first frost comes, and all the rest,

Rending their garments, yield without a blow,

Then these, in cloth-of-gold and Tyrian dressed,

Stand forth to fight it out, unbacked, alone."

► **THUS**, IN a forgotten poem, are the wild asters praised for their brave beauty in the fall, when the sun is going farther from us every day, and most other flowers have long since dropped and died. And indeed, the courage and beauty of autumn woods and fields are due in no little degree to these little turquoise and amethyst stars—for "Aster" means a star.

Frosts may discourage even autumn flowers, but this one at least will shine through all chill dawns defiantly until the snow itself comes to quench it. For the wild aster is hardier even than its cousin-companion of fall roadsides, the goldenrod.

Wild asters form one of the most numerous botanical brotherhoods of our outdoors. For the northeastern quarter of the country alone, Gray's Manual lists 59 species; and there are many more in other sections.

Some of them are white-flowered, like the ericodes group but the great majority of the genus are blue, ranging from the tiny but brilliant amethystinus to the bold, purplish, inch-wide heads of the New England aster.

Just why the latter flower, the most gorgeous of all asters, should have been made the property of New England is a riddle. It is by no means confined to New England, for it ranges the whole country-side west as far as the Great Plains. And it has as little suggestion of the traditional dour and strait-laced character of a Puritan about its purple-and-gold head as a Restoration Cavalier.

It is a bit of botanical irony, or perhaps there is even something compensatory about

it. It may symbolize the suppressed but ardent hearts of flame that often beat beneath the drab coats of the people of the hard North.

The flowers most commonly called aster are the China asters, only distantly related to the wild plants of our woods and roadsides. But even some close relatives of the true asters have been brought into this country from abroad, as especially worthy of adaptation to American conditions.

Bailey's *Cyclopedia of Horticulture* lists an even dozen of these. Particularly notable among them is the Asiatic Aster tataricus, a stiff, stout plant much taller than any of our native species. This aster reaches a height of seven feet, holding up its blue head along with the sunflowers, hollyhocks and golden glows.

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CHEMISTRY

Wash Day Chemical From Laxative Pills

► **THE INGENUITY** of the American housewife matches that of American chemists.

When she reads in the newspaper that a new chemical product, called CMC, will make her wash day problems easier, she wants it. And when she cannot get it any other way, she gets it at the drug store in a laxative, opens the capsules, and shakes or squeezes the powder into the rinse water for cotton clothes.

CMC is the short name for carboxymethyl cellulose. Its effect on cotton goods is much like that of ordinary starch, but in addition it prevents soiling and makes the clothes easier to wash clean without making the fabric noticeably stiff.

This soil-resistant treatment was developed by the Institute of Textile Technology at Charlottesville, Va., in cooperation with the Southern Regional Research Laboratory of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The material is in commercial production and is expected to be available soon in other forms than laxative capsules for home laundry use. One form, shown at a Department of Agriculture conference, comes with bluing in it.

Science News Letter, September 29, 1951

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