

# • New Machines and Gadgets •

For addresses where you can get more information on the new things described here, send a three-cent stamp to SCIENCE NEWS LETTER, 1719 N St., Washington 6, D. C., and ask for Gadget Bulletin 644. To receive this Gadget Bulletin without special request each week, remit \$1.50 for one year's subscription.

⚙️ **OUTDOOR THERMOSTAT** works hand-in-glove with stoker thermostat indoors to provide automatically more heat in houses when outside temperatures drop. The outside thermostat helps to offset the chilling effect of cold walls that make persons working near them feel colder, even though the indoor temperature has not changed.

Science News Letter, October 18, 1952

⚙️ **PERFUMED PLASTIC** is used in shower and window curtains to give the fragrance of a flower garden. Available in a variety of colors, the curtains' perfume is not sprayed on but is an integral part of the fabric.

Science News Letter, October 18, 1952

⚙️ **CHROME-PROTECTING FLUID** reduces corrosion on automobile trimming, particularly chrome trim on late-model cars that has little or no nickel mixed in due to current restrictions. Complete with dauber, the liquid dries in 12 minutes, cures completely in 48 hours and should form a coating good for six months.

Science News Letter, October 18, 1952

⚙️ **BATH SPRAY HEAD** made of a clear plastic has a built-in thermometer that shows the temperature of the water, as shown in the photograph. Especially useful



in bathing babies, the device clamps to the end of a small rubber hose and stands up under heavy knocks without shattering or chipping.

Science News Letter, October 18, 1952

⚙️ **"SNORKEL" FOUNTAIN PEN** with tube that can be plunged into ink is filled without wetting the pen point. After filling, the Snorkel tube is drawn back under the pen's nib. Because of its new design,

"leaks" that often are due to decreased air pressures during airplane trips, or to increased temperatures inside the pen while it is being used are avoided.

Science News Letter, October 18, 1952

⚙️ **WARMER PLATE** for laboratories and hospitals keeps solutions at desired temperatures for evaporation. Thermostatically controlled, the plate generates surface heats that can be regulated up to 212 degrees Fahrenheit. It has a built-in thermometer and a metal cover that shields its 24-by-6½-inch surface when not in use.

Science News Letter, October 18, 1952

⚙️ **INDUSTRIAL VACUUM CLEANER**, especially good for cleaning hard-to-reach places in airplanes, has a main tube only one inch in diameter. Made of stainless steel, the tube is beaded so that a bag can be attached to catch flying rivets and metal. A male disconnect fitting allows the cleaner to work from standard air lines.

Science News Letter, October 18, 1952

⚙️ **TINY GRINDING WHEEL** is only 1/16 of an inch in diameter and is mounted on a steel shank. Sometimes called an "abrasive point," the wheel can be used for grinding extremely small holes in metal or for polishing precision parts.

Science News Letter, October 18, 1952

# • Nature Ramblings •

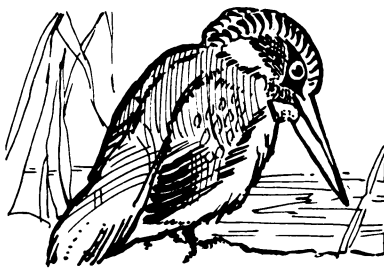
➤ "HALCYON DAYS" is an expression we are very likely to hear about now, whenever a spell of calm, warm, "Indian summer" days makes us forget for a while summer storms that are past and winter weather that is still to come. Most of us do not stop to think of its origin.

The phrase dates back to a belief of the ancient Greeks that during calm, bright days that sometimes intervene in the midst of the Mediterranean winter, a bird called the halcyon, usually identified as the kingfisher, made a floating nest on the quiet waters and there reared its young.

The word "halcyon" itself is a combination of two Greek roots meaning "seaborn." Many old-time superstitions have survived into our time, but this one has died out completely, leaving only its name as a literary tag.

There is reason enough for supposing that the kingfisher actually was the halcyon of the ancient Greeks. It is of necessity a

## Halcyon Days



water-side dweller, and thus would have been familiar to sailors and especially to fishermen. The latter may well have admired its skill at their own craft.

It is quite unlikely that the Greeks, who were on the whole not very observant naturalists, would have noticed the kingfisher's habit of occasionally vanishing into a hole in an earthen bank or bluff, so that the

whereabouts of its nest remained a mystery. Where facts do not presently come to hand to explain a mystery, a superstition is very likely to take their place. Hence the story of the floating nest.

There was another superstition about the kingfisher that apparently survived at least into the Renaissance. Sailors believed that a reliable wind-vane could be made by hanging up a dead kingfisher by the neck: its long beak was supposed to point steadily into the wind.

Marlowe, a contemporary of Shakespeare, alludes to this in one of his plays: "Into what quarter peers my halcyon's bill?"

Whether sailors actually did use dead kingfishers for this purpose may be doubted. Kingfishers aren't easy to catch; and anyway sailors usually have better means for telling wind direction. Perhaps the belief only survived the better because everybody held it and nobody put it to the test.

Science News Letter, October 18, 1952