

MEDICINE

Insect Phobias Need Care

People who have "insect phobias" may need a psychiatrist as well as a physician and pest control operator. Many ills can simulate and be diagnosed as insect or mite bites.

► MITES THAT bite, but cannot be found, may mean there is need for psychiatrist, in addition to the physician and the pest control operator.

Discussing insect phobias that people have, Charles Pomerantz told the Entomological Society of Washington meeting that actually the three specialists may have to cooperate.

The pest control operator is often called because the patient believes that his doctor has no knowledge of insects. Also, Mr. Pomerantz, who is head of research for the Bell Exterminating Co., New York City, explained that many persons complain their physician has no "patience."

After making a thorough investigation of the individual's home or office, the pest control operator is often able to convince the bite sufferer that there is no scientific basis for his complaints. At this stage the pest control operator may recommend that his customer see a psychiatrist or dermatologist.

Sometimes, Mr. Pomerantz said, merely spraying the home or office with an evil-smelling, nontoxic mixture will convince the individual bitten by the "ghost" insect

that the insects are really gone. Other times, a more drastic measure such as recommending a move to a new home may end the phobia.

In reciting numerous case histories of persons afflicted with insect phobias, Mr. Pomerantz emphasized the need for a combination of scientific knowledge with a "fatherly approach and compassion and understanding of the patient's problem."

When he has demonstrated the difference between real insects and mites and imaginary specimens consisting of dust, lint and dirt particles, or even mis-weaves in bed linens and napkins, the pest control operator has the responsibility of advising the phobia sufferer to visit his doctor or dermatologist.

Many ills, such as circulatory conditions, food allergies and contact dermatitis may simulate and be diagnosed as insect or mite bites, Mr. Pomerantz said. So in some instances the physician might call in the pest control operator for advice, he suggested. Several cases diagnosed as allergies or hives were subsequently found to be the result of bedbug bites, Mr. Pomerantz pointed out as an example.

However, while many persons suffer from insect phobias, the pest control operator must always be alert to the possibility that a previously unknown insect is the actual source of the patient's troubles, or that a real insect or mite may be there. As an illustration of the need for scientific care, Mr. Pomerantz stressed the importance of the dermatologist's studies.

Science News Letter, February 14, 1959

PSYCHOLOGY

Alcoholic's Big Sex Problem Is Immaturity

► ALCOHOLICS ARE not necessarily homosexuals, but they do have trouble assuming the responsibilities of their sex role.

A clinical study of 300 consecutive case records of alcoholics suggests that the dominant psychosexual factor is that of immaturity.

Within the male group studied by Edward M. Scott of the State of Oregon Alcohol Education Committee, Portland, Ore., 56% of the known marriages ended in divorce, he points out in *Psychological Reports* (Dec., 1958)

The sample of women alcoholics studied revealed that 80% of those known to have been married were divorced. These findings are consistent with the data obtained by other investigators studying alcoholics.

This relatively high divorce rate should not necessarily suggest that the alcoholic loses interest in the opposite sex, he stresses. Therefore, any sweeping statements that alcoholics experience a trend toward homosexuality would be false.

The fundamental sexual characteristic of the alcoholic is not that of latent homosexuality, but rather, immaturity. The alcoholic engages in heterosexual activity, but, due to his immaturity, is unable to face the responsibilities of a stable relationship with persons of the opposite sex.

Science News Letter, February 14, 1959

MEDICINE

Restricted Environment Cuts Food, Water Intake

► ONE WAY to lose weight might be to shut yourself off in a soundproof room.

A study reported in *Nature* (Jan. 31) by two British scientists showed that a restricted environment can reduce a rat's food consumption by more than 25%. Water intake was cut by 12% to 15%. Weight gain was also temporarily inhibited, results of their six-months study of two male rats indicated.

In a test to determine the effects of reduced stimulus on "general activity," Karl Weiss and Harry M. B. Hurwitz of the department of psychology of Birkbeck College, London, placed the rats in a cage that could be enclosed in a soundproofed box suspended in a soundproofed chest. The animals' activity as measured by the number of times they pressed a food-releasing lever was found to decrease sharply when placed in the restricted environment.

Science News Letter, February 14, 1959



FLEXIBLE RAILS—These rails, shown on flat cars, were welded into continuous lengths one-quarter mile long. Formerly, standard length rails were bolted together, but the gaps between the rails caused damage to rolling stock and freight, and track maintenance and replacement costs were high. The rails in the picture were welded by a new system built by the National Cylinder Gas Company of Chemetron Corporation.