

Letters (continued)

with responses of increasing severity that we shall be unable to control since the stimulus will continue relentlessly day-in and day-out "even to the edge of doom."

How much farther are we going to allow this toxic invasion of our living space by machines that do nothing to improve the quality of human living? It is incumbent upon all of us to do everything in our power to attempt to restore to mankind some of the peace and serenity that he had 100 years ago.

Herbert I. Harris, M.D.
Cambridge, Mass.

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Films of the week

Listing for readers' information of new 16mm and 8mm films on science, engineering, medicine and agriculture for professional, student and general audiences. For further information on purchase, rental or free loan, write to distributor.

AIRPLANES AND HOW THEY FLY. 16mm. color, sound, 14 min. Shows various kinds of aircraft, and discusses the manner in which airplanes fly, including concept of lift, airplane controls, and function of different parts of aircraft. Audience: elementary science. Purchase \$180 from McGraw-Hill Films, Dept. WP, 330 West 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

FIVE ABORIGINAL DANCES FROM CAPE YORK. 16mm, color, sound, 8 min. Australian aborigines performed ritual dances at Aurukun Mission, Cape York, Queensland. Audience: general. Free loan from Films Officer, Australian News and Information Bureau, 636 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10020, or Western states, from Press and Information Officer, Australian Consulate-General, 350 Post St., San Francisco, Calif. 94108.

IT'S YOUR MOVE. 16mm, color, sound, 27 min. Review of a summer workshop on teaching computing. Six high school teachers who were workshop participants discuss the course and its merits in view of the rapidly increasing interest of today's high school students in computers. Audience: high school teachers and supervisors. Free loan from American Federation of Information Processing Societies, 345 East 47th St., New York, N.Y. 10017. (Furnished with film is a documentation packet which, along with the film, shows how to set up a similar teacher training workshop.)

MANNED SPACE FLIGHT—A YEAR OF FLIGHT QUALIFICATION—1967. 16mm, color, sound, 25 min. Successful flights of Apollo/Saturn 203 and Apollo/Saturn 202; the fire aboard the spacecraft on Apollo/Saturn 204 which took the lives of three astronauts; other developments in the Apollo program. Audience: general. Free loan from NASA Manned Spacecraft Center, Public Affairs Office AP 2, Houston, Tex. 77058.

THE SMOKING SPIRAL. 16mm, b&w, sound, 60 min. Illustrates the possible crippling effects of smoking by focusing upon one day in the lives of two men suffering from lung ailments which have been linked to smoking. Audience: junior and senior high, college, adult. Purchase \$200 or rental \$9.15 from NET Film Service, Indiana University, Audio-Visual Center, Bloomington, Ind. 47401.

SOLAR ECLIPSE EXPEDITION 1966. 16mm, color, sound, 32 min. Report on how scientists, with telescopic, analyzing, and photographic equipment aboard a jet, chased the moon's shadow over the South Atlantic Ocean during an eclipse. Audience: general. Purchase \$110.70 from W. A. Palmer Films, 611 Howard St., San Francisco, Calif. 94105, or free loan from AEC film libraries or Audio-Visual Branch, Department of Public Information, U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, Washington, D.C. 20545.

Nature Note

Papyrus

Along the banks of streams and shores of lakes, in the marshy areas of the Middle East, grows a graceful grass-like plant that is now nearly extinct.

Few plants have better served mankind than this *Cyperus papyrus*, a member of the sedge family, Cyperaceae—for upon its stripped pressed stems were written valuable notes and books, as well as prosaic accounts of taxes and land sales, and miscellaneous everyday items of people living thousands of years ago around the Mediterranean. Today scraps of these writings are eagerly sought as clues to ancient civilizations.

Yet today the live plant is considered merely a weed. The narrow-leaved herb with fibrous roots, triangular shaped stems and small spiked flowers is often mistaken for grass, but has different characteristics—one of them being that the stems and leaves are dry and contain a lot of silica, and the edges are exceedingly sharp. It cannot even be used as fodder. The ancient Egyptians, however, found many uses for this plant. Garlands for shrines of the gods were made of the flowers. The woody root was fashioned into utensils or used for fuel; and from the stem came light-weight skiffs, sails, mats, cloth, cords—and most important, writing material. The tall stem was cut into longitudinal strips which were laid side by side and crossed by another layer of strips, then woven into a sheet which was soaked in the water of the Nile. After this the sheet was hammered and dried in the sun, then smoothed with ivory or a shell. Several sheets were joined together to form scrolls—the chief writing material of the Mediterranean civilizations until the 8th or 9th centuries, when papyrus began to be replaced by paper—which also stole its name. Egyptians used papyrus some 29 centuries ago, and Greeks 4 or 5 centuries later.

Interest in papyrology—as the deciphering, transcribing and translating of papyrus writings is called—is kept alive today by a few devoted scholars. In the United States there are probably fewer than 10 active papyrologists, only one or two of them working full time, according to Prof. John Arthur Hanson, coordinator of an Institute in Papyrology which has held two summer sessions at Princeton University, drawing students from all parts of the United States to learn more about the tiny scraps of brown materials, often tattered and crumbling. ◆



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