

BIOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



Winter Flowers

In the central part of the United States an unusually mild winter may give notice of its approaching end in mid-February by a display of early pussy-willows and alder catkins, the earliest, save perhaps the malodorous skunk cabbage, of our spring flowers. Even along the Canadian border these signs may be seen a couple of weeks later.

But one need not wait for winter to end outdoors, nor content one's self with pussies and catkins, attractive as these may be. Whoever wishes them may have, now, before the first of March, any of the tree-flowers that ordinarily blossom in April or May. It is so easy to get them that it is a wonder the custom is not more widely practiced.

One does not need to be a florist to carry on this simple home forcing of woody branches. All you need to do is cut them—lilac, plum, cherry, peach, what you will—and place the branches in a jar of water in a warm corner. Change the water once every two or three days, to keep it from becoming foul, and watch the buds as they swell up and shed their scales and begin to show signs of color. The process may be hastened by laying the branches in a pan of warm water for a quarter of an hour when they are first brought into the house, but even this is not necessary.

Forsythia, or golden bell, will come into flower in about ten days, some kinds of cherries about as soon, wild plum and Japanese quince require about two weeks. The shrub most amenable to this treatment seems to be the honeysuckle, which has been known to burst into bloom within three days after it has been brought into the house.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

An expedition is seeking skeletons of prehistoric dinosaurs in Tanganyika, Africa.

Teeth of man and prehistoric apes have been linked in an evolutionary series by two American scientists.

AVIATION

Weather Bureau Aids Airmen

How the Weather Bureau is carrying out the instructions of an act of Congress passed last spring, providing that it should furnish weather information such as is necessary for the safe operation of commercial flying, is described by Willis R. Gregg, meteorologist at the Bureau. "Since July 1, 1926," says Mr. Gregg, "the Weather Bureau has established pilot balloon work at 21 stations along airways, these stations being in addition to some 15 that were previously in operation in different parts of the country. The observations are made twice each day and provide information concerning upper wind direction and velocity at all flying levels.

"This information and a general resume of surface conditions are given to the pilots through special reports that are exchanged between the principal points along the airways. The data that have been found to be of most value are those concerning ceiling, or height of clouds, and visibility, but information is always desired also concerning upper winds and the occurrence of fog, rain, thunderstorm, heavy snow or any other unfavorable or threatening condition.

"In addition to the current reports fliers are furnished with special forecasts, these are of two classes—the short-range forecasts covering the scheduled duration of individual flights and the more general forecasts for 12 to 24 or more hours. So far as aviation is concerned, the former are of course the more useful."

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

GEOLOGY

Australia Joined to Hawaii?

Were Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii once parts of huge land masses in the Southern Pacific? Prof. Douglas Houghton Campbell of Leland Stanford University told delegates of the Pan Pacific Science Congress that the very real relationship of the vegetation of these three regions points to such a possibility.

The kinship of the Hawaiian flora to that of New Zealand is more marked than it is to that of Australia, but it furnishes a basis strong enough to justify the assumption that such connecting land masses formerly existed between Hawaii and the other two countries, the California scientist declared.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

EDUCATION

Studies Student Viewpoint

The value of viewing curriculum from the pupil's standpoint is stressed by Dr. Jesse E. Adams of the University of Kentucky.

"It has begun to dawn upon us that the attitudes and ideals built up when pupils must take subjects they do not like may be far more detrimental than all the subject matter they get," he says. "It would seem that those who are responsible for making our curriculums should be fully cognizant of how deadening failures are and to what extent forced interests burn the candle at both ends. I believe Otis Caldwell was quite right when he said: 'Pupils develop fastest when engaged most of their time upon things in which they succeed and not fail.'"

Dr. Adams' interest in the viewpoint of the students led him to make a survey of high school pupils in Kentucky. It was found that mathematics and Latin were responsible for far the greatest percentage of the failures. The difficulty and lack of practical application of these subjects made them very unpopular. Algebra, geometry and Latin were wanted out of the curriculum. Of the subjects which the pupils wanted to take and could not get, the girls agreed upon domestic science, French, Spanish, typewriting and bookkeeping, and the boys upon manual training, chemistry, typewriting and bookkeeping.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927

CHEMISTRY

Synthetic Hormone

Thyroxin, the hormone of the thyroid gland, has been made synthetically for the first time in the laboratories of University College, London.

Dr. C. R. Harington and Prof. George Barger are the workers who have achieved this result from researches supported by funds supplied by the Rockefeller Foundation to the University College Hospital Medical School in 1920. The hormone, which is used in treating patients with a defective thyroid gland, was first isolated by Dr. E. C. Kendall of the Mayo Clinic in 1917. Its production synthetically from coal tar products and iodine will assure an absolutely even standard, medical authorities say, and should have the effect of making the price much lower.

Science News-Letter, February 12, 1927