

First Glances at New Books

PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BITUMINOUS COAL—Pittsburgh: *Carnegie Institute of Technology*. The First International Conference on Bituminous Coal, held at Pittsburgh, November 15-18, 1926, was participated in by more than seventeen hundred persons from thirteen different countries. The unusual success of this conference was due mainly to two factors—first, that President Baker personally picked his speakers by going to Europe and inviting the leading investigators in this field of research, and second, that the conference came just at the time when a large amount of material on new methods of the utilization of coal had been brought to a practical point but were yet unknown to the American public, or even to that fraction of it personally concerned with coal. We have, then, in this volume of over 800 pages, a very complete survey of the field which makes accessible these remarkable discoveries. Here, for instance, we have Prof. Franz Fischer of the German Institute of Coal Research, on his method for the synthesis of petroleum; Dr. Cottrell of the Fixed Nitrogen Research Laboratory on the relation of coal to fertilizer, and many others of equal importance. This is a volume of immediate usefulness to the producer and consumer of coal and its products.

Science News-Letter, April 23, 1927

MARCH'S THESAURUS DICTIONARY—F. A. March and F. A. March, Jr.—*Historical Publishing Co.* A now standard work, the first combination of the thesaurus and dictionary, newly augmented in usefulness by an up-to-date appendix, the scientific part of which was prepared by Science Service.

Science News-Letter, April 23, 1927

PSYCHOLOGY IN PERSONAL SELLING—A. J. Snow—*Shaw* (\$6). If you have any doubt as to the existence of a science of salesmanship, this book will remove it. After explaining so much of psychology as will make clear why customers' minds work the way they do, Mr. Snow proceeds to analyze the salesman, the customer and the sale from every angle. Many points in the book are used on experimental evidence and actual sales situations, and the explanations are punctuated by charts and tables. A useful contribution to applied psychology.

Science News-Letter, April 23, 1927

Science For The Millions

Quotation from *THE ROMANCE OF THE ATOM*. Benjamin Harrow. Boni and Liveright.

Profoundly affected as we are by scientific knowledge, is it wise to allow ourselves to be guided by men who are not only woefully ignorant of science, but, what is worse, have a contempt for it and for the "scientific attitude"? Such men—the men in authority—are the supervisors who prescribe what is to be taught and what is to be told. They tell us, in defence of their unpardonable ignorance, that it is not "safe" to invite the "masses" (or the young) to think of important matters with a critically open mind. Hence we get, for example, a distortion of American history which we ask our young to absorb; as if a faithful account of American pioneers, recording not only their successes but their failures, were not a more wholesome lesson than distorting the truth. Why, to use an expression of Dickenson, must we "drug our mind with passion" until we reach the very antithesis of truth? Because people have been led to resist thought as they resist death. While to think and not to live is to live an incomplete life, to live and not to think is really not to live.

Science News-Letter, April 23, 1927

MINERALOGY

Blue Gem Named "Starlite"

Because it resembles a star twinkling at night more than any other precious stone, the blue zircon of Siam has been rechristened "Starlite" by Dr. George F. Kunz, well known gem expert, of New York City.

These flashing blue stones from Siam are unusual in that they are never blue at all when found in their natural state, but are brown or reddish in hue.

"The stones are placed in a crucible and burned in a fire from six to eight hours exposed to a solution of cobalt nitrate and potassium ferrocyanide," said Dr. Kunz, in announcing the new name to the New York Mineralogical Society. "The chemicals do not touch the stones which are being changed in color, but the fumes do the coloring. After cutting it is necessary to expose them again to the fire from five to 20 minutes.

"This is the most brilliant blue and green precious stone. The flash is more near that of the diamond of the same color and resembles the occasional sparks from copper contacts, especially when a trolley pole hits a wire. It also has the brilliancy and color of some stars."

Science News-Letter, April 23, 1927

Sexes "War" Before Birth

The "warfare between the sexes," with which literature and sociological speculation are filled, begins very early—before birth, in fact. Expectant mothers constantly favor their unborn daughters and handicap their unborn sons, without intending it or even knowing anything about it, according to some new facts brought forward by Dr. Oscar Riddle of the Station for Experimental Evolution of the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

Dr. Riddle calls attention to several chemical influences arising in the body of the mother, and transmitted through the blood plasma to the unborn male offspring, which act unfavorably on development and possibly sometimes kill the embryo altogether. One important member of this group of chemical compounds is the recently discovered hormone or internal secretion of the ovaries, which is known to stimulate the growth and activity of the characteristically female body-parts, but has an opposite, stunting and checking effect on male organs. If these effects are so pronounced in adult animals under brief experimental conditions, Professor Riddle argues, they must be even more marked when the supply of female hormone is kept up unremittingly for days and weeks; and he cites clinical observations that tend to confirm his point of view.

In addition to the specific glandular secretions with definite "female-promoting" and "male-discouraging" action, Dr. Riddle also calls attention to evidence produced by recent researches that the nutritional requirements of females, especially in the very important matter of vitamins, are less than those of males. It would seem, therefore, that an unborn daughter would sometimes find these conditions also more adequate than would an unborn son.

To these unconscious but inevitable antagonisms of the mother toward her prospective male offspring, rather than to an inherent relative lack of vigor in the male, Dr. Riddle ascribes the well-known fact that an unexpectedly large proportion of males is found among babies born dead and prematurely.

Science News-Letter, April 23, 1927

The Labrador duck became extinct almost 50 years ago, probably because it could eat only a peculiar diet which became hard to get as population advanced.