BIOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS

by Frank Thone

Parasites and Saprophytes

ODDLY enough, the twin-word of "parasite" has never become a part of the common English vocabulary.

We all have a pretty good idea of what a parasite is. A parasite is an animal or plant that attaches itself to another (usually larger) animal or plant and proceeds to feed on the body substance of its unwilling host instead of getting its own living honestly. Fleas and lice are parasites, so are the mushrooms and bracket fungi we find growing on tree trunks, and the lesser fungi that cause plant diseases, and the bacteria and disease-causing protozoa within our bodies, and a host of other disagreeable creatures.

Twinned with "parasite," but relatively little heard of, is the word "saprophyte." Interestingly enough, this contrasting word is used only by botanists.

There is a reason. Animals that are not parasites feed on prey that is dead before they begin to eat—or that may be eaten alive but certainly dies quickly during the eating process, like a mouse in the jaws of a cat or grass in the cud of a cow. That way of living seems entirely honorable among us animals.

But among plants it isn't. Really free- and independent plants don't depend on prey, living or dead. With the green stuff that colors their leaves and often their stems as well, they drink in the energy of sunlight and with its aid they make their own food out of water, carbon dioxide from the air, and minerals from the soil. No animal can do this. So among animals there is no need for the twin-term of "parasite," which is "saprophyte."

"Saprophyte" comes from two Greek words, which in this combination means "decay-plant." Saprophytes include some of the higher plants, like the pallid Indian-pipe found in moist woods, but most of the class are bacteria and fungi. The mold that spoils bread and gets on damp shoes, the mushrooms that grow on a dead stump, the bacteria that reduce bruised apples to masses of rotten pulp, are all examples of saprophytes.

To sum up: Plants can be divided into three classes, according to their feeding habits: parasites, saprophytes, free-living. Animals have only two classes: parasites and . . .? There isn't any generally used contrasting term. We might call them simply devourers, or if we must go Greek for a word, "phagozoa."

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SCIENCE CLUBS OF AMERICA

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NEWS OF CLUBS

BUFFALO, N. Y.—Six western New York High Schools, three of them in Buffalo, took the awards in the Third Annual Salon in Photography which was held at the Buffalo Museum of Science from February 28 to March 8. The Salon was sponsored by Science Service, the Science Section of the Western Zone of the New York State Teachers Association and the Buffalo Museum of Science. The grand prize went to Albert Cotriss of Medina; first prize, senior class pictorial, to Beth Stube of La Salle Junior High School; first prize, portrait, senior class to Ann Johnson of East Aurora and first prize, scientific, went to Robert Saunders of Medina. The pictorial prize winner in the junior class was Daniel Torrel of Buffalo. For the most part inexpensive cameras were used. A pinhole camera, made by Miss Hoyt at a cost of only 28 cents, was used to take a photo which was considered to be worthy of honorable mention in senior class, pictorial.

The schools represented among the award winners are East High School, Riverside High School, and St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute in Buffalo; La Salle Junior High School, Niagara Falls; East Aurora High School; and Medina High School.

ALBION, Mich.—G. W. Prescott, Associate Professor of Biology, Albion College, chairman in charge of the formation of a Junior Academy of Science in Michigan, reports steady progress in this project. The shortage of scientists and mathematicians as well as skilled craftsmen is being felt keenly in this state and the need for early training in these fields is lending impetus to the formation of this Junior Academy.

Such an organization will tie together the efforts of all the young amateurs in the state and will result in mutual benefit to all those participating in the activities of such a body. The many science clubs affiliated with Science Clubs of America are heartily in favor of such an organization and it is hoped that the newly forming Junior Academy will assist and encourage the formation of many more clubs in the state. Mr. Prescott will welcome correspondence from any and all science clubs in the state.

STATE COLLEGE, Miss.—Clay Lyle, head of the department of Zoology and Entomology at Mississippi State College, has stirred up interest in science clubs at the recent meeting of the Mississippi Academy of Science at Jackson and spoke on this subject at the Mississippi Educational Association on March 13. At present there are a relatively small number of clubs in this state but most of them are pioneers in this field. Their example is encouraging establishment of other clubs here where the Junior Academy of Science is a growing organization under the chairmanship of Dr. Lyle. Clubs in this state are urged to join in this very excellent undertaking by writing to Dr. Lyle.

BALTIMORE, Md.—The Camera Club of Gwynns Falls Park Junior High School has been getting a lot of practice lately in taking, developing, printing, enlarging and coloring pictures. The members have attained such proficiency that not only do they finish their own photo work but they also complete photographic processes for members of the faculty. This Club, sponsored by Josephine C. Kelly, chairman of the science department, also is affiliated with the Maryland Junior Academy of Sciences.

Clubs are invited to become affiliated with SCA for a nominal $2 for 20 members or less. You can become an associate of SCA for 25 cents, Address: Science Clubs of America, 1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D. C.