ENTOMOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS by Frank Thone

Neutralized Ogre

➤ THE HOUSEFLY had a relatively short career as a recognized menace to the health and efficiency of armies. During our brief war with Spain, in 1898, typhoid fever was a terrible scourge among our green troops living under canvas. There were far more deaths from this one disease in camps in our southern states than there were from enemy bullets in Cuba. Men died like flies, the newspaper editorials lamented: it was not suspected, except perhaps by a few more advanced physicians, that they were dying because of flies.

Crude attempts at camp sanitation were the means of putting the housefly on the spot, with damning evidence against him. In the relatively primitive camp set-ups of those days, kitchens and mess-halls were unscreened, and flies flew in by millions and crawled over the food. Except that it was a nuisance, nobody minded much; flies were so commonly regarded as harmless that in "Baby Bye," a contemporary nursery jingle, there is mention of flies "walking on eggs."

In some of the most typhoid-ridden camps it was noticed that many of the flies swarming over the troops' food had white stuff on their feet. It was quickly realized that this was lime, and that it could only have come from the latrine pits. This was more than a little disgusting in itself, but when the suspicion was raised and rather quickly confirmed, that the flies were carrying typhoid germs on their feet and mouthparts, it brought the medical profession and the better informed lay public up in arms against these buzzing messengers of death.

The Spanish-American war was too brief for much practical application to be made of the new knowledge of the peril that lay in permitting the fly to continue with a free hand (or rather, with six free feet) along his filthy way. A vigorous anti-fly campaign was launched over the country at large. It was proposed to rename the insect "typhoid fly" instead of his earlier innocuous title of "housefly." Screens for houses and porches, as well as for less formal structures like constructors' shacks and summer cabins, became increasingly common. Quick disposal of garbage and stable litter came to be the rule.

Several new industrial and merchandising developments aided indirectly in the abatement of the fly menace. Sale of many kinds of food in sealed packages replaced bulk sales from open containers. Pasteurization and bottling of milk became general, even in small communities. In cities at least, horses virtually disappeared as the motor car age developed.

At the same time, medical research produced and perfected the anti-typhoid "shots," which have an impregnable line of defense against the fever that was once the Army's worst scourge. Fly and germ have been beaten together.

Science News Letter, April 1, 1944

Pottery in everyday use in parts of Mexico is almost identical with that made and used by local Indians before the days of the Conquest.

Books of the Week

➤ DESIGNED to make the transition from classroom to the bridge of a ship less difficult, AN INTRODUCTION TO NAVIGATION AND NAUTICAL ASTRONOMY by William George Shute, William Wright Shirk, George Forber Porter and Courtney Hemenway (*Macmillan,* $4.50) presents the foundation material by easy stages. Crammed with illustrations and charts, the introductory text requires no supplementary books, tables, almanacs or work sheets.

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Just Off the Press

THE AMERICAN WAY: Selections From the Public Addresses and Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt—Dagobert D. Runes, ed.—*Phil. Library,* 71 p., $1.50.

THE CHEMISTRY OF CELLULOSE—Emil Heuser—*Wiley,* 660 p., illus., $7.50.

THE COAL INDUSTRY—Josephine Perry—*Longmans, Green,* 128 p., illus., $1.75.

THE ENEMIES' FIGHTING SHIPS—Jay Launer—*Sheridan House,* 222 p., illus., $3.75.

ESSENTIALS OF ASTRONOMY—John Charles Duncan—*Harper,* 181 p., illus., $1.85.

THE HIKER'S HANDBOOK—Douglas Leechman—*Norton,* 220 p., illus., $2.50.

LECTURES ON THE INORGANIC NUTRITION OF PLANTS—D. R. Hoagland—*Chronica Botanica,* 226 p., illus., $4.

MANKIND SO FAR—William Howells—*Doubleday, Doran,* 319 p., illus., $4.50.

MEDICAL PHYSICS — Otto Glasser, Ed. — *Year Book,* 1744 p., illus., $20.

NEW GOALS FOR OLD AGE—George Lawton, ed.—*Col. Univ. Press,* 210 p., $2.75.

THE PRACTICE OF IDEALISM—Alfred M. Bingham—*Duell, Sloan and Pearce,* 196 p., $2.

SCIENCE YEAR BOOK OF 1944—John D. Ratcliff—*Doubleday, Doran,* 218 p., $2.50.

YOUR WORLD TOMORROW — Donald G. Cooley and others—*Duell, Sloan & Pearce,* 252 p., illus., $2.50.