



Chameleon

➤ ONCE upon a time, so the story goes, there was a luckless chameleon. One day, with characteristic misfortune, it crawled onto a Scotch plaid tartan. In its frantic efforts to blend into this multicolored background, the poor creature died.

Now this is the kind of fable that men of science scoff at, but laymen, having no means of disproof, remember, half skeptical but not completely unconvinced. One scientist, who was enough of a layman at heart to appreciate the fascination of the chameleon tale, decided to do something constructive. He prepared a box littered with patches of different-colored paper, and watched what happened when a chameleon was placed on it.

The colors he chose were green, gray, brown, and black, which are woodland if not Highland colors. When he placed an American chameleon into the box, the little animal curiously explored its new home, but just went on being a dusty brown, the color usually assumed during the bright daylight hours. As a demonstration of the chameleon's alleged eagerness to take on the colors of its surroundings—to the death if necessary—the experiment was a bust.

This and other experiments show that the stimulus to change color does not come from the coloration of the background. The factors which seem to do the trick are light, temperature, and emotion. In the sun the

darker colors emerge, and in the shade the lighter. If a chameleon is placed so that one end is in sun and the other in shadow, the creature will look like a pair of two-toned sport shoes. Dr. Raymond Ditmars has reported a case of a chameleon that was basking in the sun underneath a coarse wire grating. When it moved, against the dark brown body the design of the grating could be seen, marked in pale yellow.

The emotional element is seen to operate when two American chameleon males, properly habited in daylight brown, suddenly encounter each other. They take on an ash-gray color, and the elastic throat pouch puffs out, suddenly appearing a brilliant vermilion. After a brief but furious scuffle you can tell victor from vanquished by the color scheme. The loser, frequently minus a tail which in time will grow back, is now a dull yellow, while the winner is a bright green. These fighting colors soon subside into dull brown once more.

Strictly speaking the name chameleon belongs to a family of African lizards, some species of which are found in Madagascar, Arabia, India, and along the Mediterranean shore from Spain to Asia Minor. However, many lizards have this faculty of rapid color change.

The American "chameleon" is also a lizard but of a different family from the true chameleons. It is found in Florida and other southern states, and in Cuba. It is more agile and less sluggish than its European cousin, but both are highly accomplished at flicking out their long sticky tongues to snag flies and other insects. Their marksmanship is terrific. The flies don't have a chance.

Science News Letter, May 13, 1950

PHARMACY

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➤ WITH the aim of predicting the chance of addiction from the newer pain-relieving drugs, Dr. M. H. Seevers of University of Michigan Medical School will be experimenting shortly with monkeys under a grant from the National Research Council's Committee on drug addiction and narcotics.

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With similar aid, Dr. Henry K. Beecher of the Harvard Medical School will study the methods of evaluating these drugs on actual patients.

A new research fund has been set up by cooperation from Endo Products, Inc.; Hoffman-LaRoche, Inc.; Lederle Laboratories, Inc.; Eli Lilly & Co.; Mallinckrodt Chemical Works; Merck & Co., Inc.; New York Quinine & Chemical Works, Inc.; Parke, Davis & Co.; The Upjohn Co.; and Winthrop-Stearns, Inc.

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