

GENERAL SCIENCE

"The Burning Glass"

► CONCENTRATED BURNING rays from heaven, manipulated by a secret machine that warps the atoms of the upper atmosphere, become a threatening war weapon rivaling the atomic bomb.

Should the young scientist-inventor yield up his great power to the prime minister for peaceful purposes or for war?

That is the dramatic situation in the new Theatre Guild play by British dramatist, Charles Morgan, "The Burning Glass," which opened in Washington on Feb. 15 in a pre-Broadway run.

It is not fair to tell how the play ends, but there will be discussion as to whether the climax is correct. There may be audience demands for two smash curtains, each to be played on alternate nights.

The weather control machine, the burning glass, is symbolic for the possible control of science over mankind, realized in the A- and H-bombs. Staid meteorologists will discount the possibility of Mr. Morgan's fanciful device actually working, but it must be remembered that only within the past few months there has been appointed the President's Committee on Weather Control and Evaluation, whose

chairman is retired Navy Capt. Howard T. Orville, consultant of the Bendix Aviation Corp., Baltimore. (See SNL, Dec. 26, 1953, p. 406).

If the weather men can control the rainfall by cloud seeding, which is admittedly a moot question, one can imagine that other methods might be discovered. At least a dramatist has built his play about this possibility.

Long before the atom was split, the Theatre Guild produced an all-male play, "Wings Over Europe," that seemed in those days between wars to be most far-fetched. A little black box held the fate of Europe and intimidated the rulers of mighty nations.

So the problem is not new upon the stage. It has merely moved into real life. It may even be a relief for an evening to stop worrying about the atomic bombs and wonder about whether a burning glass for the world might sometime exist.

It may not be much of a choice, this manner of burning—or worrying ourselves almost to death. Sometimes fiction on the stage is almost too real.

Science News Letter, February 27, 1954

PSYCHIATRY

Sleepwalking Cause

► SLEEPWALKING IS far from being the harmless and humorous activity many people consider it. It may endanger the sleepwalker himself or those about him, and is serious enough to warrant psychiatric attention.

Father-domination is the cause of it, in the opinion of Comdr. B. I. Kahn, MC, USN, and Lt. (j.g.) R. L. Jordan, MC, USNR, of the U. S. Naval Hospital, Oakland, Calif.

"Sleepwalking," they state in *California Medicine* (Jan.), "is an aggressive or sexual motor activity seemingly aimed primarily at a fear-inspiring father."

Their report was based on the cases of 15 sleepwalkers admitted to the Naval Hospital in Oakland.

Some of the men were married, some single. Their ages ranged from 18 to 36 years, and their ratings from seaman to chief petty officer. They came chiefly from farms or small towns in the Midwest or South. The family background was similar in all cases.

The fathers were unusually stable in occupation, considered honest and reliable and well thought of in the community. Often they were officials in the church or at least well known and regular churchgoers. The patients described their fathers "in almost lyrical terms comparable to extracts from Father's Day cards," the Navy psychiatrists reported. The patients used

such phrases as "the best dad a boy could have," "the perfect father," "a swell pal," and the like.

But while on the surface these patients wanted to be like their strong fathers, they had from childhood repressed hostility to these large and threatening male figures. At the same time, they had felt abandoned by a timid, indifferent or ineffectual mother.

Repression of the hostile feelings against the father caused the patients to react by acting out in a dream world, with sleepwalking, the distorted fantasies they had about all authoritarian figures, such as fathers, officers and stern superiors.

Because the condition has its roots far back in childhood, the Navy psychiatrists felt the outlook for recovery would be poor and that the patients needed long term psychiatric treatment.

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ASTRONOMY

Map Magnetic Field Of Sun's Surface

► PICTURES OF the magnetic field of the sun's surface are now being taken every clear day on a television-like screen with a new instrument, Dr. Horace W. Babcock of Mount Wilson and Palomar Observatories, Pasadena, reports.

One result is the definite confirmation of

the existence of a weak, over-all magnetic field of the sun. Information from the charts, known as solar magnetograms, is being checked to see if there is any relation between changes in the magnetic field and other solar variables.

The intensity of the fields, Dr. Babcock reports in the *Astrophysical Journal* (Nov., 1953), is about one gauss, the unit used by scientists to measure magnetic induction. Because the field is so weak, detecting it requires great care. The fields arise, Dr. Babcock has found, in those regions from which the coronal features known as polar tufts are seen during eclipses.

Science News Letter, February 27, 1954

SCIENCE NEWS LETTER

VOL. 65 FEBRUARY 27, 1954 NO. 9

The Weekly Summary of Current Science, published every Saturday by SCIENCE SERVICE, Inc., 1719 N. St., N. W., Washington 6, D. C., NORTH 7-2255. Edited by WATSON DAVIS.

Subscription rates: 1 yr., \$5.50; 2 yrs., \$10.00; 3 yrs., \$14.50; single copy, 15 cents, more than six months old, 25 cents. No charge for foreign postage.

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Printed in U. S. A. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Washington, D. C., under the act of March 3, 1879. Acceptance for mailing at the special rate of postage provided for by Sec. 3440, P. L. and R., 1948 Edition, paragraph (d) (act of February 28, 1925; 39 U. S. Code 283), authorized February 28, 1950. Established in mimeographed form March 18, 1922. Title registered as trademark, U. S. and Canadian Patent Offices. Indexed in Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, Abridged Guide, and the Engineering Index.



Member Audit Bureau of Circulation. Advertising Representatives: Howland and Howland, Inc., 1 E. 54th St., New York 22, Eldorado 5-5666, and 360 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, State 2-4822.

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