

"Brotex" Doubted

Agriculture

"Brotex," the much-talked-of new fiber plant which has been hailed in the press as a "replace-plant" for cotton and a solution of Britain's textile woes, is apparently being received coolly and even somewhat doubtfully by British scientists. An editorial paragraph in *Nature*, leading British scientific journal, examines the claims of the new plant critically and dismisses it, at least for the time being, with a Scotch verdict.

"That a plant with so many desirable qualities, which will survive the winter in the south of England, should only now have been brought to notice, is somewhat remarkable and merits further investigation," the editor remarks.

"The 'evolution of the plant' has not been disclosed, pending application for patents, though it has been stated elsewhere to be of hybrid origin. It is known, however, that it belongs to the genus *Lavatera* of the family of Malvaceae, and the plants now being grown in Devonshire very closely resemble a species which is a native of the Canary Islands, a plant which would certainly be hardy only near the warm southwest coast of England in normal winters. The mallow family contains many well-known fiber-yielding plants, . . . and in some cases the seeds are also of value for cattle food. None of these plants is hardy in Great Britain, and even *Lavatera arborea*, which is the only *Lavatera* found in England, will succeed only near the coast.

"If, therefore, 'Brotex' can be proved to be of hybrid origin, not only will it be of scientific value to know its parentage, but it will also be of material importance to know whether it will regularly produce fertile seed in Great Britain. Moreover, it is of importance, from the commercial aspect, to know whether the fiber is superior to jute and hemp, with which fibers we understand the market is already fully supplied."

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An investigation of habits of 300 children of the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades showed that the average child gets enough sleep, though some do not.

A sedan-style automobile which can travel on rails has been especially constructed for inspection trips over a Canadian railway line.

Seek Fossils in Southwest

Paleontology

More bones of extinct ground sloths and of other beasts that roamed the earth in their time are the objectives of a joint expedition by the Smithsonian Institution and the Peabody Museum of Yale University, which just left for New Mexico. The scientists will go to the extinct volcanic fumarole in Dona Ana County, N. M., about 45 miles northwest of El Paso, Texas, where the giant ground sloth whose bones are now in the Peabody Museum was found last year. They expect to clean this place out completely, removing and sifting tons of guano which have been deposited by uncounted generations of bats, in the search for even the tiniest of skeletal remains.

The place where the sloth was found by a group of amateur explorers has been described as a "cave." It is not a cave in the proper sense of the term, but a crevice in the ground, narrow at the mouth and broader at the bottom, forming a natural pit trap. Into this the

luckless sloth tumbled many thousands of years ago; and it is the belief of the members of the expedition that other animals may have shared the same fate and left their skeletons to be covered by the slowly accumulating guano.

All bones found will be divided equally between the two participating institutions, with the understanding that if another ground sloth is discovered it is to go to the U. S. National Museum.

The Peabody Museum will be represented by Fred W. Darby, and the U. S. National Museum by N. H. Boss. Ewing Warehouse, of El Paso, one of the discoverers of the Yale sloth, will assist the party. It is expected that the work will keep the party afield during April and May, and it is planned also to examine all similar holes and caves which may be discovered in this region, in the hope of a repetition of last year's landfall.

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200 Quakes in Year

Seismology

Nineteen twenty-eight was a record year for Mexican earthquakes.

During the first six months over 200 quakes were registered, the first one on New Year's Day.

A seismic geography of the country has been compiled from the records, and also from visual observations of such obvious earth modifications as cracks in the ground and landslides, by the Institute of Geology in Mexico City. It contains a seismic map which may have to become a guide to architectural styles in the future.

Nervous inhabitants of the capital and the surrounding valley appeal for moral assurance to the Geological Institute when the earth begins its newest step. An ancient Indian legend says that Tenoxtitlan, now Mexico City, will some day be destroyed by volcanic fire, and a German scientist, Von Humboldt, declared a century ago that the little hill, "El Penon," in the middle of the valley, may some day do it.

The 1928 Mexican quakes have nearly all been in the southern states of Oaxaca and Guerrero, and sometimes in the sea offshore. The inhabitants there have evolved an earthquake complex, from the terrifying noises sometimes accompanying the quakes.

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How Warm is a Wren?

Ornithology

That Mrs. Wren's children often "develop temperatures" has been revealed, along with other facts concerning the domestic life of the now famous wren families that have been under observation for a number of years at Hillcrest Farm, Gates Mills, Ohio, where the Baldwin Research Laboratory is located. As a result of inquiries into the private life of this bird from egg to parenthood, it is evident that the infants of wrenhood are capable of registering temperatures that would alarm any young mother.

In carrying on experiments in taking bird temperatures, thermocouples and mercury thermometers especially adapted for this study were used. Over sixty young birds were observed in the 3,300 readings obtained at Mr. Baldwin's laboratory during the last two summers. In order to secure information on the extent of variation in the body temperature of nestling wrens from day to day, during the developing period, a set of experiments under controlled conditions was devised.

The bird under study was placed in an incubator, and a series of readings taken by inserting the thermocouple deep into its mouth. Each experiment required between two and four hours.

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