



Maligned Monster

➤ WHEN a newspaper columnist of another generation wrote, "Though full of arms, the octopus

Is never called an arsenal;
In fact, some names they call the cuss

Won't do to put in print at all," he was (quite unintentionally, to be sure) maligning one of the shyest, most retiring of all the citizens of the sea. True, the creature is often called "devil-fish"—a name much more appropriately claimed by the great horned manta, or giant ray—but there is really nothing especially devilish about him. He hides in chinks between rocks or cavities in the coral, quite as much for his own safety as to enable him to nab such incautious lobsters, crabs and other items of sea-food as may venture within reach of his sucker-covered arms.

Menace to man the octopus certainly is not, at least so far as American coastal waters are concerned. Biggest specimens reported from our shores have an arm-spread of six or eight feet—and no inclination to use it on anything so big as a human bather or diver. There is said to be a giant octopus on the Australian coast, with a "reach" of 40 feet; this species may very well be dangerous. But vacationers in our winter beach resorts need be on the lookout for only two really aggressive and dangerous sea creatures—the barracuda and the moray or sea-eel. They may safely ignore all but the very largest sharks—which are very rarely seen in our waters anyway—and they can forget all about the octopus.

Indeed, if anyone is entitled to present a bill of complaint on account of a tendency to seize and devour, it would be more appropriate for the octopus to prefer such charges against the human species. In the fish markets of the Mediterranean region

and the Far East, small octopuses are common objects of sale, as are also their free-swimming relatives, the squids. The peoples of those regions cook them in various ways; and even American and British naturalists who have tried them say they can be very tasty when properly prepared.

There is no logical reason why we shouldn't relish a dish of octopus or squid. Almost all of us like oysters and clams; abalones and mussels, too, when we can get them. Gourmets of Gallic taste delight in roasted snails. All these sea animals are mollusks, belonging to the same great zoological group as octopuses and squids. Indeed, they might even be called their poor relations, for these many-armed mollusks are considered by zoologists as the most advanced forms of their kinship. So if we readily eat oysters, yet turn up our noses at a dish of octopus, we are behaving very much as we would if we were to accept fish but reject beefsteak.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Voluntary Health Plans

➤ FARM leaders favor voluntary health insurance rather than national insurance through the federal government, it appears from statements at the National Conference on Rural Health in Chicago. The conference is sponsored by the American Medical Association.

Said H. E. Slusher, of Jefferson City, Mo., chairman of the American Farm Bureau Federation rural health committee:

"We favor voluntary plans providing medical, health, dental and hospital insurance."

The Bureau, he added, has not recognized "the need for nor feasibility of a national compulsory health insurance program."

The Grange, according to Joseph W. Fichter, Columbus, Ohio, master of the Ohio State Grange, wants: 1. contributory health insurance as the basic method of financing medical care for the large majority of American people, with tax funds as required to furnish services which are public responsibilities and to supplement health insurance where necessary; 2. voluntary prepayment group health plans on a community or collective bargaining level embodying group practice; and 3. removal of legal restrictions on voluntary insurance plans on a cooperative basis, such as now exist in a number of states.

Encouragement of prepaid medical, hospital and dental care on a voluntary basis was given as one of four points in the program of the National Cooperative Milk Producers Federation, a marketing organization for dairy farmers in 47 states. Its program was presented by Mrs. Margaret K. Taylor of Washington, educational director of the federation.

A Department of Human Resources in

the federal government, corresponding to the Departments of Agriculture and Labor, is wanted by the Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union of America, Mrs. Gladys T. Edwards, Denver, Colo., educational director of the union, said.

"If medical service can be made available only by act of the national Congress, it is my opinion that we have made the first step toward completely controlled social and economic life and have given up the right to take free action in this country," declared Aubrey D. Gates, associate director of the Arkansas Agricultural Extension Service.

He stressed the need for "study and discussion, give and take, and of compromise" to meet rural health and medical problems.

More public health units, more preventive medicine and more doctors for rural areas were stressed by all the speakers.

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Science Service Radio

➤ LISTEN in to a discussion on "Our Scientists of Tomorrow", interviews with eight of the 40 winners of the Eighth Annual Science Talent Search, on "Adventures in Science" over the Columbia Broadcasting System at 3:15 p.m. EST, Saturday, Feb. 19. Eight talented teen-aged youngsters, winners of Washington trips, will be guests of Watson Davis, director of Science Service. The high school winners will tell in their own words what interests them most in the world of science. Some will describe the experiments they set up—others will also tell of future plans and ideas.

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