PSYCHOLOGY—BIOLOGY

Gorilla Has Calm Disposition

The first real understanding of the mind and personality of a gorilla has been obtained by Dr. Robert M. Yerkes, professor of psychology at Yale University. For six weeks, Congo, a five-year-old mountain gorilla, worked at problems set by Dr. Yerkes. Results of the experiments show that popular ideas about the African mountain gorilla as a fierce and savage beast are no more accurate than would be our ideas about any other creature that we had met only when it was fighting desperately for its life.

Dr. Yerkes states that he never saw this child ape in a rage. Her social relations with him and with other human beings of her acquaintance were entirely agreeable. In tests of the gorilla's ability, Congo was confronted with bananas, sweet potato, and other attractive food which she could get by learning to use a stick or by pulling a rope in a certain way. In these tests she proved slower mentally than the alert and lively chimpanzee, and often she might reasonably have flown into a rage when she failed again and again to master the situation and reach the prize. But the little gorilla would stick at the task, showing patience and judgment far superior to other types of ape that Dr. Yerkes has studied.

The psychologist concludes that, if Congo displays a fair assortment of gorilla emotions and reactions, these apes are placid, rather stoical, and slow to solve certain problems; but they are, perhaps, the most intelligent of the higher apes.

The three commonest ape traits, curiosity, destructiveness, and imitativeness, seem little developed in Congo. She showed surprisingly little interest in objects of her new world, and had no curiosity about sticks or other new things placed within reach, Dr. Yerkes found.

As for imitativeness, Dr. Yerkes writes: "I can truthfully say that I never saw her ape me or any other person.

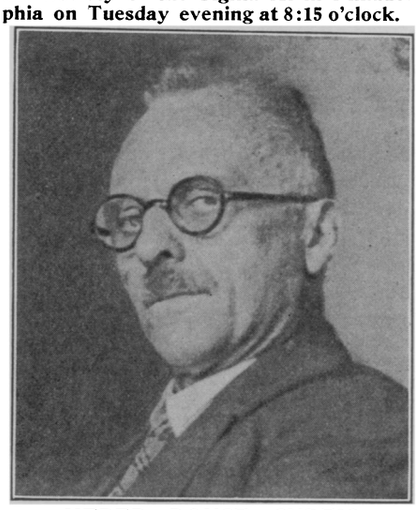
"If Congo is relatively impulsive, destructive, curious, imitative, she has deceived or misled me amazingly," he adds. "Her behavior has filled my mind with the impression that she is too much aloof from her environment, too little adventurous, or, in the scientific sense, inquiring, to readily and quickly discover solutions of novel problems and adapt

(*Just turn the page*)



HERBERT CLARK HOOVER

Mr. Hoover is Secretary of Commerce of the United States. He will deliver an address before the annual meeting of the Society of the Sigma Xi in Philadelphia on Tuesday evening at 8:15 o'clock.



HEBER DOUST CURTIS

Dr. Curtis will deliver an illustrated lecture on "The Unity of the Universe" in Philadelphia on Thursday afternoon at 4:30. He is one of the best-known of American astronomers, and has been director of the Allegheny Observatory since 1920.

MEDICINE

Disease May Stop Plague

Little rodents that prey on the weaker members of their own species are the principal carriers of plague on the high veldt, the South African Institute for Medical Research has found.

The plague is spread by the cannibalistic habits of the gerbilles, as the animals are called, as well as by fleas,

Science News-Letter, December 25, 1926

CHEMISTRY

Old Silks Made into New

Turn in your old silk stockings or worn-out clothes of that material and have new silk threads made of them. According to the experiments recently carried on by Dr. P. P. von Weimarn, of the Imperial Research Institute, at Osaka, Japan, this is indeed possible. Dr. Weimarn states that filaments actually better in quality than natural silk can be produced from worn-out silk materials or from the waste silk from cocoons or factories.

The process, as tried out experimentally by him, is one of partially dissolving the silk in hot, concentrated, aqueous solutions of any of the easily-soluble neutral salts, and of subsequent partial dehydration. A viscous liquid is produced by the first treatment. This solution is then partially dehydrated at room temperature by the addition of concentrated, aqueous solutions of other easily-soluble salts, or of alcohol solutions. The viscous liquid turns to a jelly state and then to a ropy-plastic state in which it may be drawn into threads. A washing process is usually necessary before threads can be drawn which closely resemble the natural silk in quality. Frequently the threads so spun in these experiments possessed even greater tensile strength than the original threads of natural silk. The other qualities of natural silk, such as elasticity, softness, resistance, satin gloss, were present in the threads so obtained.

Science News-Letter, December 25, 1926

BOTANY

American Oaks in France

The small and scraggly black scrub oak, or bear oak, of barren lands in the northeastern United States is being made use of in France with considerable success to provide brush cover for similar lands used as game preserves on large country estates, according to Dr. David G. Fairchild of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, who has recently returned from a botanical exploration that took him around the world. The species is a dwarf oak, hardly to be dignified by the name of tree, for its usual height is seldom more than nine feet. though specially favored specimens may reach eighteen or twenty. But it grows and seems to do better on stony ground in France than any of the native shrub or small-tree species.

Science News-Letter, December 25, 1926.

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