

under the spell of an ancient urge, to battle through snowdrifts to our remote door. Explain it as you will, O you wise men, yet it still remains a phenomenon that, while it may not baffle, will always humble the vaunted intelligence of man.

I once related this story, as I have here set it down, to a visitor at our hill. He laughed and told me the experience of a friend of his, an entomologist. This man had his laboratory in Paris and often went on field expeditions to collect specimens, especially moths and butterflies. On returning from a trip on one warm day, he laid out his collection. There was one moth cocoon, of a rather rare species which he had found in distant woodlands. The cocoon hatched, and the new-born turned

out to be a female. Within a few hours, the entomologist reported, there flew through the open window no less than thirty male moths of the same species and not to be found, to his certain knowledge, within sixty miles of his laboratory.

I admit that my visitor's account topped, in magnitude of mystery, my own poor narrative of Jo. But we agreed that it was a good thing, commercially, that the magic was not shared by the human female. For where would the unhappy hawkers of costly perfume be if our women had the simple secret of moth and mongrel? Bankrupt! A multi-million-dollar industry utterly annihilated, we agreed, aghast, while Jo looked up at us from her cushion with eyes that were wise and serene.

PHRASE ORIGINS—16

TO DICKER: A baseball player who had jumped to the Mexican League announced that he was through "dickering with the powers-that-be in Mexico." I don't know whether he wanted the ante raised by tens, but the word "dicker" originally referred to trades made in groups of ten. The Latin word for a set of ten was decuria, from the Latin decem, which gives us "decimal." Furs and skins were the chief commodities exchanged between the Romans and the tribes in their empire. Possibly because of early man's tendency to count on his fingers, a set of ten became the recognized unit of barter. Although decuria was used mainly for skins, the word also became applied to other objects of trade. In changed form, decuria passed into the Teutonic languages and became "dicker" in English, which was used as a verb. In this country it was applied to bargaining, and "to dicker and swap" occurs in the writings of James Fenimore Cooper. He applied it once more to the fur trade, to the dealings of the early trappers with the Indians.

MORRIS ROSENBLUM

BLOOD PRESSURE, HIGH AND LOW

BY PETER J. STEINCROHN, M.D.

IT is probably correct to say that more people are concerned about the actual height of their blood pressures than with the potential dangers of the atomic bomb. What the layman doesn't know is that high blood pressure is not a disease but a symptom. For example, a man may be overjoyed because his pressure has dropped from 180 systolic to 160. Actually, this means little one way or another. He may feel worse with the 160 than with the 180. It is important to remember that the actual numbers tell only part of the story.

High blood pressure is only one symptom of a disease process, just as pain is only one symptom of appendicitis, or as shortness of breath is only one symptom of heart disease.

The high blood pressure patient may complain about faintness, dizziness, nervousness, headaches, blushing, lightheadedness, numbness and tingling in the arms, excessive perspiration, vertigo and stroke. However, no one with any or all of these symptoms should jump to conclusions.

Vertigo, for example, may be due

to Ménière's syndrome. Numbness and tingling in the arms may be due to a severe case of anemia. Excessive perspiration may be due to a hyperthyroid condition. The stroke may be due to an embolism from a broken-off clot in the heart chambers. A headache or fullness in the head may be due to any of the hundreds of causes of headaches. The lightheadedness and dizziness may be due to a refractive error that an ophthalmologist can easily correct. Blushing may really be the hot flushes due to the menopause. Fainting spells may be due to a lack of sugar in the blood.

These symptoms are important. They should not be passed over lightly. However, someone may have *all* of these symptoms and not have high blood pressure; he also may have *none* of these symptoms and have a pressure of 250 or over. The moral is that no one can be certain about his blood pressure until he has been checked by a doctor.

I have heard many intelligent patients ask, "Do I have blood pressure, Doc-

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