

been wandering for some years into deepening stage-three dubieties that I came across the hog-researches indicating that the facts about pigs and snake-bite, though true enough, may be as misinforming as an orange-pip in a caecum. Pigs aren't immune. They are just fat. Venom injected into the protective mass of blubber that enwraps a hog is absorbed so slowly that it has no serious effect.

Perhaps what has happened in the matter of shrews is my favorite. Lay ignoramuses — farmers and such — had been saying for ages that a shrew-bite was poisonous. Not merely infective and dangerous, as any animal bite may be, but actually venomous, toxic, in the manner of the bite of a poisonous snake or a spider. Mani-

festly, it is absurd that this little mouse-like mammal should have any such queer equipment. It is fantastic. None knew better than I, in the long-ago of Biology I, what simpletons country people are, and what a proud thing it is to be ranged with the little company of enlightened scientists in such a matter as this preposterous superstition about shrews. A while ago a couple of biologists — as in a whimsical experiment on a hot day, with nothing more serious to do — tried injecting shrew-spit into rabbits. The rabbits keeled over, twitched briefly, and died. I have not kept up with the latest scientific papers giving analyses of the shrew-poison. But it seems not immoderate to remark, at any rate, Hmmmmmm.

MUSIC

BY ETHEL BARNETT DE VITO

The war dance or the symphony:
Music is some insistent plea
You cannot hear impartially.

Music demands imperiously
"Be what I am along with me"
And you must answer, whether it be

An elegie, a lover's dream,
A waltz or the slim quicksilver gleam
Of singing in a woodland stream.

THE MAN WHO KNOWS ALL ABOUT SNAKE BITES

BY CHARLES A. GAULD & MICHAEL SCULLY

ON THAT dark winter morning in 1916 it was hard to see the mottled shapes on the gray floors of the snake house in New York's Bronx Zoo. And perhaps the routine of his job had dulled John Toomey's caution. As he pushed his cleaning tool into a cage, a big Texas rattler struck from the shadows. Toomey screamed as the fangs hooked deep into his hand.

Other keepers quickly applied first aid while, with the only antidote available, anti-venin crystals, Curator Raymond Ditmars worked deftly but dubiously. The crystals had to be boiled to make a serum — a loss of 45 minutes. Moreover, Ditmars had often seen them prove futile.

It was so with Toomey; the injection failed to take effect. As the swelling mounted, the man, racked by nausea, seemed to face death.

Then sheer luck intervened. A visitor in Ditmars' office mentioned

that just the day before he had met the only man in the world who might save this life. Ditmars grabbed the phone. An hour later, a stocky Brazilian walked into the hospital room where Toomey lay writhing. "What type was the snake?" he asked. Told it was a rattler, he selected a vial from his bag, drew its liquid into a syringe and jabbed a needle into Toomey's chest. Within two hours, the man was out of danger.

Later, when Toomey voiced his gratitude, the Brazilian chuckled. "I'm indebted to *you*," he confided. "You were the man I was looking for."

For years, in a bare little laboratory at São Paulo, this oddly named Brazilian, Dr. Vital Brazil, had labored to supplant the crude serum then in use. First, he traced its failures to the assumption that all snake poison was of one type. Then, from thousands of snakes, he isolated three groups, for each of which a specific anti-venin

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