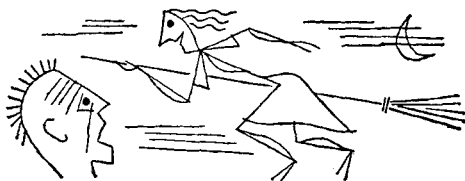

THE SKEPTICS' CORNER

by BERGEN EVANS



*That love birds die of grief at
the loss of a mate*

Mr. C. J. Cornish (in *Animals at Work and Play*) doubts that the death of the second of a pair of love birds soon after the death of the first is proof that these pugnacious little parrots die of grief. They are very delicate birds, he points out, and the same improper food or unfortunate chill that kills one usually affects the other.

*That kings formerly lived in
open profligacy*

At the abdication of Edward VIII, many who longed to see him keep both the crown and the lady felt that it would have been otherwise in the good old days, that Charles II or Louis XIV would have taken no nonsense from Mrs. Grundy or the archbishop.

But, despite romantic fiction, the kings of old, while frequently proflig-

ate, were rarely open about it. Mistresses were either concealed completely or attached to the court as ladies in waiting and the most elaborate mummary was gone through to preserve the fiction of their status. When we say that "everybody knew about it" and that it was "discussed openly," we are speaking from the safe distance of several centuries, equipped with knowledge gained from the closely guarded and posthumously published memoirs of gossipy courtiers. Voltaire got into serious trouble for even mentioning Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour in the same poem, and when later that monarch was taken ill at Metz and thought to be dying, the bishop of Soissons refused to administer the sacrament when he learned that the Duchess de Châteauroux and her sister were so much as in the town. Louis was forced to send her back to Paris and en route her coach was stoned by a morally indignant popu-

lace that had heard whispers of unconventional goings on.

That American women are equal with men in the law

Many minor legal discriminations against women remain. In the aggregate, they are quite impressive. In a third of the states, women cannot serve on juries. In many states, prostitution is defined as the act of a female. In quite a few, all common property during marriage — including the wife's personal fortune, if she has one — is controlled by the husband. In a third of the states, the mother can become the legal guardian of her child only if it is a bastard. Most states severely restrict the right of a young woman to dispose of her person. And so on.

That corpses sealed in coffins have been found, centuries later, in perfect preservation but that within a few seconds of opening the coffins they fell to dust

This yarn, dear to garrulous vergers guiding wide-eyed American tourists through English cathedrals, may be based on a too literal acceptance of the Biblical assurance that we are dust and shall return to dust. There used to be a verger at Canterbury particularly addicted to this spooky assur-

ance. His chief subject was Henry IV whose leaden coffin, he claimed, had, by chance, been opened in his presence. For one unforgettable moment he had gazed upon the russet beard and the lowering eyes of the sinister Bolingbroke and had just had time to be struck by his resemblance to his effigy when, with a faint crepitation, the royal features dissolved into a fine white powder and the last vestige of the fourteenth century withdrew forever into the somber shadows of the gloomy arches.

The story was a good one and always well delivered. Furthermore it had the advantage of not being open to examination, at least not by the average tourist. Such scant records as we have, however, of the opening of the old leaden coffins in which the great of the past were soldered do not substantiate it. Milton was so buried in 1674 and in 1790, during the course of alterations to the church which had led to his temporary disinterment, his coffin was pried open and various teeth, ribs and scraps of hair torn loose by his admirers or by those who hoped to sell them to his admirers. A Mr. Philip Neve collected as many pieces of Milton and information as he could and published an account (*A Narrative of the Disinterment of Milton's Coffin*) in a curious pamphlet, now in the Bodleian, of what is surely one of the most re-

markable instances on record of the zeal of souvenir hunters. Mr. Neve cross-questioned everyone he could who had been present at the opening and there is no doubt that Milton was not in a perfect state of preservation even before his admirers got at him.

That children slide down the banisters

A child who attempted to slide down the actual banisters would be in immediate need of the services of a urologist. What children slide down is the handrail which is supported by the banisters (or, more proper still, the balusters), the slender upright posts which guard the side of the staircase.

That certain foods are not "wholesome"

There is scarcely anything edible that has not at some time or place been regarded as delicious. Maccaenus, who could surely afford the best, liked donkey meat. Heliogabalus, an effeminate epicure, was fond of the combs and wattles of cocks. Trimalchio delighted in the dugs of a pregnant sow and, incredible as it seems to us, Roman gourmands set great store by the skin of a womb that had miscarried — "whereunto," as Sir Thomas Browne remarked, "we

could hardly persuade our stomachs." Homer (*Odyssey*, IV) seemed to regard fish as the last resort of the starving, and to the Elizabethans bacon was a disgusting substance fit only for gluttonous boors. Dogs have been eaten with relish by many peoples. Galen recommends them young, fat and gelded. Varro and Appicius record recipes for preparing mice. Until very recently sparrow pie was eaten by many people in England and rattlesnake meat is now being offered in cans. The Mexicans eat fried worms. They have a fine, nutty flavor. Insects are a staple of diet for many. Many African tribes eat ants. John the Baptist's locusts were no more a publicity stunt than his camel's-hair coat was a luxury. Both represented the severest plainness of living, that was all. Many Americans, by the way, eat fish eyes in their soup, though many more would rather go hungry. Caviar remains caviar to the general. Bourgeois taste is about equally divided in respect to brains, though the necessities of the war enlarged the number of those who would eat them. Testicles are highly esteemed in many country places, where they are called "mountain oysters," though city palates would probably reject them if they knew what they were.

Most animals eat the excretions of

other animals. The thought is repugnant to us, except, of course, in regard to those excretions — honey and milk — we enjoy. Peculiarly enough, we esteem them as being particularly “wholesome.” The milk of cows and humans is most consumed among us, but every kind has probably been used at some time or other. Goats and asses’ milk are still prescribed in certain sickness, though there is a growing doubt of their value. Horse’s milk is still a staple among the nomadic peoples of the Asiatic steppes and has its devotees even among Europeans. The father of Toulouse-Lautrec, the painter, used to ride a brood mare into the Bois de Boulogne every morning, dismount at his favorite café, milk his steed into a half glass of sherry and consume the mixture to his own and the bystanders’ delight.

That circumstantial evidence is unreliable

There are two sorts of evidence — testimonial, or what certain people say happened, and circumstantial, or logical deductions based upon the observable facts. No one who has had much experience with human testimony would hesitate to choose between them and he would choose the circumstantial evidence. So indeed would anybody in anything except a

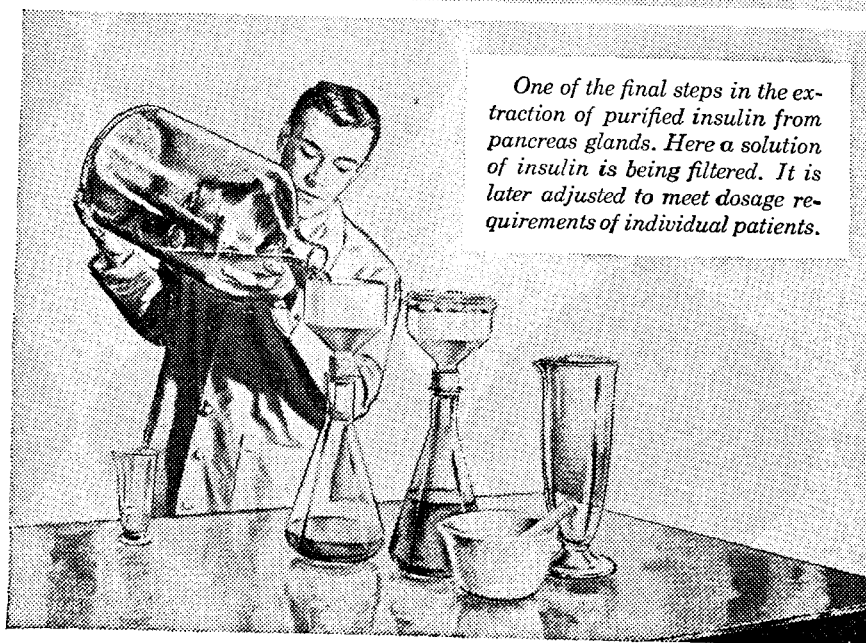
criminal case. If an automobile, for example, had been wrecked in such a way that it would have been impossible to move it and if experts testified that the skid marks on the asphalt showed that the car must have been doing sixty miles an hour on the wrong side of the street, few opponents of circumstantial evidence would accept the assurance of the driver that he was doing thirty on the proper side.

Max Radin has suggested that the popular attitude is basically anti-intellectual, a hatred of logic and a jealousy of experts.

That “once a Caesarean, always a Caesarean”

It is widely believed that if a woman has a child by Caesarean section she must have all her subsequent children in the same manner. Dr. Alan Frank Guttmacher, Associate in Obstetrics at Johns Hopkins, says that this belief is an error, based on the fact that from 2 to 4 per cent of those who have had Caesarean sections will rupture the uterine scar in a later pregnancy or labor. “However,” says Dr. Guttmacher (*Into This Universe*, p. 264), “most authorities believe that it is usually unnecessary to repeat the section, unless of course the cause for the original operation is still present.”

Progress in fighting *DIABETES*



One of the final steps in the extraction of purified insulin from pancreas glands. Here a solution of insulin is being filtered. It is later adjusted to meet dosage requirements of individual patients.

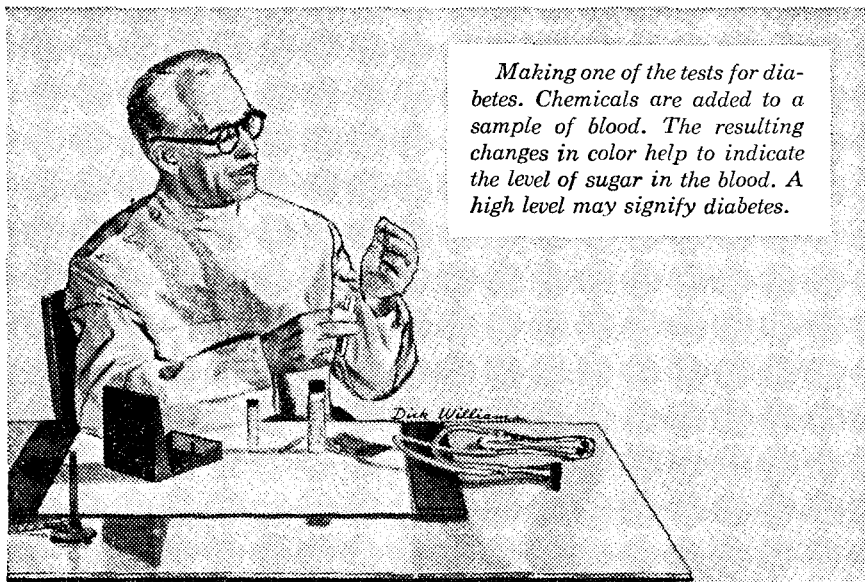
What medical science is doing . . .

Great advances have been made in controlling diabetes. The discovery of insulin in 1921 has led to a much greater life expectancy for the average diabetic today. For example, at age 40, the expectancy is more than twice what it was before insulin was developed.

Medical science is still on the march. It has developed different types of insulin. Some are quick acting with a

short term of effectiveness; others are slower acting but longer lasting.

In addition, it has been discovered that diabetes can be produced experimentally with a substance called *alloxan*, as well as by other means. This may shed new light on how the disease develops. Various studies, including research with radioactive isotopes, also offer hope for important advances in the treatment, and perhaps the prevention, of diabetes.



Making one of the tests for diabetes. Chemicals are added to a sample of blood. The resulting changes in color help to indicate the level of sugar in the blood. A high level may signify diabetes.

What you can do . . .

Recent surveys indicate that in addition to the million *known* diabetics, another million people in our country have diabetes and are unaware of it. So it is wise for everyone to keep alert for these warning signals—excessive thirst, hunger, or urination, continual fatigue, or loss of weight. It is important to see a doctor at once if any of these conditions appear.

Doctors recommend that everyone

have an annual physical examination, *including tests for diabetes*. These tests are especially important for those who have diabetes in the family, those who are overweight, and those past 40.

While there is as yet no cure for diabetes, it can generally be controlled through insulin, diet, and exercise. By following the doctor's advice about keeping these three factors in proper balance, the diabetic can usually live a practically normal life.

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To learn more about diabetes, send for Metropolitan's free booklet 109L, entitled "Diabetes."



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WHAT DID I DO?

A STORY

BY JOHN CRAIG STEWART

IF IT had not been for the two second cousins, Marcia and Louise, Tom would not have been invited to a party while he was visiting Douglas that summer. If he had not gone to the party he would not have met Eugenia, and if he had not met her, although he had seen her at the swimming pool and longed timidly to know her, he would not now be walking down the street at night on the way to his first date. It was a formal date, and he was in his first long trousers, white duck trousers, and a blue serge coat. Already there were beads of perspiration on his forehead and a sticky dampness over his freshly scrubbed tense body. He understood now why Douglas had laughed as he sat patching the wing of a model plane and watched him dress for the date, and again later as Douglas stood on the front porch, leaning casually against the banisters, and watched him as he walked slowly into the dark toward Eugenia's house.

"My Lord, Tom," Douglas had said, "you really going to walk a mile across town in that hot coat to see a girl?"

"Oh, it's not far," Tom had said, "not very far. I don't get hot very easy anyway. I just thought I'd like to go over and take her to a movie. She seems like a pretty nice girl."

"A movie?" Douglas howled, "you going to walk all the way to town after you get her just to go to a movie? If you're going to a movie, why do you have to take a girl?"

Tom had seen his own face turning red as he looked in the mirror to tie his light blue four-in-hand tie.

"Well, she may not want to go, but I thought I'd ask her," he had said.

Douglas shook his head, "That party was enough for me — all those girls standing around giggling and looking silly; and hot, oh golly, I got hot with that tie on. If it hadn't been for the ice cream I'da died."

And Tom remembered the party

JOHN CRAIG STEWART is a student of Hudson Strode at the University of Alabama. His short story, "The Devil Can't Look Back," appeared in the October 1948 MERCURY.