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THE DRY-ROT OF OUR ACADEMIC BIOLOGY¹

OUR society requires its retiring president to close the annual meeting with a discourse or sermon—a task which has become increasingly difficult, for every year the program of the morning and afternoon sessions becomes more abstruse and therefore makes greater demands on our attention and the lingering memories of past presidential rhetoric invite to more odious comparisons. To me the task was the more arduous, because I had been busy for many years in remote fields of entomology in which few of you are interested, and because it fell to me at an inopportune moment, while I was in the very act of laying—if you will pardon a French expression—a volume of some 1,100 pages on ants. This racking oviposition leaves me reduced to a mere blob of corpora lutea and so feeble that I can only crawl, in search of a text for my sermon, to the next Encyclopedia Britannica article, which is not “ant-eater,” but “Antæus.” You will recall Antæus, that mythical F₁ generation hybrid between Poseidon, the Sea, and Gaia, the Earth. His hybrid vigor was so great, we are told, that he not only grew to gigantic stature, but insisted on wrestling with every stranger that happened to pass through his Libyan domain. He was always invincible in these encounters because his strength waxed with each successive contact with his mother Earth. When not engaged in wrestling he was building a monument to his father with the skulls of the vanquished. One day Hercules came along and, knowing the secret of the giant's strength, raised him aloft and strangled him in the air.

We may, perhaps, interpret this exploit of the sun-god Hercules as a mythical expression of the fact that no terrestrial substance can permanently resist evaporation or volatilization by heat, but the accepted and, I believe, more

¹Address of the president of the American Society of Naturalists, Boston, December 29, 1922.

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