



# museum memo

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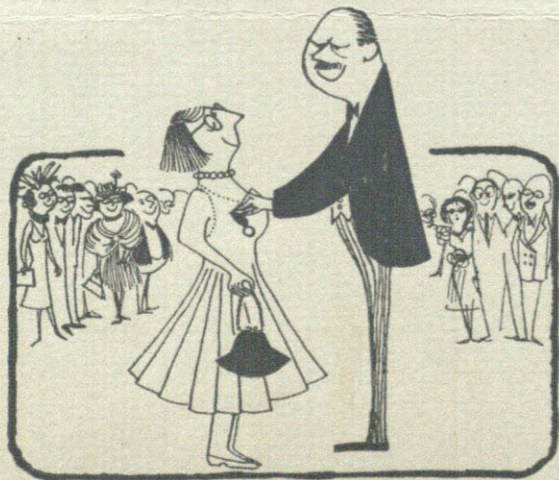
## Gold Medalist

IN the field of the natural sciences we have known many persons blessed with enduring dedication to their work but we came upon the most extreme case of all the other day when we had a long talk with Dr. Libbie Henrietta Hyman, Research Associate in Invertebrates. Dr. Hyman has been working on a treatise on invertebrate zoology for thirty years. She has published five volumes of the treatise, is now working on a sixth and considers the job far from finished.

We called on Dr. Hyman just before her departure for England where, on

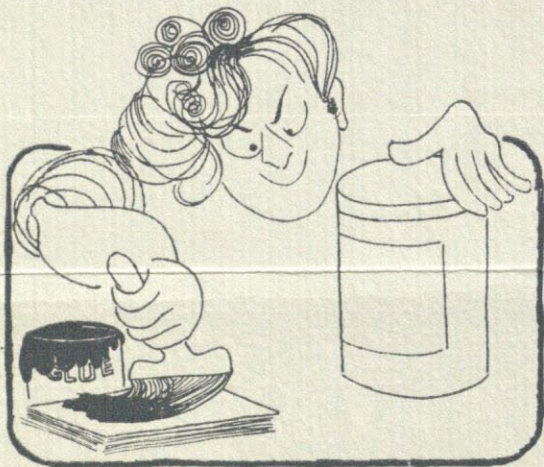
May 24, the Linnean Society of London presented its Gold Medal to her in recognition of her work on the invertebrates. Dr. Hyman is the third American scientist to receive this great honor. The other two were Dr. Edmund Beecher Wilson, zoologist, who was awarded the medal in 1928, and Dr. Elmer Drew Merrill, botanist, who received it in 1939. The only other woman recipient of the medal was Dr. Agnes Arber, British botanist, in 1948.

Dr. Hyman is a small, gray-haired woman with a manner that is brusque and genial at the same time. She said the secretary of the Linnean Society of London wrote her a letter announcing that the medal had been awarded to her. The letter explained that if she wanted to she could have someone in the United States Embassy in London receive the medal for her and that it then could be sent to her. She didn't like the idea of receiving such a high honor by proxy so she decided to take a plane across the Atlantic and receive the medal herself.





Dr. Hyman was the youngest member of her high school graduation class at Fort Dodge, Iowa, in 1905. After her graduation she went to work in a factory in Fort Dodge that made a breakfast cereal called Mother's Oats. Her job was



to paste the colored labels on the boxes by hand. She had been engaged in this work for several weeks when she met one of her former high school teachers on the street. When she told her what she was doing the teacher was horrified. The teacher arranged for a scholarship at the University of Chicago and Dr. Hyman started there in 1906.

After taking her Bachelor's Degree and her Ph.D., she remained in Chicago for fifteen years as research assistant to the late Dr. Charles Manning Child. During that period she wrote a textbook called "A Laboratory Manual for Comparative Vertebrate Anatomy". The book, first published in 1922, was highly successful and she revised it in 1942.

"This book has supported me in comfort if not in luxury for thirty years," Dr. Hyman said. "They want me to

revise it again but I don't like vertebrate anatomy and I won't have anything to do with it at all."

She likes the invertebrates much better and prefers to devote most of her efforts to her treatise. It bears the overall title of "The Invertebrates" and the first volume was published in 1940. Soon after the first volume was published she bought a house in the village of Millwood, up near Ossining, New York. She is very fond of gardening but after eleven years she decided to give up the house.

"If I had it to do over again, I don't know whether I'd do it or not," she said. "I would have been farther along with my work. Now I live in an apartment hotel with maid service where I don't have to do anything and I just love it."

Dr. Hyman has other things to do besides work on her treatise. She has specialized in the free-living flatworms and is the foremost authority on that branch of the invertebrates. People send her flatworms from all over the world to be identified. Sometimes the specimen represents a new species and she describes it. She didn't know, offhand, how many new species she had described.





On a desk near Dr. Hyman was an ancient Oliver typewriter. It was dull green in color the keys rose above the roller instead of being located beneath it as in the modern machines. Questioned about the old machine she said she was still using it and that she had written all the volumes of her treatise on it. She said she had owned a similar one before that and bought this one second hand for \$8 twenty-five years ago. It has only three rows of keys instead of four and has two shift keys, one for capitals and one for figures. Dr. Hyman said she had gotten used to this keyboard and didn't feel like changing.

The five volumes of the treatise that have been turned out on the old machine are "Protozoa Through Ctenophora", "Platyhelminthes and Rhynchocoela", "Acanthocephala, Aschelminthies and Entoprocta", "Echinodermata" and "Smaller Coelomate Groups". Dr. Hyman explained that they are not textbooks but are designed for advanced students. She praised the museum's library highly and said that it was indispensable in her work.

"If they haven't got it, they'll get it for you," she said.

On her return from London Dr. Hyman will get back to work on the sixth volume which deals with the molluscs. She said she hopes to get two more volumes done and that will take her up to the Arthropoda which includes the insects. She doesn't intend to tackle the insects because it is a matter of around a million species already described and more being described each year.

In 1955 Dr. Hyman was awarded the Daniel Giraud Elliot Medal of the National Academy of Sciences in recognition of her work on the invertebrates. In 1941 she received an honorary degree of Doctor of Science from the University of Chicago. When she decided to fly to London to accept the Linnean Society medal in person she refused to tell any of her friends just when her plane was leaving. She didn't want a lot of people showing up at the airport and making a fuss over her.

On the other hand she is highly pleased to have such an honor bestowed upon her. When she received the Elliot Medal she said, "No matter what people say, they all like to feel important. Any one who denies it is a liar and he's not fooling anybody."



In this instance Dr. Hyman has a right to feel important. The Linnean Gold Medal was established in 1888 on the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the society. Other recipients of the medal have included Sir Richard Owen, Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, Thomas Henry Huxley and Ernst Heinrich Haeckel.

JOHN O'REILLY