

HOMES IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

THE HOME OF THE SILKWORM

This month you will read about the most valuable home in the animal kingdom. The lowly creature that spins it has enabled man to cloth himself in shining garments and added thereby to the beauty of the world. This is the mulberry silkworm or known just as the silkworm. It spins most of the real silk cloth in the world which is unwoven from the walls of its home.

The silkworm's skin is smooth and yellowish white. This caterpillar likes the leaves of the mulberry tree better than any other food. When it has eaten as many mulberry leaves as it can, it is about two inches long, and is then ready to spin its cocoon. Its cocoon is yellow or white and it is spun with unbroken fiber and without any doorway.

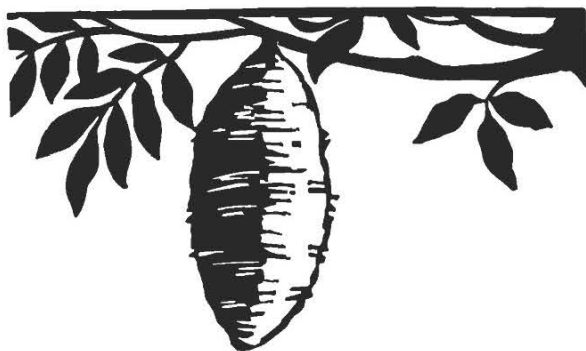


The silkworm lives as a pupa inside the cocoon for about three weeks (or more if it is kept in a cool place) and by the end of that time it has its wings and is ready to come out of the cocoon. Although the cocoon has no doorway, the moth has a way of coming out. It squirts some liquid against one of the cocoon. This liquid softens the gum that holds the silk together. It is then easy for the moth to push

its way out thru the wet end of the cocoon. The moth is cream-colored, with some faint brown lines on the forewings.

There are many interesting stories about this famous insect. Long, long ago, the Chinese people found out that if they put the cocoons of the mulberry caterpillars into hot water, the gummy stuff on the silk would soften and the fiber could be unwound. They found that fibers from several of these cocoons could be twisted together into thread and then woven into cloth.

This way of getting silk fiber to use was kept a secret by the Chinese. They practiced weaving and dyeing and embroidering until they could make wonderful silk cloth with pictures of flow-



ers and dragons and people on it. The silk robes that the Chinese princes wore were the most beautiful in all the world. The Chinese sold some of their silk cloth to travelers from other countries, who paid great prices for it. This cloth was so famous that China was called "Land of Silk."

But in one way and another the secret of getting silk at last reached the people living in the different countries, and they, too, learned how to cultivate the tame silkworms. Here in the Philippines you may watch silkworms, if you are interested in them, when they are exhibited every year by the Bureau of Agriculture at the Carnival. Perhaps many of you have already seen them and have wondered as you stared at those soft round creatures how a thing of beauty may have a very humble source.