

BEAVER'S



MONTH

IT was phenomenal the way the school year had ended. Right up to the last Thursday, every evening had been gripped in a net of homework requirements and other things that had to be done. Then Thursday morning, when the Beaver dropped his bluebook on the desk and walked out of his last exam, the tension suddenly broke. He looked up at the warm sky and suddenly realized that summer was here, and, more incomprehensible, that he had no work to do that afternoon, or that night, or that weekend, or at all.

Added to this shock was the fact that all his friends were leaving. The Houses were turning quiet and empty, their corridors hollow, haunted shells. He felt adrift and lonely, and he smiled a little, thinking how he had condemned that attitude as characteristic of so many snakes who didn't know what to do with themselves when they had no assignments. Still, summer did involve an adjustment.

His friends were adjusting to summer in many ways. Some who could afford it were working in labs and on research projects. Others, who needed money, were working in factories and on construction jobs. A sign of the times, thought the Beaver, that that summer work paid the most which took the least knowledge and skill. Some of his friends, financially more fortunate, were even now lying on beaches with long-legged, tanned girls. He would at any rate inevitably hear all about these varied summers in September, over coffee in the Greasy or cold beer at the Skip Inn.

The Beaver sighed and picked up a sheaf of mimeographed sheets on his desk that purported to prove that Caltech students do everything better—like Duz. Under the imposing title, "A Statistical Picture of the Caltech Student Body," several pages of data had been assembled, tabulating the Techman's comparison with State University men. The state university, which preferred anonymity, was a meager place where apparently everyone did nothing but study—and then, for all its pains, found Caltech, with its scintillating array of parties and activities, well out in front scholastically.

The Beaver decided it must be a cruel world for State students and made a note to write his Congressman. Perhaps, on the other hand, it was only the statistics which made Tech look like such a meteor of varied youthful endeavor. He thought of activities like the several Student Body offices that went uncontested in the last election; and the members of the drama club, who slapped a dozen rehearsals into one play once during

the year and the rest of the time were indistinguishable from pedestrians.

He was sympathetic, though, with the comparison between Student Houses and fraternities. The Houses at Tech were a brilliant thought, combining all the close comradeship and lasting memories of fraternities with a happy freedom from their snobbish selectivity. He also knew that House parties were frequent, and certainly no one could complain of not getting his money's worth.

But all through the reading of the statistics he couldn't help thinking of those single-tracked individuals he met only at the dinner table, or when he went from room to room soliciting and found them snaking. They were the ones who never came to the House's six parties a month—the ones who sat with resigned ennui in humanities courses. How many of these "active" Techmen ever really got out of their muddy technical rut?

The Beaver decided a great lurking number of these people with "activities" were EE's who belonged to the AIEE, ME's who belonged to ASME, physicists who belonged to the Radio Club. He burrowed through his packed trunk and came up triumphantly with the 1949 *Big T*, eager to check his hypothesis. Then, after considerable checking and pencil-chewing, he sat back and surveyed the results: Very close to 60 per cent of those who had "activities" merely belonged to the professional societies of their respective trades. On a note of bitterness he leaned back in this chair, feeling he'd suspected it for some time—and wishing it weren't true.

The value of technical knowledge

Of course, the Beaver admitted, good sound technical knowledge had often been put to useful purposes. It had certainly led to some excellent tricks of diabolical hilarity. Not too many years ago a small Model A had been laboriously dismantled, carted piecemeal, and reassembled in the room of a House brother who had unwittingly left for the weekend without locking his room. The hapless one returned on Sunday night, tired and lugging suitcase, to hear the ominous chugging of an enthusiastic Ford motor issuing from his normally quiet snakepit. How many days Hapless lived with the monster the Beaver didn't know, but he grinned to himself thinking of the poor guy sitting on its fender before the sink to shave, or setting his alarm clock on its running board by his bed before sacking out. Perhaps he even sat in it and ran the motor in the evenings to obtain inspiration from its musical purr.

During the past year, though, no wild, ingenious putz had arisen to divert the troops. It's true they had filled a mammoth meteorological balloon with water and left it, sprawled like a gargantuan jellyfish, on the floor of someone's room in Fleming. It had broken, of course, when he tried to budge it, and flooded the alley—but this was not the kind of spectacularly executed putz that rapidly becomes part of the legend of the Houses. There had really been nothing like the revolving, oil-flinging cement mixer that went into a House prexy's room a couple of years ago, or the ill-fated Mount Wilson safari that aroused such a storm of newspaper bungling in the spring of 1947. Even the Ricketts brake-drum seemed to be getting rusty this last year. The Beaver had worried for some time over this evidenced lack of joie de vivre. Now, suddenly, a fiendish idea came to him, and he began to work out the details for a fine, epic-making putz that he could bring about next year. Things looked rosy again.

—Jim Hendrickson '50