

# THE SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER

*A Weekly Summary of Current Science*

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ISSUED BY  
**SCIENCE SERVICE**

B and 21st Streets  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

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SUBSCRIPTION: \$5 A YEAR, POSTPAID

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Vol. V. No. 187

Saturday, November 8, 1924

## WHITE INDIANS TO BE STUDIED IN HOME COUNTRY BY SCIENTISTS

The White Indians of the Darien region of Panama have been given a preliminary inspection by a committee of scientists consisting of Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, anthropologist of the Smithsonian Institution, as chairman, Dr. Charles B. Davenport of the Station for Experimental Evolution, Cold Spring, Harbor, L. I., and Dr. C. W. Stiles of the U. S. Public Health Service. The committee, in a communication to R. O. Marsh, the explorer who discovered the White Indians, recommends a thorough study of the newly found people in their own land by an expedition of scientists.

The committee's letter follows:

"Dear Mr. Marsh:

"The Committee of Drs. Hrdlicka, Davenport and Stiles which you desired to take charge of the study of the "white Indians" of Panama whom you brought to Washington for the purposes of investigation, held a meeting after these Indians were examined last Friday at which the whole matter was discussed and the following conclusions arrived at:

"The problem of the "white Indians" is one of much scientific interest, but its satisfactory solution is only possible by a detailed and all-sided study of these people and their families in their own country.

"The Committee is of the opinion that these investigations should be conducted simultaneously by Anthropology, Genetics, and Pathology.

"In order that the results may be satisfactory it is requisite that the research should be carried on by experienced and reliable men, whose findings will be accepted with confidence by their colleagues.

"The first condition for a successful carrying on of the work should be, in the opinion of the Committee, the training during the remainder of the year of two or three of the persons now in your party in the English language and such terms as it may be necessary to use with the Indians. Considerable questioning will have to be done, particularly by the anthropologist and geneticist, which would be quite impossible without well qualified interpreters. Two of the men of your party, the father of Margaret, and Alfred, would seem particularly promising in this direction. It is felt that the two and one-third months remaining of this year would be sufficient to form these men into invaluable interpreters for the scientific party.

"The Committee would appreciate a statement from you as to whether or not you

desire it to take charge of whatever further work is to be done on these Indians.

Very truly yours,

A Hrdlicka."

Mr. Marsh states that he intends to cooperate with the scientists in every possible way to facilitate carrying out the recommendations of the committee.

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#### WHITE INDIANS HAVE SHORTHAND SPEECH, SAYS SMITHSONIAN LINGUIST

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"The language of the White Indians is the most melodious and smooth sounding variety of speech that can be found anywhere in the world, and is made up of the smallest number of sounds," is the statement of Dr. John F. Harrington, ethnologist of the Smithsonian Institution, who has been studying the language of the three White Indian children recently brought from the Darien region of the Isthmus of Panama to the United States by R. O. Marsh, explorer and engineer.

"It is an exceedingly easy language to learn. It has no sound in it that cannot be pronounced by anybody, without any training or practice. All of its sounds occur in the English language. The effect on the ear is much more pleasant even than that of the melodious Spanish, while by comparison English, French and Russian sound harsh and barbarous.

"The structure of the language is represented by the formula  $cv$ ,  $c$  representing a consonant and  $v$  a vowel. It produces an alternating flow of consonant and vowel, consonant and vowel; no two consonants ever come together. This structure is responsible for the great melodiousness of the language.

"It has none of the clicked consonants so abundant in Maya and Hottentot, and it also lacks the difficult "tl" and "tz" combinations of the Aztec. It does not have the "intonation values" of Chinese; that is, the meaning of a word is not changed by the tone of voice in which it is spoken. The accent follows such regular rules that it is not even necessary to indicate it by accent marks such as are used in French.

"It is an analytical language, in which ideas are expressed by separate words. In this it is sharply contrasted with practically every other Indian language, which are of the 'agglutinative' type, building long, complex words by sticking separate roots and word-elements together.

"The number of sounds is very small; hence the alphabet will be the shortest one in existence, when the language is reduced to writing. It is the shorthand of languages. The sounds used consist of the five vowels, the two semi-vowels  $W$  and  $Y$ , and the consonant sounds  $K$ ,  $T$ ,  $Ch$ ,  $Sh$ ,  $Ts$ ,  $S$ ,  $L$ ,  $M$ ,  $N$ ,  $R$  and  $P$ . This gives eighteen letters; the English alphabet contains twenty-six, and we use many other sounds, like  $ch$  and  $ng$ , that are not represented by single letters.

"The polynesian languages, for example the Hawaiian, have been thought of as being similar 'shorthand' languages. In print they do look simple, but then spoken they are full of 'choky' sounds in the throat that make them really difficult. These sounds are entirely lacking in the language of the White Indians.