



Science News-Letter

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ARCHAEOLOGY

Indian City of the Dead Found in Illinois

By FRANK THONE

An Indian City of the Dead. That is what George Langford of Joliet has discovered out on the prairies, where the Des Plaines and Kankakee rivers converge to form the Illinois. The valley of this classical American river, used as a highway to the West by the French in the time of Marquette and LaSalle and by the early Americans in the days of the Great Expansion, was also a road for the red men who held the land before them. Historians have long known how important the Illinois river was to the Indians, but the discoveries which Mr. Langford has made, by years of patient and unnoticed digging in a group of neglected mounds near its source, have shown that all the events of known historic time in this region have been matters of yesterday, and that the human drama here probably reaches back a thousand unknown years for every hundred that have so far been recorded in the books. With very modest equipment and one devoted assistant, working only in his spare time, he has brought to light evidences of one vanished people living above the graves of another until they in their turn passed and left their bones to be built upon by later comers. Such a layer-arrangement or stratification of relics of Indian occupation in America has been virtually unknown, but here in his Indian city of the dead Mr. Langford has found three very well-marked layers of burials marking three very distinct tribal cultures; and the lowermost layer probably is double, making four layers in all. It is an aboriginal American Troy, silent for lack of a Homer.

Digging down into any archæological site is like reading history backwards. One naturally finds the most recent things first, since they were



SKULL FROM ONE OF THE BURIALS, with accompanying funeral gifts. The departed squaw was given a supply of food (in the pots), skin-scraping tools, axes for fire-making, etc.

buried last, at the top of the heap. Thus the first burials found in the Fisher mounds, only a little under the grass roots, were the remains of Indians as recent as American colonial days. There were definite traces of contact with white traders, in the form of silver buckles and brooches, on some of which the manufacturer had stamped his trade-mark. The bones of one child were in this layer, and with them were glass and china beads and a few fragments of cloth, all of European manufacture. But the lowermost graves in this layer have no such relics, only the chipped stone arrow points and broken pottery of the Indians themselves. Thus the last chapter in the unwritten Iliad of the Mounds ties in with the story of the coming of the white man. When they began burying their dead on top of the already ancient hecatomb he had not yet come; in the midst of their time he came, and his coming was as the stroke of Fate, rendering inevitable their departure from the homes they had held and

the graves they had guarded for many generations.

But the passing of the last of the Indian tribes before the white man's invasion was only the latest of a series of such successions. As Mr. Langford went down through these buried records of the past, he came next to a most abundant fund of human remains, with ornaments, utensils, and weapons, constituting the real bulk of his discoveries. They were a very different people from those who had remained to meet the white man, for their workmanship was radically different, and all the skulls he found were of a "round-headed" type, whereas the skulls of the later people were markedly broad.

This middle layer contains the real cream of Mr. Langford's discoveries, but he restrained his eagerness to explore it until he had dug clear to the bottom of the mound and on past the original ground level. Here he found the real beginnings of the burial pile in a series of very ancient graves in the hard, gravelly earth. These primitives differed from the later peoples of the middle and upper layers in their burial customs, for they left no funeral gifts with their dead, save for a few pieces of flint, so rough that Mr. Langford is uncertain whether they are the products of human workmanship at all. Times must have been hard in the days of these prehistoric Indians, and birth as perilous as battle; for every one of the adult female skeletons found by Mr. Langford in this layer had beside it the pitiful bones of a newborn baby.

This layer of very ancient burials, made beneath the natural ground surface before there were any mounds at all, contains strong indications that it is really double, and that it represents two racial subdivisions rather than one. For while all the burials are alike in having few funeral gifts, or none,

(Just turn the page)

Indian Mounds

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and in the crouched, "sleeping" positions of the skeletons, their skulls separate rather clearly into two physical types, one group being long-headed and the other medium-headed, or "mesos" as Mr. Langford terms them. The long-heads were the pioneers; they occupy the lowermost graves, and where one burial has been made above another the long-head is always beneath and the "meso" above.

The bulk of the mounds, as already stated, is occupied by the graves of a "middle people," who lie between the long- and meso-headed primitives beneath and the graves of the recent culture near the surface. The people of this middle layer were not the tall and robust athletes that used to be pictured in books as the "noble red man." They were a slightly-built race of low stature, the men averaging only five feet six inches, and some of the women failing to reach even five feet. They had good heads, though, and this combination of intelligent brains with deficient size and muscular strength conditioned their whole culture.

The most obvious of their adaptations to a hard and hostile world is seen in their weapons, which are found abundantly in their graves—for they left generous funeral gifts with their dead. Their spear and arrow points are slender and very sharp, their tomahawk heads keenly edged and exquisitely polished. They represent indeed some of the finest of known prehistoric Indian workmanship. These weapons are obviously those of a people who knew that they were not well fitted for rough-and-tumble, hand-to-hand fighting, and who therefore undertook to make up for their deficiency in brute force by superiority in the quality of their arms. They were apparently a people of archers, who chose their own battle range and never permitted their enemies to come to grips, but stood them off and stung them with accurately-shot arrows and well-flung tomahawks and spears.

They were beginning also to learn the use of metals. Mr. Langford has found numerous ornaments of copper and a few copper celts, or tomahawk heads. At first he was inclined to believe that the presence of this metal indicated trade relations with Europeans, and therefore a comparatively recent date for the Indians of the middle layer. But among the funeral gifts of one man was a large nugget of native copper. This shows that there

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Vanishing "Hawg"

The auk and the dodo must now make room for a newcomer in the Limbo of extinct animals. The razor-back hog, once a familiar sight in the piney woods of the South, is doomed to extinction. During the State Fair of Texas, a razor-back sow and her shoat were on exhibit in the Live Stock pavilion just to show what sort of animals once grew in the South. Live stock experts declare that the genuine razor-back is as much of a curiosity to the younger generation as many animals now exhibited by circuses or that are kept in many of the zoological gardens of Texas and other southern states.

The Texas Museum of Natural History, an institution devoted to the study of natural wild life of this state, has classed both the razor-back hog and the long-horn steer as animals doomed to early extinction and plans are now under way by which mounted specimens of both will be placed in the Museum's permanent collection.

W. H. Standish of Lyons, Ohio, a world authority on breeds of live stock, who judged dairy cattle at the State Fair of Texas, declared the razor-back hog has become such a curiosity in many sections of the South that it is of greater interest to many school children than a camel or lion, both of which are common sights to all children of the cities where zoos are maintained and that are frequently visited by the great circus parades.

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ASTRONOMY

Meteors Reveal Heavens

The only imports to this earth of ours, the meteors that flash in the night, are being studied by the Harvard College Observatory in the hope that they will throw some light upon the composition of the mysterious dark nebulae that appear in parts of the sky. These dark nebulae are believed to be immense heavenly clouds of dust and it may be that the "shooting stars" that are seen from earth are similar particles of stellar dust that plunge into the earth's atmosphere at the high rate of speed of 25 miles a second. Study of photographs of meteor trails, which are hard to obtain, show that some of them are discontinuous and that often one trail breaks up into two or more. Plans are under way to photograph meteors from various parts of the earth in order to discover their secrets.

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MAKING A FIND. George Langford (right) and his assistant Albert Tennik, removing objects from a newly discovered grave in the Fisher Mound Group.

Indian Mounds

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must have been inter-tribal traffic in the metal, probably with the Indians of the upper Great Lakes region. The date of the middle layer therefore goes back again to an unknown antiquity, and considering the fact that the first of the upper-layer burials above it contain no European relics, this antiquity may easily be very great.

One expensive luxury only, did these aborigines permit themselves: the clay pots which they buried with their dead are of a very high order of workmanship for early Indian pottery. It seems to have been the invariable custom of the Indians of this period to bury the bodies of women and children with a pot of food as provision for the last long journey. Men were not so provided; presumably the collections of weapons placed as pillows beneath their heads were considered adequate to secure ghostly game for a brave. But a food-pot is always part of the furniture of a well-stocked grave, if a woman or a child lies there. As a rule there is a clamshell spoon in the pot, and frequently bits of bone from the meat.

Other finds have been eloquent of individual experiences in the dangers and hardships of savage life. One skull of a man, a thick and heavy skull, must be that of a warrior who died in battle, for a small chert arrow-head was found protruding from its broken temple bone when it was uncovered. Another skeleton was found with an arrow-head between its empty ribs.

Perhaps the most pathetic of such mute records of battle and sudden

death was the skeleton of a young squaw with the bones of an infant beside her. There was an arrow point between the bones of her forearm, and another under her left shoulder blade. It does not require much imagination to reconstruct the sudden raid of the tribe's enemies, the terrified flight of the young mother and her baby, the wound received as she tried to protect her child, and the deliberately aimed shaft that at last drove through her heart. This unsung Helen did not outlive the sack of her city!

To the student of Indian history and migrations, the most important thing about Mr. Langford's discoveries is the resemblance between the things these middle layer Indians made and the utensils, implements and tools of the Iroquoian group of recent and modern Indians in the eastern part of the United States. The Iroquois Indians were the backbone of the formidable Six Nations alliance which in Revolutionary days made endless trouble for the Americans, though they had at one time been the allies of the French against the English. Cooper's old favorite novel, "The Last of the Mohicans," deals with a part of the struggle against this formidable Indian alliance, said to have been one of the most highly advanced native American political arrangements north of Mexico. Hitherto nothing resembling Iroquoian handiwork has been found west of Ohio, and this discovery in Illinois may throw new light on the route of the predecessors of the tribe eastward to their final empire.

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