

BOTANY
NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



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Wild Plums

Springtime in Japan sees thousands of pilgrims on the road, going to worship beauty in the groves of flowering cherry trees, and perhaps to hang on the branches long strips of paper bearing bits of lyric verse. The average American is too self-conscious to let himself get caught writing poetry (though we all try it, at least while we are young); but if he were to undertake to leave the favors of the muse fluttering from the branches of a tree he could hardly choose a better one than the near American relative of the Japanese cherry—the common wild plum.

The American wild plum is as deserving as any tree in the world of having pilgrimages made to its haunts, and no pilgrimage would need to be a long one, either, for the wild plum grows all over the eastern part of our country and follows the stream-course timber belts far out into the dry grasslands of the West. The pearly white of its blossoms against the dark branches, with just the faintest beginnings of pale green leaves showing between, is a sight to make even the least poetic of us feel lyric stirrings.

The wild plum has as well what we call in our practical, bread-and-butter language "a good follow-up," for after it has delighted our eyes and spirits with its beauty in the spring it prepares to satisfy our palates and stomachs in the summer with a generous crop of really good fruit. The American plum is one of the few fruits that is equal, in the wild states, to the efforts of many another tree after many generations of careful cultivation. The excess of tannic "pucker" that makes our mild crabapples inedible is completely gone from the wild plum when it is fully ripe, and the big seed that takes up most of the room in such things as the pawpaw is kept down to reasonable proportions in the plum, leaving space inside the skin for a good, generous bite of highly palatable pulp.

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ARCHAEOLOGY
Unknown Kings at Ur

Names of eastern kings who ruled in Mesopotamia more than 5,000 years ago and returned to the dust leaving no trace of their reign may be restored to the records of history as a result of excavations at Ur of the Chaldees, the early home of Abraham.

A report just received from C. Leonard Woolley, director of the joint expedition of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania and the British Museum at Ur, states that seals bearing the names of kings unrecorded in any history were among the last finds of the season's work.

The graves in which the seals of the unknown kings were discovered belong to a period as early as 3500 B. C.

"As for their richness," Mr. Woolley writes, "it is enough to say that for three weeks not a day passed without gold objects being found."

"The richest grave—if indeed it is all one grave—was found at the very end of the season," he states, "so late that to finish it we were compelled to keep ten men on at work after the rest of the gang had been dismissed. At a depth of eighteen feet we came on a hoard of copper tools and weapons lying between two of the filmy streaks of white which indicate matting.

"We followed up the matting over an area vastly greater than that of any tomb yet found by us and came upon increasing quantities of copper weapons, more spears, arrows by the quiverful, lance-points, a mace, axe-heads, parts of bows and other things we could not identify. Then there lay, scattered in the soil, beads and pendants of polished carnelian, lapis and gold, some of them exquisitely worked; then the gold binding of a bow; then an adze of solid gold, its handle of wood covered with gesso painted red and bound with thin gold; and lastly, lying apart, a silver baldric to which was attached a golden 'vanity-case' enriched with filigree work and containing intact its tiny tweezers, spoon and stiletto, all of gold, hung on a silver ring, and a dagger which was the season's crowning reward. The hilt is of one piece of deep-colored lapis lazuli studded with gold, the blade is of burnished gold; the sheath is of solid gold, the back plain except for two lines of simple beading, but the front entirely covered with an intricate design in filigree. It is in perfect condition, and to see it grad-

ually emerging from the heavy clinging soil, was well worth a year's labor. Produced at any date it would have been a marvel of design and workmanship; it is astonishing indeed when we realize that it was actually made nearly 5,500 years ago and is one of the oldest known examples of the goldsmith's art."

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RADIO

Radio Direction Changes

A new radio puzzle as to what happens to a radio wave while it is traveling with the speed of light from the transmitting station to the receiver has been brought to the attention of radio engineers as the result of studies made by Herbert J. Reich, of the department of physics at Cornell University. Mr. Reich's experiments, which he describes in the *Journal of the Franklin Institute*, were made to determine whether the apparent direction of a radio wave changes as it travels through space.

By means of a loop antenna, such as is used in radio compass stations to locate the position of ships at sea, a series of tests were made on three broadcasting stations heard at Ithaca. These were WGY, Schenectady; and WEA and WNYC, New York. When the loop antenna is at right angles to the apparent direction of the station, it cannot be heard. The changes in apparent direction, however, have been found to be very marked and rapid, sometimes changing as much as 130 degrees in 15 minutes. When the average for two-minute periods was taken, changes as great as 30 degrees were recorded in the same time.

That these direction changes are not due to atmospheric changes was shown when tests were made almost simultaneously with the transmission of WEA and WNYC, both of New York City, and nearly the same wave-length. Sometimes the setting of the loop for these stations differed as much as thirty degrees. On one evening in August it was found impossible to determine the direction of any station, as the signals came as loud despite the direction of the loop. It was at first supposed, says Mr. Reich, that something was wrong with the receiver, but this was shown not to be the case. However, there was at the time a brilliant display of the Northern Lights.

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Light waves exert a pressure.