

Evolution Reminisces

Zoology

"History repeats itself" is an old adage, which like many saws of its kind is not strictly true. However, it is true that in history situations sometimes rise which are very much like those of an earlier era, or one nation will go through an experience more or less similar to that which another nation has known.

And what is true in history is true also in natural history. Evolution never repeats itself exactly; yet one often comes upon queer creatures that are obviously doing over again on their own account things that our remote ancestors presumably did back in the days when the earth was young. Thus the Philippine goby, a queer little fish that lives among the mangrove roots on the tidal mud

flats, has learned the trick that some fish or fish-like ancestor of all the land-living vertebrates practised away back in Devonian or Mississippian times. It flounders around on the drained ooze when the tide goes out, not worrying at all that the traditional "native element" of all fishes has gone away for a time, and it even creeps up sloping roots or sticks, clinging with its strong pectoral fins, which have become almost like legs.

There is even something in its appearance that is strongly reminiscent of the amphibians. Its wide mouth and its round pop-eyes, mounted on the top of its head as shallow-water fishes' eyes often are, give its head a decidedly frog-like look, which is

reinforced by the rather bulging belly of the creature. If one could imagine a scaly tadpole metamorphosing into a frog, and producing front legs before sprouting hind ones, that would be a fair picture of a goby.

Science News-Letter, August 18, 1928

Orang-utans are in danger of extermination in Sumatra, since natives art catching large numbers for zoo collectors, and since many of those transported die en route.

A road building expert estimates that Pennsylvania automobile owners save \$51,750,000 a year in operating costs, as a result of hard surfaced roads.

Avert Plague

Public Health

Word has just been received at the U. S. Public Health Service that an epidemic of plague was narrowly averted in Liverpool. Plague-infested rats were discovered on the steamer Sicily from Buenos Aires and Rosario, Brazil, when she was examined at quarantine. Word was immediately flashed from health authorities at Liverpool to quarantine officers in other ports where steamers from South America call.

This incident and the report of a fatal human case of plague in Monterey, Cal., on July 30 are reminders that plague is not at all remote and that it is only the vigilance of quarantine officers, routine and monotonous though their work may seem, that protects from the epidemics of plague that swept over the world in preceding centuries.

Plague first came into the United States through the port of San Francisco in about 1900. Local indifference and resistance to public health regulations made it impossible to stamp out the disease. The plague-infested rats were killed during the earthquake, but not before they had transmitted the organisms of the disease to the ground squirrel. These animals now constitute a huge reservoir of plague, resulting in frequent human cases. The vast territory, wild, inaccessible and uninhabited, in which these squirrels roam makes it practically impossible to stamp out the disease now.

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