

Did Man's Legs Outrun His Head?

Evolution

Has man gone up the evolutionary ladder literally feet first? Did his legs evolve into human legs faster than his head evolved into a human head?

The possibility that there has been a tendency in the human genus to evolve from the bottom up in more than the figurative sense is suggested by Dr. Wilhelm Gieseler of the University of Munich, writing in the German scientific weekly, *Forschungen und Fortschritte*.

Dr. Gieseler has made a study of the two most-disputed human or near-human remains so far discovered, the Pithecanthropus or Ape-Man of Java and the Broken Hill Man of South Africa. Both of these *n*-th degree great-uncles of the human race had very primitive skulls, the cranium of Pithecanthropus especially being so "low-brow" that many anatomists are still disposed to deny it human rank at all but to classify it instead as the skull of an extinct species of gibbon or East Indian ape.

The German investigator defends his opinion that Pithecanthropus was

human, largely on the basis that his eye-sockets are man-like rather than ape-like, although he admits that the skull is so low that the doubts of some of his colleagues are easily accounted for.

But an examination of the thigh-bones of both Pithecanthropus and Broken Hill Man tells an entirely different story, according to Dr. Gieseler. Not only is the thigh-bone of Pithecanthropus quite unlike that of a gibbon, but the thigh-bones of both the extinct humans (or near-humans) are so much like those of modern man that doubts have been expressed in both instances as to whether they really belong with the skulls at all. If they do not, he argues, it is an extremely striking coincidence that *two* debatable skulls should have happened to be found with thigh-bones that did not belong with them. If they do, we have the astonishing spectacle of men, or man-like creatures, with very decidedly primitive skulls walking on leg-bones built on a decidedly modern pattern.

Science News-Letter, October 6, 1928

Quake at Storm's Birthplace

Seismology

The birthplace of the hurricane that recently devastated Porto Rico and parts of Florida, has again made itself known to the world—this time with an earthquake. A tremor occurred there at 7.44 p. m., Eastern Standard Time, on Wednesday, September 26. This announcement was made by the earthquake experts of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey after the study of data gathered by Science Service.

A point about 250 miles off the mouth of the Orinoco River, on the northeast coast of South America, at 12 degrees north latitude and 59 degrees west longitude, was the center of the quake. It was in this same position that the Florida hurricane was first reported.

Another effect of the storm on the ground was shown recently when the hurricane moved up the Atlantic coast. Several days before it reached Washington, Rev. F. A. Tondorf, S. J., director of the earthquake observatory at Georgetown University, recorded a great number of micro-seisms, slight but continuous tremblings of the earth. This was a direct effect of the storm.

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Mosquitoes and Dengue

Hygiene

Dengue fever, which has been running riot in Athens, and in fact has swept over the whole of Greece, is no respecter of persons, having finally attacked Prime Minister Venizelos himself. The total number of cases in the present epidemic has reached 80,000, according to reports received by the U. S. Public Health Service in Washington. This is an unusually large number even for a warm country like Greece, where the disease occurs frequently.

Dengue fever, like yellow fever and malaria, is one of the so-called tropical diseases and is spread by the mosquito. In former times it was considered a mild form of yellow fever, but more recently it was found to be a distinct disease. It has a sudden onset, and the course of the disease is acute and short, usually seven days. The death rate is very low, the patients almost always recovering. The severe pains which characterize this fever earned it the name of "break-bone" fever.

One medical authority states that no disease, not even influenza, attacks so large a proportion of the population. The last epidemic to occur in the United States broke out in 1922.

Science News-Letter, October 6, 1928

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE

Natural History



A Wanton Destroyer

In a recent issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* there was a striking short poem by Dorothy Leonard; the disjointed death-agony thoughts of a sparrow impaled on a thorn by a shrike:

"The Great Shrike put me on a thorn
Too near the house where I was born.
It's made of straw I thought so fine.
I see that heaven-pointing pine
I sang in, scrag against the sky.
No singing now for such as I.

Poor I—he must have marked my
crest

(Or that strange spot upon my
breast)

To fancy me from all the rest.

Good Cankerworms! The tree's pos-
sessed!

These other hop-in-hedges loop
Their necks like robins with the roup.
Don't lollop around so sour and still,
Grimalkins . . . fly to Thirsty Hill!
I heard my blood drip on a stone.

Oh, Birds, how bright his bent beak
shone!

The shrike, or butcher-bird, is often berated because of its apparent ferocious cruelty, in hanging grasshoppers, mice, small birds and other living things on thorns or barbed-wire fences and leaving them there in lingering agony. But it is not settled whether or not the bird takes any pleasure in the misery of its victims—whether its cruelty is cold and deliberate, or simply wanton and wasteful.

There is no doubt that basically it is nothing but a food-storing instinct. But the shrike kills so much more game than it eats, and forgets where half its stock is left hanging. That looks like sheer cruelty. Yet we reflect that California woodpeckers lay up far too many acorns, that bees store much too great a treasure of honey, that dogs (*Turn to next page*)

Wanton Destroyer—Cont'd

bury bones and guard them jealously though they may never dig them up again, and that proud and self-conceited Man himself slaughters twenty wild geese when he can't eat the whole of one, or breaks a dozen business rivals in the accumulation of a fortune of which he can't spend a tenth. Is the shriek alone in his wasteful madness?

Science News-Letter, October 6, 1928

**THE
SCIENTIFIC HABIT
OF THOUGHT**

by *Frederick Barry*

Professor R. A. Schuyler says:
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Invention of Pottery

Anthropology

RICHARD SWANN LULL in *Ancient Man* (Doubleday, Doran):

Pottery is so distinctive a feature of human culture that a brief summary of its development during Neolithic time seems needful. Just how it originated is an interesting question. It is evident, however, that some means of storing liquids arose with permanency of habitation and the necessity of provision against a time of scarcity. It may well be that the art of making pottery originated somewhat accidentally through the effort to render watertight certain plaited containers, in other words, baskets, by plastering the inside with clay, and there is evidence that that very thing was done. If these were used near the fire or in connection with the operation of cooking, some of the clay would be hardened by the action of fire, and thus another step in the operation discovered, for sun-dried vessels can be made permanent only in a tropical climate. The art of the potter has evidently been repeatedly acquired by mankind as a local discovery, hence one may not say that it had its

origin with this or that ancient people and thence spread over the world. And as the Australians and other races of today are yet in Stone Age stage of cultural evolution, so one may find certain primitive peoples still making pottery in the crudest imaginable way and thus recapitulating the evolution of the art as it developed in Neolithic Europe.

Three methods of pottery making seem to be common to all primitive peoples. They are:

1. Hollowing out a vessel from a lump of clay.

2. Building up on some support such as basketwork or a plaited mat, and adding masses of clay to increase the capacity of the vessel.

3. Coiling, wherein a mass of clay is rolled out in the form of a rope, the object built up spirally, and then smoothed either by the hand or by simple wood or bone instruments.

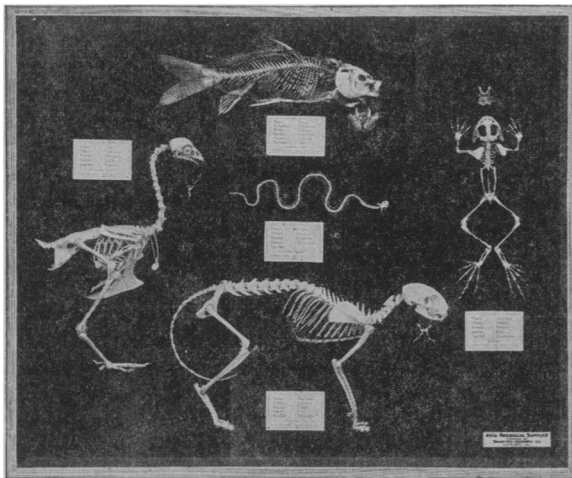
The invention of the potter's wheel, again an instrument independently acquired by diverse peoples, came much later, not until the Age of Bronze.

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