built by Zapotec Indians and abandoned before the Spanish Conquest.

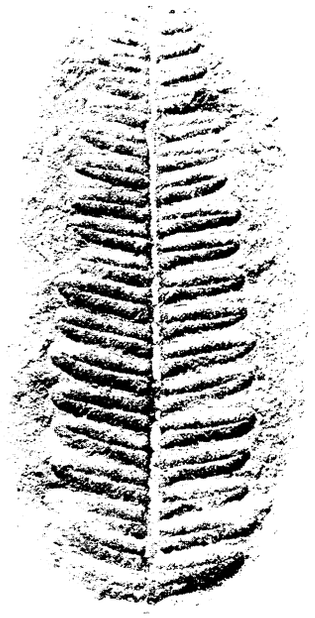
The stairway which has been cleared gave access to a platform in the city plaza. To reach the platform, the people of old Monte Alban climbed thirty-five steps.

It was a common practice in Mexico to enlarge old structures when they became too small by covering them with an outer shell. This was done at the stairway of Monte Alban. Beneath the stairway first discovered, the archaeologists have found an older, inner stairway which appears to be intact and superior in construction to the newer, outer stairway. The outer stairs were in their turn concealed by an even later set, but only traces of these can be seen.

At each end of the big platform are mounds, formed of a series of small superposed platforms. One of these mounds still has the stumps of a temple on top.

Monte Alban is a complicated system of such mounds on top of terraces and platforms, placed symmetrically about sunken courts or other structures. These were built at various levels along a high mountain ridge. From the valley below, the serrated effect of the prehistoric city's sky-line may still be seen.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1931



SIGNATURES IN CLAY

Some of the most important of early historic documents have been found inscribed on tablets of clay, in the buried ruins of cities that were the abodes of kings and gods when Sumer and Akkad were young. Not less important are the signatures in clay, since hardened into stone, that tell some of the tales of the unmanned world, ages before even the dinosaurs wallowed in the swamps and crashed through the underbrush. The waste-heaps of many soft coal mines will yield abundant flattened-oval lumps of shale which, struck carefully on their edges, will split apart and disclose leaf or stem or fruit. This one yielded, for the inspection of Cornelia Clarke's camera lens, a perfect fern leaf.

PHYSICS

Airplanes See Through Fog With New Photocell Device

THE PHOTOELECTRIC cell, magic eye of science, has penetrated blanketing fog with an effectiveness thousands of times that of the human eye and so gives promise of enabling the aviation industry to overcome one of its greatest handicaps.

This and other important facts about aviation light signals have been learned from studies at the General Electric Research Laboratory by Dr. Irving Langmuir, who first filled the vacuum of electric lamps with rare gases to make them shine brighter and last longer, and his associate, W. F. Westendorp. They reported results of their work before the annual meeting of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

A device was described which, it was said, will enable a photoelectric cell on an airplane to "see" through dense fog, light beacons on the ground entirely invisible to the eye of the pilot and thus enable the pilot to hold to his course.

Far More Sensitive

Its operation depends chiefly on the fact that the photoelectric cell is thousands of times more sensitive to diffused light—and all light from the ground will be diffused by fog—than the human eye.

To make sure that this super-sensitive electric eye will report airplane beacons and not just any lights on the ground, Dr. Langmuir and Mr. Westendorp suggested feeding special beacons with a 1000-cycle current so that they will give a rapidly flickering light. Since other lights use either a 60-cycle or direct current, it will be possible to isolate the 1000-cycle signals and use only these for direction purposes.

Indicative of the extreme sensitivity of the photocell, the scientists said that even in full moonlight the photocell can detect a diffused modulated light of an intensity only one-thirteenth-thousandth of that of a diffused flashing light just visible to the eye.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1931

MEDICINE

Reports Success With New Treatment for Pellagra

A REMARKABLY successful method of treating pellagra, based on a new theory of its cause, has been reported by Dr. Ibrahim Sabry, skin specialist of the Government Hospital at Alexandria, Egypt, to *Lancet,* medical journal published in London.

Dr. Sabry's method consists simply of daily injections into the veins of a small amount of a sterilized solution of a common chemical, sodium thiosulphate.

The skin lesions which are a distressing feature of pellagra are checked in early cases after only a few injections and disappear quickly in late and lingering cases, Dr. Sabry claims. Gangrenous limbs, sometimes seen late in the course of the disease, soon heal under this treatment. Other symptoms clear up as the disease yields to treatment. From 20 to 60 injections are needed. So far no complications have been met with.

Dr. Sabry considers these facts sufficient grounds for contesting utterly the idea that pellagra is caused by vitamin deficiency, since no disease due to deficiency of a vitamin has ever been known to improve without supplying the lacking vitamin, and certainly not from the mere introduction into the body of a drug that cannot contain any vitamin.

Instead, Dr. Sabry believes that the symptoms of pellagra are due to the presence in the body of a poison belonging to a chemical group having the name dioxyphenylalanine. This is closely related to tyrosine, which occurs normally in the body.

Dr. Sabry claims that the pellagra toxin which he calls "dopa" has been obtained from the vegetating seeds of beans. He therefore attributes pellagra in Egypt mainly to the eating of beans.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1931