



The Devil's Mushroom

OCCASIONALLY we meet with persons so repulsive in body, so malicious of disposition, so crooked of soul, that they restore a belief in an orthodox personal Devil. And there are creatures in the lesser worlds of plants and animals, too, that seem to be explainable only as deliberate inventions of an infinitely malicious intelligence, so offensive are they to every human sense, so devoid of any redeeming feature.

Such an object is the stinkhorn fungus. Of all the fungi its coming is the most goblin-like and sudden, for it bides its time compressed in the hidden egg-like globe beneath the ground, springing from nothing at all to a height of six inches or more in an hour. And

where other fungi, even poisonous ones, content themselves with a mysterious and apparently elfin birth, and offer a certain grace, albeit an odd and alien one, to atone for startling us (as Puck might bow and grin when he suddenly appears among the daffodils), this incarnation of uncompromising evil makes no apologies at all. He stands defiantly erect, with the last rag of his restraining swaddling-bands still around him, impudently holding up in the horrid air a black-daubed, slime-smeared head that stinks like the very kettles of Hell.

One friend, and one friend only, the stinkhorn fungus has. Flies. These

children of filth know their feast from afar. Guided by the carrion scent they swarm to the stinkhorn's slimy head, and revel there until the putridity is washed away by an obliterating rain or dried by a sun impatient of the affront to his face.

If the ancient Pagans or the medieval Christians, who liked to dedicate flowers to the gods or the saints, had noticed the stinkhorn, there is no doubt who would have been elected to the sinistral honor of its patronage. Pagan and Christian alike would have laid it before the throne of Beelzebub, the Prince of Flies.

Science News Letter, September 24, 1932

ANTHROPOLOGY

Asselar Man Lived in Sahara When Desert Was Green

THE FOSSILIZED skeleton of a man who lived in the Sahara when it was a green prairie instead of the parched desert it is now was described recently before the Institute of Human Paleontology in Paris, by the French anthropologists Marcellin Boule and Henri Vaillant. Discovered as long ago as 1927, near the French post of Asselar in the Western Sudan, the skeleton has been completely freed of its stony embedding matrix in a cliff near Asselar only within the past few months.

The skeleton, especially the skull, including the face, is well preserved. It was found resting on its back with its knees up in the air, as if the man had fallen thus.

Both geological and palaeontological evidence point to the very considerable antiquity of Asselar man. He belongs to

a time when the Sahara was well-watered and fertile. The spot on which he was found was once part of either a lake or a tributary of a neighboring river, which long ago ran dry. No implements were found associated with the remains, though implements of a much later date, yet still belonging to a time when the Sahara was humid, were found on the surface nearby.

The bones were very highly fossilized. They probably belong to the very early part of the upper pleistocene epoch, or later Ice Age.

Prof. Boule thinks Asselar man is the link which is required between early man in Europe and early man in South Africa. He may, he thinks, represent an ancestral stock in northwest Africa which split into two, one part going north to Europe and developing into Crô-Magnon man of the Upper Palaeolithic and the other branch going south and developing into Boskop man—the type which is ancestral to the Bushmen, who are a highly specialized race—and of the Hottentot and Bantu peoples.

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An improved nail, which is said to hold from two to three times as tightly as the ordinary article, has been invented by the Forest Products Laboratory at Madison, Wis. Instead of being smooth, its surface is etched by a chemical process with minute pittings. A patent dedicating the process to the free use of the people has been applied for.

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