

BIOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



Snails

The early bird catches the worm, and the early snail catches the early leaf. So early gardeners will find themselves contending with these slow-but-sure devourers of verdure, which in some places make themselves terrible pests, very destructive and very hard to eradicate. Fortunately, in most garden plots they are few enough so that they may be looked upon with a somewhat more philosophic eye.

In a sense, they are strangers from another world, or at least from an old home which we have left so much more completely than they that we have forgotten it, and everything that comes from it seems strange. For the home ties of the snail are strongly with the world of queer beings that live in the water. He is the only mullusk that has come ashore to live, and even at that there are more snails that continue to live in the water than there are landlubber snails. And all the rest of his strange kindred, oysters and clams, octopus and cuttlefish, chiton and abalone and natutilus, stick to the original aquatic life. Even the land snails keep a strong memory of their old home, for they like deep woods and other damp habitats; a snail in the desert would be an anomaly.

This inability of snails to endure long drought is responsible for one of the best examples we have of evolution actually in progress. There are several volcanic islands in the South Pacific, on which deep, moist canyons are cut off from each other by high walls of lava rock. The upper parts of these ridges are extremely dry, veritable desert strips, while the canyon bottoms are rich, wet, tropical jungles. Each of these canyons has its own separate species of snails, which, unable to cross the ridges and mingle with its neighbors on either side, has developed its own peculiarities. On one of these islands, two surveys of the snail population, made at an interval of several years, have shown changes to be taking place even in so brief a time.

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ARCHÆOLOGY

Clues to Norsemen

A large flint spearhead made of material different from Indian spearheads of this state is arousing renewed interest in the stories of Norse adventurers in North America in the eleventh century. The spearhead, which was found on the beach at Pemaquid several years ago, is now in the possession of Walter B. Smith, who has made extensive studies of Indian remains in Maine.

In a report on the possibility of finding traces of the Norsemen, just made by Mr. Smith, he states that the spearhead may be Indian in origin. He points out, however, that it is not of flint such as the Indians used, but seems to be identical with a rock called hallefinta which is well known in Scandinavia. The fact that eleventh century Vikings had passed the age of stone tools adds to the mystery.

Where the Vikings landed in this country is not exactly known. The place described as Vinland is believed to have been somewhere along the Labrador Coast, and the accounts say that some of the explorers stayed several years.

"If the sagas are true," Mr. Smith says, "it seems improbable that some of the numerous bays of the extensive coast of Maine would have remained unknown to these hardy voyagers. They would have been lured here by the spirit of adventure or the hope of gain, or driven hither by storms."

Mr. Smith has spent some time vainly seeking Indian village sites and burial places around Pemaquid, in the hope of finding objects which the Indians might have obtained from the Norsemen. A number of shell heaps proved that Indians had once lived there, but no trace of European work was found in any of these.

Tools of iron possessed by the Norsemen would probably be masses of rust by this time, he points out. But most objects of copper, bronze, lead and silver would be still recognizable. Shards of Norse pottery might still survive, and also glass, particularly beads.

"If Norsemen actually discovered North America at that early date I believe there is still a possibility of finding proof of it, unless such proof is already destroyed," Mr. Smith concludes.

"With this possibility in mind it is fitting that collectors of Indian relics, all those who dig in shell-heaps, the discoverers of unknown inscriptions on rocks, and any one who finds puz-

zling objects of metal, pottery, or stone, which are occasionally uncovered from their burial places along our coast, should save them for identification.

"The majority of such 'finds' will, of course, prove to be of little consequence, but there is a possibility that something may be found of far greater significance. Unless such care is exercised, tangible objects of a possible Norse origin, perhaps at our very doors, may be carried away unrecognized by the junk man."

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EVOLUTION

Trying Another Tack

Checked but apparently not squelched by their defeat in the Arkansas State Senate, the Fundamentalists have now begun a new attack on science teaching in the Arkansas state schools. A petition is now being circulated with the object of placing the anti-evolution law before the people in 1928 for a direct referendum vote.

As predicted in last week's Science News-Letter, a "monkey bill," whose wording resembles that of the Tennessee law, has been introduced in the Florida legislature. It is predicted at present that the bill will not pass, and that if by any chance it does it will be vetoed by Governor Martin.

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ENTOMOLOGY

Poisonous Honey

Poisonous honey of the same kind that aroused the wonder of the ancient Greeks is still to be found in northern Asia Minor, according to Dr. K. Krause, who recently returned from a journey through that region. The honey, which was first mentioned by the soldier-historian Xenophon and later described by the philosopher-scientists Aristotle and Dioscorides, still has much the same effects upon those who eat it as it had in the days of classical antiquity. According to Dr. Krause's description, based on personal experiments with the poisonous sweet, it causes a giddiness and sometimes a brief loss of consciousness, followed by a short period of general malaise, "as though one had been on a spree," he says. Where the bees get the toxic nectar is still an unsettled question, but suspicion settles most strongly on two species of rhododendron abundant in the region, whose foliage is known to be poisonous to cattle.

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