

## SOCIOLOGY

**87-Child Family A Myth**

The record of the world's biggest family, recently claimed for a German household of 87 youngsters, must be sought elsewhere, in the opinion of European scientists who have looked into the matter.

The father of the family in question, named Scheinberg, is reported to have married twice. His first wife had 69 children—four quadruplets, seven triplets, and 16 sets of twins. After the death of the first wife, he married again and had 18 additional children.

Records of such remarkable families are of interest to scientists who are studying problems of eugenics, population, and heredity. In this case, the *Journal of Heredity* addressed an inquiry to authorities on these subjects in Germany and Austria, asking whether the 87-child family really exists.

"No confirmation of the existence of this huge family has been obtained, though the story was alleged to have appeared in an Austrian medical journal," said Robert Cook, editor of the *Journal*.

Dr. Lenz, of the University of Munich, who has investigated a number of such alleged cases, has found that hysteria or a desire for publicity sometimes causes an amazing expansion of ordinary sized families.

"Similar stories of families with repeated multiple births are often reported," he writes. "Generally they turn out to be the hallucination products of hysterical women who want to make themselves interesting through accounts of multiple births."

Dr. Felix Tietz, of Vienna, states that "after having spoken to, or corresponded with all the persons concerned with eugenics, growth of population, etc., I can assure you that some misunderstanding must be the basis of that rumor."

"In the medical literature are accounts of women having nearly 50 children, but none of these is accepted as unquestionably authentic," said Mr. Cook. "One of the most reliable is considered to be the case of Dr. Mary Austin, a Civil War nurse. She lays claim to a family of 44 children—13 twins and 6 triplets—and in addition she found time to study medicine and get a doctor's degree while she was bringing up her family.

"It would be a matter of scientific interest to have reliable information about the maximum size of human families, and any one who

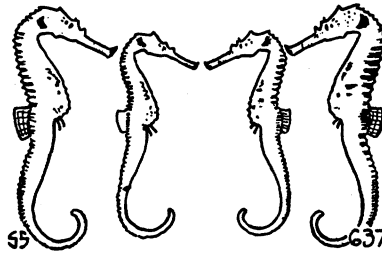
knows of families approaching a third the size of the alleged Scheinberg family is invited to communicate with the *Journal of Heredity*, in Washington."

Science News-Letter, May 14, 1927

## BIOLOGY

**NATURE RAMBLINGS**

By FRANK THONE



Sea Horses

"Horses, . . . horses, . . . little horses."

Thus a recent song, that is already old. The author, who iterately declared himself to be "goofy over horses," might well have been contemplating a tank of sea horses at the aquarium when his fantastic Pegasus bore him up to the heights of song-hit-dom. Certainly these strange little fish, veritable gargoyles of the sea, might inspire odder verses than his.

Except for the blunt fin on his back, the sea horse scarcely looks like a fish. Emphatically he does not swim like a fish, for he holds himself approximately vertically instead of horizontally, and travels through the water in a series of little jerks. Further, he does not use his tail like a fish, nor yet like a horse's, but much more like a monkey's. For he coils it around bits of eel-grass or seaweed wherein he makes his home, and thus holds himself at anchor. Only, since "down" in the sea is not toward the bottom but toward the surface, whither fishes will "fall" if they let themselves go, the sea horse's monkey-pose is the opposite of that of the tree-dweller, for his tail is beneath and his head above.

As though the real sea horse were not queer enough by his own unexaggerated self, certain medieval and early modern writers had to put on trimmings: "The Sea Horse, between Brittany and Norway, is oft seen to have a head like a horse, and to neigh; but his feet and hoof are cloven like to a Cow's; and he feeds both on Land, and in the Sea. He is seldom taken, though he grow to be as big as an Ox. He hath a forked tail."

Science News-Letter, May 14, 1927

## ASTRONOMY

**Mysterious Celestial Object**

What was the mysterious object that appeared for a night in the constellation of Camelopardalis, a rather faint star group now low in the northwestern sky in the evening? This is the question asked by Dr. Ejnar Hertzsprung, a famous Dutch astronomer, who has spent the past winter in studies at the Harvard College Observatory. He found the object on a photographic plate made on the night of December 15, 1900, but it did not show up on plates made the night before or after.

Just what the strange object is, Prof. Hertzsprung cannot imagine. It appears like a faint patch of light about the same brightness as a star of sixth magnitude, just at the limit of naked eye visibility. That it is not due to a defect on the plate is shown by the fact that the image is double, as two exposures were intentionally made on the same plate, one after each other. Like the surrounding stars, the object shows two images side by side. As the two exposures were made less than an hour apart, but nevertheless, there is a considerable difference in the images, Prof. Hertzsprung thinks that the thing was in the solar system, and no farther than some of the planets. If two other bodies, like two asteroids, or small planets, collided in space they might produce a flash of brief duration, but it would not be apt to be perfectly round, like the thing on the plate. On the whole, to Prof. Hertzsprung, it is "the most serious riddle" that he has met with.

Science News-Letter, May 14, 1927

## AUTOMOBILES

**Solid Tires Blow Out**

The auto owner who casts longing glances on passing trucks with solid tires as he repairs a blowout on his own car on a hot day might be just as badly off if he could dispense with his pneumatic tires. Solid tires may also blow out, L. W. Fox, tire expert of Akron, Ohio, points out in a report to the Society of Automotive Engineers. Such blowouts are caused by running the solid tire equipped truck too fast. The speed generates heat within the tire faster than the compound can dissipate it, with the result that the compound is disintegrated and melts. This forms gas within the tire which may blow out through the tread or the side, in either event effectually ruining the tire.

Science News-Letter, May 14, 1927