

China At Human Dawn

Archæology

The discovery of further traces of prehistoric men in China and the recent finding of teeth which belonged to ancient human beings like the Neanderthal men of Europe, has attracted geologists to intensive study of the prehistoric Chinese scene.

The evolution of the land surface on which early man dwelt in North China has been studied by Prof. George Barbour, of Yenching University, Peking, and reported to the New York Academy of Sciences.

In the era before man appeared, the land had been worn down almost level and the rivers flowed smoothly over flat country, Professor Barbour's survey showed. Then this flat land was suddenly broken up by the same disturbance that pushed up the Alps, the Rockies, and the Himalayas. The rivers had barely succeeded in opening out the valleys when a slight buckling of the surface dammed the streams back into lakes.

"About this time," said Professor Barbour, "we find the first traces of primitive man, or some close relative

of his, living in a limestone cave overlooking the Peking plain."

With a change of climate the rivers flowed more swiftly and cut narrow gorges, making the surface of China more rugged. As the soil was worn away, gentle upheavals in the earth's crust pushed the surface of Mongolia up, and cold dry winds blew over these high altitudes, picking up the dust and sweeping it along in immense quantities. The blanket of dust in some regions became as deep as 800 feet, and forms the famous loess of China.

In the limestone caves of China have been found stone axes and arrows belonging to the prehistoric men, and with the weapons are the bones of mammoths, deer, rhinoceroses and other animals and the broken eggshells of ostriches. The teeth found near Peking and considered as possibly belonging to the oldest human inhabitants of China were from one of these ancient cave shelters.

A communication from China, just received by Professor Barbour, states that new specimens of human fossil teeth have been found and are designated as belonging to the Neanderthal period, which in Europe was about 50,000 years ago.

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Prehistoric Child Burials

Archæology

Two child burials have been uncovered in the prehistoric Indian ruins of the Wupatki National Monument, in Arizona. Jesse C. Clarke, custodian of the reservation, who made the excavations, reports that in one burial a cradle board was lying over the body, which bore a shell necklace and was accompanied by three pieces of pottery.

In the other burial the cradle board was underneath the body. Four pots were found with it. Both burials had been wrapped in matting, but moisture had crept in and spoiled it so that only a small piece could be salvaged.

It is believed that the prehistoric buildings at Wupatki were constructed by the Snake family of the Hopi Indians in their migration from the Grand Canyon, where, according to their mythology, their ancestors came upward from the Underworld. The Hopi, or People of Peace, are among the most picturesque of existing Indian tribes.

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New Comet Receding

Astronomy

Reinmuth's comet, discovered on Washington's birthday by a German astronomer, is not likely to become visible to the unaided eye, or even with small telescopes. It is already receding from the neighborhood of the earth and the sun, according to Dr. Armin O. Leuschner, in charge of the Students' Observatory of the University of California.

With the aid of three observations made on February 24, 25 and 26, two of his students have computed the orbit of the comet. These figures, which Dr. Leuschner states to be tentative, indicate that the comet approached closest to the sun on February 27, but even then it was 210 million miles away from the sun, and still farther from the earth. As it is the approach to the sun that usually excites a comet to activity, Reinmuth's comet is not expected to become any brighter than it is now, and will probably get fainter until it has passed beyond the reach of even powerful telescopes.

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NATURE RAMBLINGS

BY FRANK THONE

Natural History



Aard-Vark

Nobody knows why God made the Aard-Vark, any more than anybody knows why the cathedral-builders of the thirteenth century carved grotesque gargoyles on their handiwork. It has been conjectured that the gargoyles were works of humor as well as of art—exuberant jokes in stone. It may be also that the Creator was indulging a cosmic sense of humor when He made the poor aard-vark into such an exuberant joke in animal flesh and blood.

It took mankind a long time to find the joke, however, for the aard-vark lives in South Africa, and it was not until the seventeenth century that the Boer settlers began moving out onto the veldt. Then they found this weird two-pointed beast rooting around among the termite nests, and because of its amazing ability to dig itself into the earth when it suspected danger, they named it "earth-pig," which in Dutch is aard-vark.

As might be suspected from a look at its long, tapering snout, the aard-vark is an ant-eater. It differs from most of its toothless kin in having an efficient battery of grinders at the back of its jaws. It resembles them, however, in having the typical slender, sticky, rapidly protruding tongue of the ant-eater, together with the ant-eater's long, powerful fore-claws. With these it rips into the earthen walls of the towering termite hills that dot the veldt, and when the infuriated soldier-termites swarm out to defend their outraged stronghold, they are swept up in thousands by the flickering tongue.

Living on such tender morsels, the aard-vark develops a goodly weight of tender flesh, and since it is wholly defenseless against hunters and predatory animals it has to escape them by burrowing. Its enormous, jackass-like ears are constantly listening for a hint of danger, and at the least suspicious sound the aard-vark instantly begins to make the dirt fly as it tunnels for safety.

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