



Both Dove and Eagle

IN THE perennial debate that never seems to approach a conclusion, as to what should be our national flower, the columbine has always had a solid body of staunch advocates. The chance resemblance of its name to Columbia, the poetic title given to the United States in the later eighteenth century, may have something to do with it. But more probably it is simply a matter of the recognition of the beauty of the graceful plant that in a number of species ranges over a considerable part of our country.

The commonest columbine of the eastern United States is the vivid orange-colored species sometimes called the Canada columbine. Not that it is peculiar to Canada, but that in old French days a good deal of the territory beyond the Alleghenies was considered a part of Canada. The Rocky Mountain long-spurred columbine is a magnificent blue, and the Yellowstone Park area boasts a species that is appropriately a bright lemon-yellow.

The saltier-minded among our political commentators might point out a parallel between the somewhat inconsistent American temper, which alternates between truculence and pacifism and the two mutually contradictory names of the columbine. For the Latin name of the plant is *Aquilegia*, which comes from the word meaning an eagle. The name was suggested by the claw-like cluster of the flower-spurs. And the common name, columbine, is also taken from the Latin, but refers to doves!

But to such scoffers it might be countered that the eagle's claws are tipped with beads of honey, and that this dove-named plant is very hardy and able to take care of itself, in all wind and weather. It even thrives under dry conditions, though it prefers moisture.

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AVIATION-ASTRONOMY

Meteors no Menace to Travel In the Upper Atmosphere

Although Often Bright and Seemingly Close, Fireballs Have Small Chance of Hitting Plane Even Ten Miles High

METEORS that flash in the upper air will be no menace to air passengers when airlines span oceans and continents in record time by using the stratosphere for their airways.

So bright and menacing, some "fireballs" have appeared to commercial airline pilots in recent months that they felt sure their crafts were about to be hit. Some of them even veered their planes because of a meteor that seemed to be coming at them.

Dr. C. C. Wylie, University of Iowa astronomer, has looked into the matter of the danger to aviation from those fragments from the heavens that bombard the earth, usually to be consumed in the heat that they create by plunging through the upper atmosphere. He reports that he has never as yet seen a "shooting star" which came low enough to damage even an airplane flying in the stratosphere, although one night he heard the explosion of one which may possibly have come as close as ten miles.

"We may," he states, "compare the danger from meteors in stratosphere flying with the danger from lightning in automobile driving. The chance of a plane being struck at an altitude of ten miles or thereabouts is almost negligible."

The airways of the future as contemplated by Dr. Wylie will almost certainly lie in the upper regions, where the thinness of the air will make great speed possible in lines stretching not only from country to country but across the Poles. Fear has been expressed in various quarters that meteors would constitute a grave menace, but Dr. Wylie does not consider celestial bombardment even a minor danger.

Dr. Wylie considers the danger of being suddenly startled by the presence of a dazzling light in the sky greater to automobilists than to pilots.

When a spectacular meteor falls it may light up several states brighter than the full moon does. Dr. Wylie cites instances where drivers have nearly wrecked their cars when a "fireball" un-

expectedly shot across the heavens. One driver was going around a dangerous curve when a meteor fell. He looked around to see what had happened and narrowly missed crashing into a ditch. Others seeing a brilliant light thought their cars might be on fire.

But Dr. Wylie concludes that authentic reports of damages to either motorists or airplane pilots which can be attributed to a meteor will probably be rare.

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ZOOLOGY

Ancestors of Pigs Found in India

THE GREAT granddaddy of the pigs lived in Europe and Asia 35,000,000 years ago. He did not look so very different from his modern descendants in the barnyard, for pigs are conservative in everything but their skulls and teeth, Edwin H. Colbert of the American Museum of Natural History told the American Society of Mammalogists.

Palaeochoerus was his name. In spite of the family conservatism, some of his grandchildren were freaks. One called *Tetraconodon*, found in the Pleistocene deposits in India, had a head two feet long and great conical teeth three inches high. A fierce-looking contemporary of *Palaeochoerus* had protruding front teeth, huge dagger-like tusks and grinders like those of a tapir. Still another contemporary, and so close a relative that they can hardly be told apart, migrated to North America and gave rise to the peccaries, the only pig-like animals of the New World.

Palaeochoerus himself stayed at home in India and became the ancestor of the true pigs of which many genera and species live in a wild state in the East Indies today. In the peccaries the canine teeth remain in a vertical position so that the bite is always up and down. In the pigs the canines project at an angle toward the outside of the mouth permitting sideways rotation of the jaw.

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