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## A Child of the Plateau

*Palæontology*

HENRY FAIRFIELD OSBORN, in *Human Biology*:

In this somewhat divided state of mind, strongly inclining toward the ape-man hypothesis but with some misgivings on the score of limb proportions, of structure of the hand, of the tool-making capacity of the brain, I accompanied Roy Chapman Andrews on a rapid reconnaissance journey into the very heart of the Desert of Gobi. Carefully trained to observe and to reconstruct past conditions from geological and palæontological data rapidly traversing in the course of ten days five or six hundred miles of the now bare and desert but formerly hospitable country, I suddenly found myself forming an entirely new concept of human origin, namely, that the actual as well as the ideal environment of the ancestors of man was not in the warm forested lowlands of Asia or of any other continent, but in the relatively high, invigorating uplands of a country such as Central Asia was in Miocene and Oligocene time—a country totally unfitted to any form of anthropoid ape, a country with meandering streams, sparse forests, intervening plains and meadow lands. Here alone are rapidly moving quadrupedal and bipedal types evolved; here alone is there a premium on rapid observation, on alert and skillful avoidance of enemies; here alone could the ancestors of man find the materials and early acquire the art of fashioning flint and other tools.

These conclusions and others too numerous to mention in detail sent me back to Peking a complete convert to an entirely new concept of the ecology or environmental conditions of primitive man; he could not have been a forest-liver; he could not have inhabited a warm tropical country; he could not have learned to fashion tools where no flints or rocks capable of being shaped into tools were to be found; he could not have preserved and improved by intelligently directed use the marvelous powers of the human thumb unless opposed to the flexible fingers. Immediately I announced my conversion before the assembled scientists and naturalists in Peking from all lands, but not until three years later, on April 29, 1927, on the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the American Philosophical Society, was I able seriously to formulate a new theory of the plateau origin of man and to challenge the Darwinian hy-

pothesis not only in its original form but in its highly developed modification refined by the wealth of recent discovery in which it has been expressed by such great anatomists and anthropologists as Sir Arthur Keith and my own colleague, William King Gregory. In the few lucid intervals which I have been able to devote to this anthropological avocation in the midst of an extremely busy life, I have taken up one aspect of this subject after another; I have held a running debate with all my colleagues, none of whom, with the single exception of Tilney, is inclined to agree with me; I have sought the aid of Dubois, Tilney and McGregor in the remeasurement of the Trinil brain; I have learned from Dietrich of Berlin that the Trinil ape-man is not an ancestral link, as all of us have supposed, but a surviving, non-progressive, forest-living offshoot of some very ancient early human stock shut off from competition in the southernmost forests of Asia where food was plentiful, and that it thus affords convincing illustration that ancient and conservative types can survive only when they are shut off from competition with progressive and more adaptive stocks and when they are sheltered in warm, tropical, forest-clad regions.

The Trinil ape-man is thus dethroned from its once proud position as a Pliocene prototype and takes its place beside a few remnants of the more ancient palæontological world which were harbored in forests.

*Science News-Letter, March 16, 1929*

## The Motion of Venus

*Astronomy*

On page 135 of the SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER for March 2, in the article on Venus, it was stated, correctly, that Venus makes a complete circuit of its orbit in 225 days. As the earth itself moves in this period, however, it takes nearly a year more for Venus to catch up. Twice in this "synodic period" of 584 days the planet appears to earth-dwellers, once in the morning sky before sunrise and once in the evening sky after sunset.

*Science News-Letter, March 16, 1929*

Government experiments at Sitka show that Alaska can grow commercially hardy flowering bulbs, including narcissus, tulips, English iris, gladiolus, and hyacinths.