

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By Frank Thone

*Bats Awakening*

WHEN we talk of animals coming out of hibernation in the spring, we usually think of bears and squirrels, and that semi-legendary creature so important on February 2, the groundhog.

But there are other animals whose winter sleep is coming to an end, and when they come out of their caves they come a-flying. Literally flying, for they are winged. Bats hibernate, as do their heavier-bodied brethren who have to go afoot all their lives. There isn't anything else for them to do, if they want to survive the winter at all. Bats, at least all non-tropical bats, are insect-eaters and catch their prey on the wing. Since there are no insects awing in winter it is up to the bats to figure out the best way to spend the long winter evenings, and for creatures that cannot read, or play checkers, or listen to the radio the best thing to do is sleep. So they sleep, in long festoons within dark caves or deserted buildings.

There is one superstition about bats, held principally by women, that dies hard. They think that a low-flying bat is likely to get tangled in their hair. Even in these modern times of enlightenment and bobbed hair, women still duck and writhe uneasily when one of these noiselessly-flitting little animals swoops too near.

As a matter of fact, no bat ever collides with anything when it is flying. No matter how dark it may be, the bat always avoids all obstacles, even such slender things as twigs and wire. It is hardly possible that the animals can see these things in the dusk, but it is not known definitely how they become aware of them in time to swerve. Most naturalists conjecture that this uncanny power of locating things in the dark is due to specialized and highly developed organs of hearing.

*Science News-Letter, April 26, 1930*Small Towns in Ancient Egypt—*Continued*

bolts are half the size of a common brick, and the keys are six or eight inches long. But apparently they served their purpose.

More orthodox in appearance are wooden hayforks, carding combs, spindles, door frames. A curious piece of furniture is a wooden reading desk. This is in the shape of a wide but shallow trough. The two boards that form its top meet in the middle to form a wide "V", which prevented the rolls of papyrus that were the commonest books of that day from falling off. The desk is only about four inches high, and must have been used by a student sitting cross-legged on the ground, as Orientals still do.

Most of the wooden articles are made of ordinary varieties of timber, but the carpenters showed the preference they have always had for good tools. Numbers of mallets and wedges have been found that are made of mahogany.

It is in household gear, however, that the ruins are richest. The people of Karanis were not rich and they lived simply, but they had their own standards of comfort and were apparently able to maintain them when times were good. Metal pots and pans for the housewife's kitchen-work were of course unknown, but earthenware pots she had in abundance and in all conceivable sizes and shapes. Great pottery jars for the household supply of water stood by the door, on stone stands. Pottery lamps hung from the ceiling beams or stood on brackets.

Anybody who thinks that glassware for table use is a modern invention will have his eyes opened if he walks through the rooms of the museum at Ann Arbor. These Karanian women liked nice things, too, even if they weren't princesses, and they could set well-shaped glass bowls, goblets and bottles on the table when there was company for dinner. Most of it is delicately-tinted glass, too; the blues and greens are especially attractive.

And when the party was on, it seems not unlikely that the ancient Karanians "made whoopee" in a style not unlike that of Main Street—or Broadway. Witness a pair of wooden castanets: evidently the Egyptians of that day did not need to wait for Spanish teachers, although in that climate fringed shawls were a superfluous. Witness also a set of dice, spotted in exactly the same pattern that marks the dice of today. "The boys in the back room" had their own

ideas of relaxation in those days as they have now.

But the folk of Karanis, whatever their daily labor or household cares or even frivolities, had one touch of nature that makes them even more kin to us of the present time. All through the village are the reminders of children. The toys scattered about, perhaps as the children left them before their parents decided to pack up and go to a more prosperous town, are mute witnesses of the affection which the Egyptians have always felt for their offspring.

They are, moreover, witnesses of the unchanging minds of children through the ages, for the outstanding pieces of the toy section in the University of Michigan museum are things on which children of today would pounce as eagerly as did their prototypes of twenty centuries ago. There is a handful of marbles, stained and discolored now, but round enough and of the right size, so that your own boy could take them outdoors this minute and "knuckle down" with them. There are wooden toys on wheels, especially little wooden horses, so like those favored by toddlers of four or five that these old Egyptian toys could be repainted and sold at any toy shop without being noticed as unusual at all.

But perhaps the prize of the whole toy exhibit is a rag doll. It is probably the oldest rag doll in the world, though certainly not the first rag doll that was ever made. It is not a big rag doll, and certainly not a beautiful one. It is just a wisp of linen cloth tied over a chance bit of stuffing with string—the kind of thing that a busy mother makes in a couple of minutes to quiet a clamoring youngster. Or perhaps some little Egyptian girl made it herself, and crooned happily over it afterward. The workmanship is crude enough to be that of a child's fingers. But it was enough to satisfy the budding maternal instinct of a young daughter of Egypt, in the far-off days when, somewhere under the same sky, a slim foreign girl from the North, but little older than herself, sat under a palm-tree tending her infant Son.

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Scientists who have been studying insect flight say that the rapidly whirling wings of some insects are very similar to the rotating propellers of airplanes.