



Buttercup

**B**OTANISTS have given the buttercup the generic name *Ranunculus*, which means a little frog; even learned men will have their mild little jokes, and the way some buttercups squat down by the waterside must have appealed zoologically to some of the early students of plants who first went about, like later Adams in the garden, distributing names. Only Adam didn't use Latin—it hadn't been invented in his time.

But the pretty yellow flowers that run close to violets and spring beauties as favorites with children are by no means confined to ponds and marshes, like the familiar frogs. If one insists in dragging the frog-name after the buttercup, one must remember also the upland-dwelling tree-frogs that can be found even on the hilltops, for the buttercups are there, too.

The secret of this wide distribution is that there are many different kinds of buttercup, and some of them like it wet, and some of them like it dry. There is the water-buttercup, to take an extreme example, that lives in the water up to its chin, with most or all of its leaves submerged, and only the tops of its stems appearing above the surface to produce its flowers. Then there are swamp buttercups, that grow on land all right, but on land that is so soggy that another teacupful of water would turn it fluid. The great majority of buttercups, perhaps, are sensible folk like the rest of us, and prefer land that is neither too wet nor too dry—land that would be good for farming. And finally, there are some with a streak of Arab in them, that like to grow in dry places.

Any given locality will have several of these varied species. It is great sport to walk from marshy pond-edge to dry hill-top, spotting buttercups as you go.

*Science News Letter, April 2, 1932*

## ANTHROPOLOGY

## Modern Diet Blamed For Widespread Tooth Decay

**S**TRIKING evidence that the modern diet of American civilization causes dental decay was presented before scientists gathered in Washington at the meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists.

Two scientists of the National Museum staff told how they have systematically counted carious teeth in hundreds of jawbones of prehistoric Eskimos and in the mouths of living Eskimos in Alaska.

The ancient Eskimos were meat eaters living chiefly on walrus, seal, and fish, with only a little vegetable food. In 800 jawbones of these prehistoric people, M. S. Goldstein found only 6.5 per cent. with defective lower molars. He selected these molars to count because they are the first teeth of the jaw to succumb to decay. Most of the diseased spots were no more than pinhead size, he stated.

Henry B. Collins, Jr., reported examining the teeth of 296 living Eskimos. He found 26 per cent. of them with more or less serious dental decay.

"The significant fact," Mr. Collins explained, "is that in remote, barren regions of Alaska today where the Eskimos are poverty-stricken, they still live in the old-fashioned way as seal hunters and fishermen. And these living Eskimos practically do not know what toothache is like. But Eskimos living in proximity to white settlements show a much higher incidence of dental decay. At Nome we find more than half the natives with carious teeth.

"In the teeth of those Eskimos who supplement their native sea food diet to a greater or less extent with food that the white men eat, dental decay is prevalent, and is directly proportionate to the extent that the diet has been altered."

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