

GENERAL SCIENCE

Gold-Plated Silk Shown To British Scientists

Synthetic Sex Hormones, Man-Like African Ape, Hooked Noses on Basic White Race, Discussed at Cambridge

GOLD, real gold, will luxuriously swathe milady when she glides out onto the dance floor or makes regal entrance at the opera. For a way to make gold cloth that costs no more than good quality silk was demonstrated at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Cambridge.

The fabric is really gold-plated silk. Silk goods is used as a base. This is covered with a solution of an organic compound containing gold. The compound is then decomposed chemically, leaving pure gold behind. Estimated cost is about three dollars a yard. This relatively low figure is possible because the coating of gold is in a film whose thickness is measured in ten-thousandths of an inch.

By a similar process gold mirrors can be prepared, that are more beautiful than the present ones of silver and at the same time less costly.

Gold dresses that have passed out of fashion or are otherwise unsuited for further wear, and even dressmakers' scraps left over from their cutting-out, would be valuable for cashing in on the purchase of a new gold gown. The metal, like any old gold, can be reclaimed and re-used.

A Newer Alchemy

Love philtres, vended by old-time alchemists to yearning youths, have their counterparts in synthetic compounds produced by modern chemists. Substances not at all related to the natural sex hormones stimulate normal sex reactions, Prof. E. C. Dodds, of the University of London, reported.

Prof. Dodds was able to produce characteristic physiological changes in female animals with a whole series of organic compounds which he made in the laboratory. This "indicates that a complete change of view must be made on the question of the specificity of biological action," he remarked, adding, "The bearing of this on the whole question of hormones and vitamins is of the greatest importance."

In line with Prof. Dodds' suggestion,

it appears possible that chemists may eventually be able to produce synthetically substitutes for the present costly and laboriously extracted "biologicals" much used in medicine, that will cost far less and yet be much more potent.

Dr. A. S. Parkes, also of the University of London, cited examples of male gland secretions, or hormones, that also had the power of stimulating underdeveloped female animals to normal growth and activity along the lines of their own sex. This falls in line with the lack of specificity in such substances discussed by Dr. Dodds.

Age of Civilization

Civilization's dawn—the time when men learned how to systematize food production and live in towns—recedes farther and farther into the mist of years the longer the problem of culture origins is studied, it was indicated in the address of Prof. V. G. Childe, president of the Association's section on anthropology. Recent German excavations in lower Mesopotamia show well-developed town life as far back as 4500 B.C.—long before the invention of writing. And the towns found buried beneath the ancient river plain show every evidence of having been built by peoples already civilized, who apparently migrated into the land from somewhere else, bringing their relatively advanced culture with them.

Evidence also increases, Prof. Childe declared, that there was a continuity of civilizations, with business and cultural contacts between the peoples, during all these uncounted centuries of unrecorded history. Archaeological finds all the way across Europe, from Macedonia to Scandinavia, give indications of these contacts far back into the Late Stone Age. East met West ages upon ages ago.

Difficult Skull

The fossil skull of a creature that might be the missing link between man and the common ancestor of apes and man, except for its geological youth, was described before the meeting in a communication presented on behalf of Dr.

Robert Broom of the Transvaal Museum.

The skull is that of a unique anthropoid ape found in South Africa. It is the newest member of the strange family of anthropoid apes, previous forms of which were discovered by Dr. Broom and by Prof. Raymond Dart of Witwatersrand University. These animals existed in relatively recent geologic times, contemporaneously with genuine human beings of pleistocene or Ice Age time.

Sir Arthur Keith, noted English anthropologist, declared, "These discoveries have destroyed the fingerposts on which anthropologists have always depended to indicate the line between anthropoid and man."

Dr. Broom's latest-found skull, though distinctly anthropoid, has teeth that are human in structure and arrangement. On this point, Sir Arthur Keith remarked, "It is likely that these apes evolved more closely than the gorilla and the chimpanzee from the spot which gave rise to human beings."

Whether our present, acquired human gait was used also by these ancient anthropoids, walking as bipeds on South Africa's treeless plains during the pleistocene, cannot be decided until their lower limb bones are discovered.

Hook-Nosed Iranics

New headache for the new "racist" theories in Europe: The fundamental type of white men, who originated thousands of years ago on the plateau of Iran (Persia) had hooked noses! So declared an American scientist, Dr. Henry Field, of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

Dr. Field was brought to his conclusion through a study of three thousand Persians, by means of a new device for the mechanical sorting of anthropometric data. Fundamental traits were long heads and hooked noses. When intermarriages occurred with other types, the hooked nose won out; it dominated the countenances of the offspring.

A new method of inactivating plant disease viruses by both X-rays and ultraviolet radiation was reported on jointly by Drs. N. W. Pirie, of Cambridge University, and F. C. Wawden, of the Rothamstead Experimental Station.

Their discovery points the way to a possible future method of vaccinating plants against diseases such as mosaic, curly-top, and "frenching." It also indicates a way in which safer smallpox vaccine may be prepared. Irradiation enlarges the crystals that may be obtained from the viruses, and reduces their infectivity.

Science News Letter, September 3, 1938