

FOSSIL COCKSCREWS

QUEER FREAKS OF NATURE THAT ABOUND IN NEBRASKA.

Gigantic Spirals of Mineral Fashioned So Mathematically as to Be Easily Mistaken at First Glance For Works of Art.

Nobody knows with certainty what the so-called "devil's corkscrews" really are. They are found by tens of thousands in Nebraska, most particularly in Sioux county, and some of them are as much as forty feet in height, without counting the gigantic "roots" presently to be described. Quartz is the substance of which they are made, but how they came to be imbedded, numbers of them together, in the sandstone cliffs of that region is more than anybody can tell, unless, perhaps, one theory, to be mentioned later, is to be accepted as correct.

You are traveling, let us say, on horseback through that part of the country, and, as often happens, you see, standing out from the face of a sandstone cliff, a gigantic spiral. If, as geologists have proved, the sandstone rock be chipped away a corkscrew shaped thing of quartz is exposed to view, fashioned so mathematically as to be easily mistaken at first glance for a work of art. The white spiral may be free, as a sculptor would say, or, in other cases, may be twined about a sort of axis, as a vine would run around a vertical pole.

Somebody awhile ago gave to these spirals the name "devil's corkscrews" for want of a better and as expressive of the mystery of their origin. Scientists discussed them in vain, and many theories were formed in regard to them. There were authorities who declared they were fossil burrows excavated in tertiary times by gophers of a huge and extinct species. And, to confirm this notion, the bones of some burrowing animal were actually found imbedded in the substance of one of the "screws." This seemed to settle the matter for awhile, until the controversy was started again by the discovery of the osseous remains, under like conditions, of a small deer. Nobody could assert that a deer was ever a burrowing animal, and so that notion had to be abandoned.

Other theorists declared that the "fossil twisters," as some folks called them, represented the prehistoric borings of gigantic worms that lived in the very long ago. Yet others suggested that they were petrified vines, though it was difficult to explain how or why the "poles" on which the alleged vines seemed in many cases to have been trained had been so admirably preserved, or, for that matter, originally erected.

In the midst of so many contradictory theories the problem seemed likely to defy solution indefinitely. The one that held out longest and gained most adherents was that of the extinct gophers. It accounted for the "root"—a shapeless appendage often nearly as big as the "twister" itself and attached to the lower end of the latter—which obviously, as it seemed, had been the nest of the rodent animal, the "corkscrew" representing the spiral hole by which it made its way to the surface of the ground. What could possibly be more easy to comprehend?

Professor E. H. Barbour, however, has declared—and his decision is accepted provisionally until somebody offers a better—that the corkscrews are of vegetable origin. They are, he asserts, the fossil remains of ancient water weeds of gigantic size, which grew millions of years ago on the bottom of a vast sheet of water that covered all of Nebraska. These must have been the biggest aquatic plants that ever existed, and when the huge lake that overflowed the region in question dried up the remains of many of the plants were left behind buried in the accumulated detritus at the bottom.

In the course of time—ages after the bottom of the ancient lake had been converted into solid rock—rivers, plowed their way through the land, cutting this way and that and exposing to the view of the modern traveler on the faces of the cliffs the fossil casts of the prehistoric water weeds just as they stood when they grew hundreds of thousands and probably millions of years ago. Their tissues were replaced as they decayed by silica from the water, particle by particle, and thus, as if by magical means, their likenesses have been preserved for the wonder and admiration of the present survivors on the earth.

Such is the theory now pretty well accepted by scientists in regard to the origin of the "fossil corkscrews." Possibly it is not correct, but if otherwise there is room for the exercise of anybody's imagination in the consideration of this veritable romance of the ancient history of the world.—New York Herald.

One Way to Get a Persian Carpet.

A woman who accompanied her husband up the Khyber pass in Afghanistan tells how she saw a fine Persian carpet and coveted it. An assistant to their host went out and returning said: "My head man says the owner of the carpet is a wicked old man, who will not sell his carpet at any price, but he has gone for the night to sleep in a little village close by, which is beyond British boundary. He wants to know if he shall make a hole in the wall of the mud hut and steal it while the old sinner sleeps. Shall he walk in at once and kill him and take it? He will do whichever memsahib likes." Memsahib, however, discovered that she could live without the carpet after all.

LIFE INSURANCE.

Its Early Struggles and Reverses in This Country.

The origin of insurance in this country is from 1752 and had its first beginning in Philadelphia.

The first company was the Philadelphia Contributionship For the Insurance of Houses From Loss by Fire, and its insignia was four hands, which was its house brand. This mark may still be seen throughout eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey on old time houses. The company survived till 1847. In 1792 the first life insurance company was founded in the same city. It was called the Universal Tontine. The next year similar companies were started in Boston and in New York. Its avowed aim was "for the purpose of raising a fund upon lives to be applied to charitable and other uses." Its subscription books were opened on March 29, and five general agents were appointed.

Some business was done during the summer, but in November of that year a general meeting of the subscribers was called, and the idea of a general insurance company was suggested and met with approval. The proposition was referred to a committee, and at an adjourned meeting held at the state-house on Nov. 12 it was resolved that "the Universal Tontine association be and is hereby changed from its original object and converted into a society to be called the Insurance Company of North America." The first policy was issued to John Maxwell Nesbitt, its president, for \$5,333.33. It wrote both fire and life insurance, but paid attention chiefly to the former and gradually dropped life insurance altogether.

In January, 1794, it considered the policy of insuring persons against capture by the Algerians and insured Captain John Collet "on a person against Algerians and other Barbary corsairs in a voyage from Philadelphia to London in the ship George Barclay, himself master, valuing himself at \$5,000." The premium charged was 2 per cent. Two similar policies were issued, but the premium was increased to 5 per cent. Two similar policies were issued, approved, one on the life of John Holker, from June 6 to Sept. 19, for \$24,000, at 1 1/2 per cent premium, and one on the life of Albert Briois de Beaumez, for eighteen calendar months, in the sum of \$5,000. The demand for insurance on life was light, and the business, which was finally abandoned by the first company, was not revived until 1820, when Hartford men took it up and kept it running till it gained the great prosperity of modern times.

Value of the Average Man.

Genius is a phenomenon; the average man is a law. He has seen Shakespeare and Goethes and Napoleons and Wagners rise and fall, and he goes on calmly, knowing that it is he and not they who are the race. Despite him, kick him as you will, the last word is with him. He is nature's favorite. Like a true mother, she loves her dull boy best. A Shakespeare was too much for her, but she saw to it that his faculty perished with him. He died, a wonder among men, and his family reverted to the average. Lest the abhorred thing should reappear in the course of generations the family presently died out. The case is typical. It is almost a commonplace of the science of heredity that the appearance of extraordinary talent in any branch of a family means the extinction of that branch.—London Standard.

"Robbing Peter to Pay Paul."

This saying had its origin in the rivalry between St. Peter's cathedral, now Westminster abbey, and St. Paul's, when, in 1550, an appropriation was made from St. Peter's to make good a deficiency in the accounts of St. Paul's. Much opposition was shown to this, and it was for the time a popular outcry, "Why rob Peter to pay Paul?" The saying was revived as a proverb upon the death of William Pitt, earl of Chatham, in 1778. The city of London argued that so illustrious a statesman should be buried at St. Paul's, while parliament held that the remains of so great a leader should be placed with the dust of kings and that to bury him away from the Abbey of Westminster would be again a robbing of Peter to pay Paul.

One Sure Method.

There is a story of a medical student before a board of examiners to whom the question was put again and again of how he would produce perspiration in a patient. He proposed all sorts of things, to which one importunate examiner always replied:

"Well, and if that would not do?"

At last the poor young man, driven to his wits' end, exclaimed, "I would send him before this board to be examined, and I warrant that would make him perspire."

The Obstacle.

"I came near eloping once," said the sweet young thing.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. We had quite made up our minds."

"Who?"

"Papa and I, but I could not find a man who would elope with me."

Appropriate.

Charles—I don't see how Blank can make any money out of that tobacco business of his. He's always smoking the best cigars himself. Fred—Oh, that's his method of advertising his goods.

Safety.

He—Why does this theater have its orchestra concealed? She—Why? Just wait until you hear it play.

Man is creation's masterpiece. But who says so? Man.—Gavarni.

PROBLEMS IN COLORS

WHITE IS COOL, YET ARCTIC ANIMALS AS A RULE ARE WHITE.

Why Are Land Birds Mostly Dark and Sea Birds, in Many Cases, White—Why Have Nearly All Purple Blossoms Poisonous Properties?

In summer weather ladies, and men, too, when possible wear white. Why? To keep cool, of course, you will say.

If this be so, why, then, are almost all the creatures that live in arctic regions clothed in white? The usual reply is that the white color is for protective purposes—in order, in fact, to make them invisible to their enemies in the midst of the wastes of snow.

But, consider, again, is this reasonable? From whom does the polar bear need to hide? He has no enemies to fear. And as for the birds which assume a white plumage when they migrate north, surely they also have far fewer foes in the polar regions than when farther south.

Again, if white be a cool color this is surely another reason against the inhabitants of the coldest regions turning white at the approach of winter. It is easy to strengthen this argument. Visit the tropics, and you will find hardly any white animals or birds. In the very hottest regions of the globe not only is man, as a rule, black, but the birds and beasts are either very dark or else extremely brilliant in color. Of tropical birds the commonest colors run as follows: Brown, dark green and dark blue, emerald green, reds and yellows.

Speaking of the birds again, why is it that land birds are mostly dark hued while so many sea birds are white?

Here is another color puzzle. Almost all song birds are somber in hue, while the brightly colored species, such as the jays, the parrots and birds of paradise, have naturally harsh voices.

The colors of flowers and leaves offer numbers of interesting problems. No one quite knows why the prevailing tint of early spring flowers is either white or yellow. Yellow, indeed, holds its own to some extent all through the summer, but the typical color of summer blooms is pink, while as the autumn advances richer crimsons and all the rich, glowing hues of dahlias and chrysanthemums are seen.

Horticulturists have produced popples of pretty nearly every shade under the sun, and with many other flowers they seem able to alter the colors almost as they please. Yet the blue rose, the black tulip and the green carnation seem as far off as ever they were in spite of constant efforts to arrive at them. Nearly three centuries ago Dutch gardeners imagined themselves on the verge of inventing a black tulip.

The colors of the blossom of fruit trees are limited to white, pink, bright scarlet and purple. The reason no one knows. Nor is it clear why nearly all plants with purple blossoms have poisonous properties. The deadly nightshade is an instance which will be familiar to all country readers.

It used to be said and many still imagine that intensity of color depends upon intensity of light. The brilliancy of a tropical landscape seems in some measure to bear this out. But any amount of arguments may be deduced against it. Rubies, opals and other exquisitely colored gems are dug from the depths of the earth.

The rays of the sun have never touched them. The pulp of some fruits is more richly tinted than the outer rind, while the crimson blood of animals is hidden from the light. What could be more rich and magnificent in color than the wings of many moths? Yet these are all night flying creatures.

Speaking of moths, it seems odd that there is no blue moth. Very few show even a touch or spot of blue. The colorings of butterflies present many problems, for there seems no order or method in their hues and markings, and a strange point is the absolute difference in these points between species otherwise closely allied.

Why do autumn leaves turn yellow? Here is a question which is more easily answered than some that have already been suggested. The popular reply is, "The frost does it." This is only partly correct. If a really hard frost were to happen early in autumn there would be no tints at all. All the leaves would turn brown at once. The really gorgeous colors are produced by a slow and gradual fall of temperature, of course, without too much wind or rain. The cold causes a chemical ferment, which attacks the color compounds in the cells of the leaf. It is those leaves which contain most sugar which oxidize most rapidly and of which, consequently, the color becomes most rich and brilliant.

A question which is often asked is, "Why do lobsters, shrimps and certain other similar shellfish turn red when boiled?" It seems that the black coloring matter which colors the shell of the lobster during life is an iron compound. We know that iron rust is red. The effect of boiling is practically to turn this iron compound in the lobster shell to a highly oxidized rust.

The dislike of certain creatures for certain colors is strange. If a number of earthworms be placed in an oblong box, of which one half is covered with red and the other with blue glass, they will with one accord crawl away from the red light and take refuge under the blue glass. Many other higher creatures share the same dislike to blue rays.—Pearson's Weekly.

A Terrible Mistake.

There are women who are smart and intelligent yet they labor under the delusion that no man can tell them a lie and look them straight in the eye at the same time.—Mansfield News.

Joy's recollection is no longer joy while sorrow's memory is sorrow still.—Byron.

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