

present instance it seems worth while to give some reasons why it seems practically certain that *Collier's* correspondent has been the victim of a hoax, especially as "an archeologist of repute" in America is stated to have said: "This looks very much as if we should have to begin our research all over again," presumably meaning in South American archeology.

To my mind, there is a probability, almost amounting to a certainty, that the photograph, which is certainly taken from a real scene, represents a structure which is not prehistoric, which is not South American, which is not the work of a savage people, and which is situated not in a tropical jungle subject to a rainy season like the Peruvian Ucayali, but in an arid country probably devoid of vegetation. Where or why it exists is a problem to be solved by some one better posted in Eurasian archeology than the present writer.

The halftone does not lend itself to magnification like an original photograph but it can be seen that the top of the wall is absolutely rectilinear and level, and provided on a bevelled edge with long smooth sloping slabs of some substance, probably stone, roofing it from the weather. These slabs are of uniform length, apparently about fifteen feet, and at their junctions are placed the vases on a presumably flat surface. The latter are of a "classical" design like no product of the American aborigines. No structure with such unvarying lines is known among American prehistoric ruins nor as the product of a people in a state of savagery.

It is notable that there is no trace of tropical or other vegetation in the picture. If some skeletons still remain in a natural position, and no deposit of vegetation or drift of dead leaves and mold has formed on this immense heap of bones, and those in the lower part of the heap seem (from the picture) to be perfectly preserved, it is evident that the deposit can not be prehistoric but is very recent; that it can not have been subject to tropical rains and blown débris for centuries, but must be in an arid climate where bones do not read-

ily decay, and where there is no vegetation of a kind to form a covering of humus.

The picture is interesting enough in itself to be worth an authentic explanation.

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"TERMS USED TO DENOTE THE ABUNDANCE OR RARITY OF BIRDS"

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: I sympathize with Mr. John Dryden Kuser's desire to standardize the terms used to denote the abundance or rarity of birds,<sup>1</sup> but it seems to me that the chief difficulty is the inherent one that lies in the personal equation. No two persons can have just the same notion as to the precise meanings of the various terms used. What one calls rare another calls uncommon, and still another, having in mind the relativity of all such terms, may call the species "fairly common,"—for a hawk, for instance, hawks being judged by a different standard from warblers. Undoubtedly the best system is a numerical one when that is possible, the exact or estimated number of individuals observed being noted. That entails, however, in some cases an amount of labor that the observer may prefer to expend in other directions, while for generalizations it is unsatisfactory.

As to the list of terms with synonyms offered by Mr. Kuser, it seems to me that it is open to objection in some particulars. It is not quite clear, for one thing, just what he means when he states that "not uncommon is equal to common." Is he making an arbitrary ruling for his own guidance, or is he stating what he believes to be a fact? Presumably the latter, since he says he limits himself to eight terms, and "not uncommon" is not one of the eight listed. And yet I venture to express the belief that to most ornithologists the term "not uncommon" expresses a status distinctly less common than "common." It comes nearer to "fairly common," but to my mind means less common than that. In short, it seems to me that we can not treat

<sup>1</sup> SCIENCE, June 14, 1912, p. 930.

the English language exactly as we treat a mathematical equation. There are fine distinctions in words that we can not abolish by arbitrary rules.

I *quite* agree with Mr. Kuser that "quite common" is an incorrect expression as it is ordinarily used, but I am very sure that simple "common" does not fill its place, and I am not altogether certain that "fairly common" quite expresses it either, though perhaps that is the best substitute.

"Tolerably common," though it has the sanction of government usage, is also objectionable on etymological grounds, as Mr. Kuser points out.

"Frequent" strikes me as objectionable because it is an adjective of time rather than number or distribution in space. "Fairly common" or "rather common" are preferable, perhaps.

The statement that "accidental is occasional or rare" seems to me absolutely wrong. All birds that occur only accidentally or "casually" are rare, but not all rare birds can be called accidental. The distinction is generally recognized, I think. The accidental occurrence of a bird is supposed to be due to some stress of weather or similar outside force or possibly some abnormal tendency in the individual. No bird that is found regularly in a given locality, no matter how rare it may be, can be called accidental—unless, indeed, it is a single individual that is found thus regularly. Mockingbirds are still rare in Massachusetts, but they can no longer be called accidental, and the same is true of the Iceland, Kumlien's and glaucous gulls.

Mr. Kuser says that "very rare is using an unnecessary adverb, for rare is very rare," but are there not degrees of rarity, and, if so, why should we not be permitted to indicate them? Mr. William Brewster in "Birds of the Cambridge Region," calls the mourning warbler "rare in spring, exceedingly rare in autumn." Is there not a decided advantage in being able to make this distinction?

Is not Mr. Kuser's definition of "scarce" as indicating "that the bird mentioned was at some previous time common" a purely

arbitrary one? If so, how can he expect its use in that sense to be generally adopted?

Finally I suggest that Mr. Kuser's definition of "irregular" be extended to cover the complete absence of a species during some seasons.

It was certainly worth while to call attention to the common use of vague and inaccurate terms in bird-lists, but as one who has made many lists (mostly unpublished), I have ventured to offer a few considerations which will serve to indicate that the standardization of the terminology is not so easy as it looks.

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#### POPULAR "SCIENCE" AGAIN

It is perhaps worth while calling the attention of the readers of SCIENCE to a fresh contribution to the pseudo-scientific literature of this country. In a recent number of *Mother's Magazine*, Dr. Cornelia B. DeBey writes concerning weeds as follows:

Weeds may not seem (to you) to have much connection with your home hygiene, but they do have. Growing under the bedroom window, thriving in a corner of the yard, lining a back walk, they are constantly, through their nature, absorbing floating air poisons. As the period of their annual decay approaches, they throw off these poisons and the winds gather them up and sweep them through the house. They are blown into your lungs and into the lungs of your children. If perchance the system of any one of you happens to be weak at the time, a sickness may almost certainly be expected to follow.

Weeds of the yard, like the foul dust of the streets of a city, carry millions upon millions of germs eager to thrive on any frail human or animal body. Root out the weeds. Treat them with scalding hot lye and wood ashes that have been soaked in hot water. Attack them with hoe and spade. Certain noxious weed growths, very common to American yards, may breed diphtheria, typhoid fever, scarlet fever and serious catarrhal affections.

The spirit of the foregoing is doubtless highly commendable, but the ideas of the causes of diseases inculcated in such a statement, are, at the very least, undesirable.

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