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## PREHISTORIC ARCHEOLOGY, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE<sup>1</sup>

By N. C. NELSON

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PREHISTORIC archeology as a method of solving the problems of man's physical origin and cultural development may be traced back almost two hundred years, but it was not until past the middle of last century that the inquiry became a recognized science. The long interval is marked by several important discoveries, as well as by sporadic efforts to get systematic investigations under way; but, owing to the long established adverse speculations of poets and book scholars, little headway was possible in the observational field until after 1859, when the growing prestige of the natural science movement finally swung the balance in favor of the visible facts and so opened the road to free inquiry. Since then the spade has been steadily in service, and by degrees the earth has yielded

up an abundance of relics in nearly every quarter. Interpretation of the evidence thus obtained has kept close pace and is continually being rectified as new facts accumulate. The outstanding results of these research activities are that in the short span of seventy-five years the story of human existence has been stretched from the 5,000 years or so covered by written documents to a million years or more and we are beginning dimly to see the general course of progress from near the time when man first took to making implements and thereby differentiated himself once and for all from the rest of animal creation. The picture may never be fully developed as to its minor details, but the grand outline is permanently fixed and is clear enough for any school child to see and appreciate. Under the circumstances, if the astronomers are permitted to startle us with their idea of a rapidly expanding physical universe, there is no

<sup>1</sup> Address of the vice-president and chairman of the Section on Anthropology, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Atlantic City, December, 1936.

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