

Book Reviews

Man in Search of His Ancestors. The romance of paleontology. André Senet. Translated by Malcolm Barnes. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1956. 274 pp. Illus. \$5.50.

In Search of Adam. The story of man's quest for the truth about his earliest ancestors. Herbert Wendt. Translated from the German by James Cleugh. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1956. 540 pp. Illus. + plates. \$6.50.

The revelation of the Piltdown hoax and, at the same time, the widespread publicity involving the numerous discoveries of man-ape remains in South Africa have apparently whetted public appetite for popular accounts of human evolution. The effects have been twofold: an increase in the willingness of magazines of mass circulation to give simplified, heavily illustrated versions of discoveries in human paleontology, and the multiplication of popular books dealing with the subject. Unfortunately the number of new and sensational finds can never keep pace with the artificially stimulated curiosity of the public. The result is, that although a certain amount of information may be successfully transmitted, much of this hastily composed literature tends to become repetitious and wearisome, as only stale and warmed-over facts can become.

Taken individually, many of these treatises are unexceptionable and useful works. It is in the mass that they present a certain monotony, which is inescapable and which, perhaps, encourages a kind of languor even in the authors, so that, for example, we find André Senet, in *Man in Search of His Ancestors*, confessing that his account of Darwinism and Lamarckism is "oversimplified." There thus emerges a sort of "why bother when the going gets tough?" attitude, which encourages the same reaction in the public.

There are annoying little expressions which begin to grate on the professional reader. The Old Man of La Chapelle has a brain that was "abnormally developed." Bishop Wilberforce and Huxley are dextrously manipulated into having their great debate over Neanderthal man. The tooth of *Gigantopithecus* is assigned without further warning to a

"gigantic ape or man from 8 to 10 feet tall." Although this theory is no longer seriously held in reputable quarters, it has an irresistible attraction. *Meganthropus*, for example, is carefully calculated to have had a height of 7 feet 6 inches. The researches of Weidenreich on the brain are confused with the work of Robert Broom. Clairvoyantly, *Sinanthropus* is assigned a rudimentary language because of certain muscular insertions on the skulls. The American paleontologist Marsh becomes March.

When bunched, these statements look more appalling than when they are scattered through the book, which begins with the Piltdown hoax and runs quickly backward to the dawn of life itself. The attempt to enliven the story with material of the human-interest variety has produced some of the errors noted here. The general public, says Senet, "has acquired a few false notions." It is regrettable that this readable and by no means unappealing book will not do all that it might have done to reduce them.

Herbert Wendt, in his *In Search of Adam*, has produced a lengthier and, at the same time, more concentrated book. He has confined his attention primarily to the human story and has, a little more successfully and accurately than Senet, made use of American historical materials. Some of the European material is of particular interest to English and American readers, because it gives details of continental anthropologic history which have hitherto been less available to the general public.

Unfortunately, there are also dogmatic expressions upon still unsettled problems. The Swanscombe cranium is asserted, without proof, to be a "genuine early Neanderthal specimen" and the Piltdown cranium, as distinct from the jaw, to be a "direct ancestor or contemporary of the Aurignac or Cro-Magnon peoples." Wendt asserts that the mastodon was used as a draft animal by the Maya but that "it probably went out of fashion." One wonders, on the subject of "fakes," intentional and otherwise, why the relation of the famous *Hesperopithecus* tooth to the Bryan antievolutionary campaign and the Scopes trial could not have been told, since so much other interesting gossip has been intro-

duced. Certainly the world laughed at the Scopes episode, but should we forget, we scientists, that in 1927 the public had a chance to laugh at the scholars and their "million-dollar tooth" as well?

Occasional expressions, once more, cause lifted eyebrows, even though they are well-intentioned. For example, Australia "drifted away" from the Asiatic mainland in Cretaceous times." When sexual selection was invoked to explain the rise of man, the objections "were not really significant." Once more an author bows out of a formidable problem.

In Search of Adam is an uneven popular treatment of a complicated subject. It is extensive and novel in its fullness of European detail. It will sell and be widely read. It contains, at the same time, apocrypha and dramatization after the best modern manner, which will sound a trifle dated in perspective. This is a fault of public taste, but unfortunately it seems to create an appetite which can be served only by more spectacular discoveries narrated in an increasingly breathless prose.

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Handbook of South American Geology.

An explanation of the geologic map of South America. Geological Society of America Memoir 65. William F. Jenks, Ed. Geological Society of America, New York, 1956. 378 pp. Illus. + maps.

This volume is intended to accompany the geologic map of South America published in 1950. Because compilation of the handbook was delayed for several years, many of its chapters are more up-to-date than the map. Hence, the book serves both as a detailed explanation and as a supplement, bringing the map abreast of current geologic knowledge.

The book consists of chapters on the several South American countries, each written by a geologist or a group of geologists familiar with the particular area. Despite the multiplicity of authors, a good balance of subject matter is maintained, and the treatment of geologic details is remarkably uniform from one country to another. The editor should be highly commended for insuring this balance and essential uniformity, while at the same time permitting each author considerable individuality of presentation.

Emphasis is on stratigraphy and to a lesser degree on structure. Igneous rocks and land forms are treated very briefly in most of the chapters but are discussed at length in a few. Economic geology is omitted altogether in order to hold the book to reasonable dimensions. Most of the authors take pains to point out the