

ST. LOUIS BOTANISTS

VISIT BEEHLER'S BONE HILL AT KIMMSWICK

Members of the Engelmann Club Turned for a Day From the Flora of This Age to the Fauna of Another.

THE St. Louis botanists of the Engelmann Club have come in wonderment from the valley of dry bones. In a single day they passed from the flora of this age to the fauna of another.

It was their first day in practical paleontology. They went to Kimmswick, Mo., twenty miles south of St. Louis, and were guided by W. H. Beehler out to the great bone hill a mile and a half back from the Mississippi river. Beehler led the way to a blue house under a hill. This is the house that Beehler built. It is 40 feet long and not quite 20 feet wide. In this place, for a good share of a day, the men and women who know where the snakeroot grows in summer and how many members there are in the great family fern, saw the massive bones of the Mastodon; Giganteus and considered what enemies he must have run through with his great tusks; they exclaimed over the teeth of the hairy mammoth, and imagined what succulent salads he must have ground therewith for his daily bread; they examined the wide-spreading horns of the olden bison, and conjured up thoughts of this noblest of them all; they pitied the poor little Florida elephant, whose tiny tusks in this faraway land tell with pathos enough how he was claimed by death while sojourning at this far-north Missouri resort; they inspected the bones of a megatherium, the great lizard who waddled down Broadway thousands of years before the little changeable chameleon came into the same street at 25 cents per; they saw bones of bears bigger than our bears; of deer and elk and beaver greater than any we boast to-day. So, what wonder is it they came wondering from the valley of dry bones?

THE botanists of the Engelmann Club dearly love to penetrate to the very wildness of the wood. It is there the rarest plants grow and the most-sought flowers bloom. So every now and then they get together and go into the places where the whippoorwill is still heard in the night and the wild dewberry trails. Funny place, you'll think, for botanists—this bone deposit at Kimmswick. Not at all; very fitting. For is it not true that the bones most abounding here are those of the mastodon and the mammoth, those great creatures of a day when America did not import her elephants? And what were they but the plant gatherers, the botanists, of the time in which they dwelt? They were herbivorous. They ate only grasses and branches and the flowers and vines. Any paleontologist can tell you that the mastodons and the mammoths used their great bulk to bear down trees which they straddled, and that if we could walk out in the wood and find them there today we would see them weighting down the trees in this very way and feasting upon the tender shoots and leaves that would otherwise be out of reach.

This may not have been botany, but it was not so far removed.

The bone hill is but a little way up the Kimmswick and Montezano valley. Rounding a sharp turn where the road parallels a creek, the botanists hear Beehler say: "That's the place."

He points to a promontory a quarter of a mile on the right. He could not make a mistake pointing it out; not Beehler. He knows the place. As the prodigal knows the house of his father, Beehler knows the place. He has spent days and days all alone there. For three years there has not been a week when the slight figure of Beehler, hastening nervously, the slouch hat pulled over his spectacled eyes and his head down, has not crossed the creek to the bone hill. Maybe it has been to work out under the wonderful loess bank; maybe to sew in white muslin sacks, close-fitting, the specimens which would speedily disintegrate if left exposed to the air; maybe just to look around, to see that the jaw is next to the tooth or the big rib bones are laid six in a row on the east floor, just as he left them when last he was here.

Who is Beehler? Is it his hill? Are they his bones? Is Beehler a paleontologist? Ridiculous questions. Who is Beehler,

indeed? Who is there has not heard of Beehler first and the bone hill last? Who could not have heard that Beehler is the high priest of this promontory; that he leased it and dug in it and took out of it what is there to be seen; that he guards it as the Afghan guards his frontier; that he has taken there almost every paleontologist of note in the New World, and that not one of them has ever borne away with him any bone from the hill except as he pilfered one when Beehler's back was turned? Beehler was a mechanic and inventor not so many years ago. Paleontology was no study of his. He did not know the pliocene period from the other side of the moon. The glyptodon looked to him like a turtle, shell soft or shell hard. This was the Beehler before taking a trip to the place where Koch got his mastodon or as Prof. Gustav Hambach says, where he got what parts of it were missing from the skeleton excavated out on the Gasconade river. He became another Beehler after taking that trip. He began to look up the paleontological books. He went to Kimmswick again and again. People down there called it the bone hill. Beehler could see the bones protruding from the side of the bluff. He came back to St. Louis and interested a number of persons of scientific inclination. They organized the Humboldt Exploration Society, and Beehler personally leased the hill from Fred Miller. Then he began to dig. The society furnished some money. A cabinet was built for the bones. In a little while Beehler had filled it with the most remarkable find ever made in these things in this or any other part of the world. The money gave out. No more was raised. The project dragged, and Beehler hung to the hill and the bones. That is the status of the thing today.

"How do you suppose these creatures happened to die in such numbers in this place, Mr. Beehler?"

Mr. Reinke is a botanist. Of course he wouldn't know much about the occurrence of bones. Plants, flowers, trees—any of these Mr. Reinke knows about, but nothing of bones.

Beehler told them of the theories. They are innumerable, like the Philistine host. Some of the scientists think the creatures were attracted there by a spring possessing some attractive property, possibly a salt spring. How the bones became piled in such confusion at the foot of the bluff is a puzzler. Dr. C. A. Peterson of St.

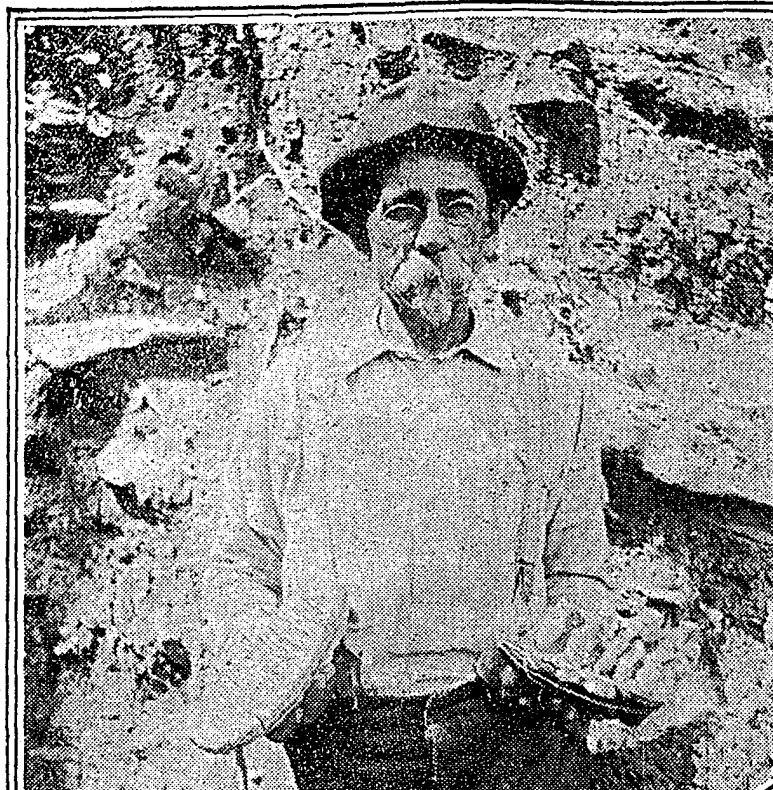
Louis, who is a member of the Humboldt Exploration Society and has many times visited the hill, once expressed in the Sunday Post-Dispatch a theory that the spring at the foot of the hill had in the old days been to the creatures of the valley what Benares is to the Hindu of India today—the place where the faithful must go to die. As the mastodon grew old and felt

his end approaching he came to this place. By its cool waters he rested, drinking his fill and lounging, as a cow will do after drinking, as the top of the hill. When he died the wolves and jackals—even the hyena was here in that day—set upon him and rended him limb for limb, finally, like hungry dogs, pulling the parts down hill until they dropped over the ledge. In profusion

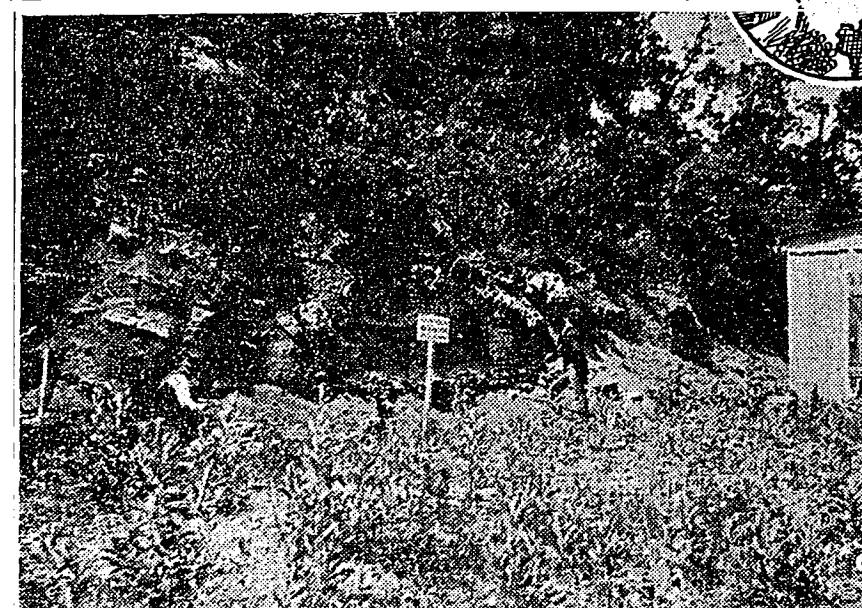
and confusion they lay there until the dropping soil covered them over. And so they are found, no skeleton complete, but the whole mass of bones tumbled about like the bones of the buffalo out on the plains. The botanists thought so fine a collection should be in some university or similar institution and that it ought not to

waste its exceptional instruction down there in the wilderness. They were unanimous that the bones should be seen at the World's Fair. From the cabinet some of the botanists went out in the woods hunting specimens. They were like fish getting back into water, when they plunged into the grass and trees. Here they were at home where they knew

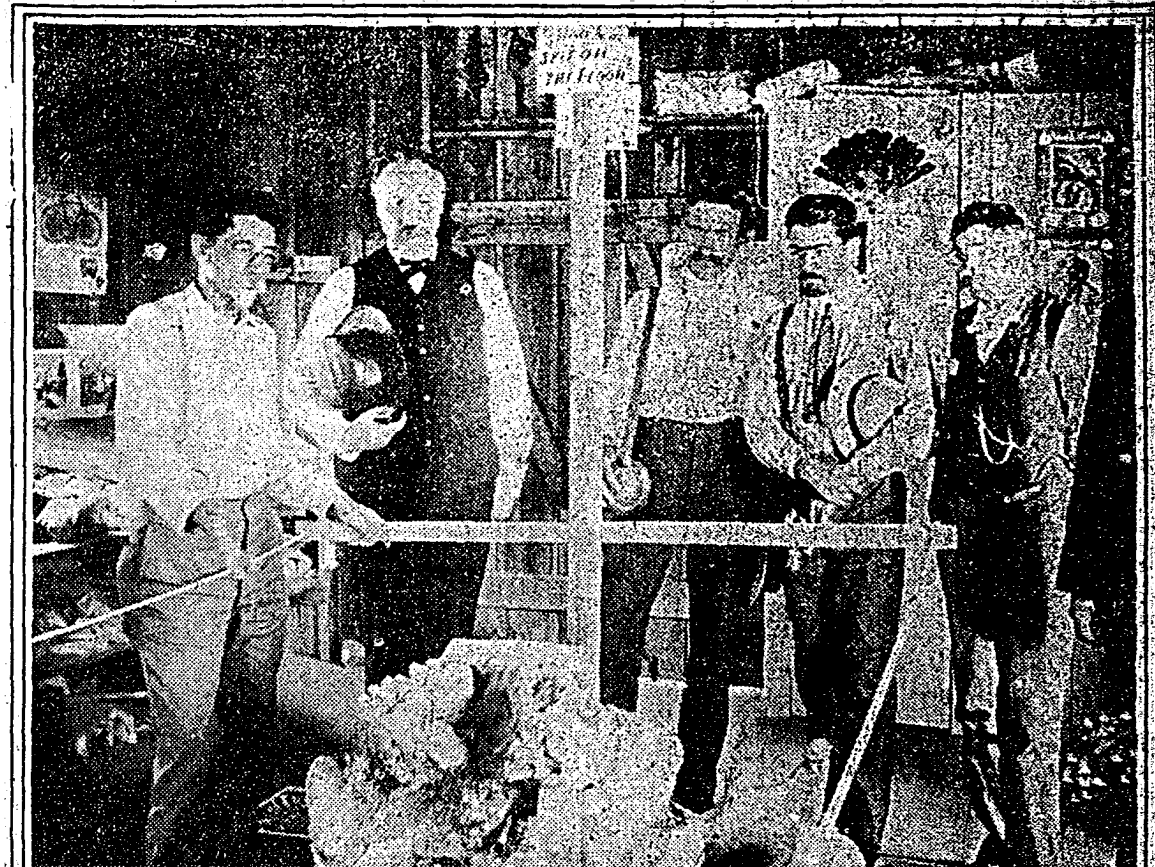
what things they saw; in the bone house it was all of another science, a great science they were free to admit, and intensely interesting—but what does a botanist know about the hoplophorus? Or who could expect Beehler to understand if he were asked if the ears of the pliocene mule grew pinnate or bi-pinnate? Every man to his own science.



W.H. BEEHLER, HIGH PRIEST OF THE BONE HILL. HE HAS A MAMMOTH TOOTH IN HIS RIGHT HAND; A MASTODON TOOTH IN HIS LEFT.



BANK WHERE THE BIG BONES WERE FOUND.



BEEHLER SHOWING SOME OF THE BOTANISTS THE LOWER JAW OF A MASTODON. LEFT TO RIGHT—W.H. BEEHLER, G.A. JUST, L.P. JENSON, J. ARTHUR HARRIS, J.F. REINKE AND N.L.F. NELSON.



THE ENGLEMAN CLUB PARTY BEFORE THE KIMMSWICK MUSEUM.