

# Jokes that Nature Plays



The Strychian Lamb, or Golden-haired Dog

### Freaks of "Unnatural History"—Some Curious Imitations That Seem to Betray a Sense of Humor—Funny Faces and Accidents of Mineral Formation.

By RENE BACHE

NATURE has her lighter moods. She likes to perpetrate a jest now and then, and some of her jokes are so excellent as to be amusing.

Consider for instance the carbons of the fishback whale. It is a species of cetacean for which an important profitable fishery is conducted off the coast of Norway and in neighboring seas.

Each of the two carbons of this monstrous mammal, which is the subject of all whales, bears a face; and, oddly enough, the latter is unmistakably the face of a Scandinavian fisherman. It has the distinctive characteristics of the low-caste Scandinavian physiognomy—the receding chin, the rounded cheek-bones, and the flat nose-bridge. Truth to tell, it looks rather like a death-mask in miniature, done in white plaster-of-paris.

The ear-bones of whales, by the way, are among the most indestructible things in nature, being extremely hard; and those of fishbacks are often brought up from the ocean bottom by deep-sea dredges. Every one of them bears the same face.

#### Crabs That Wear Faces

Even more extraordinary is a kind of crab common in the Sea of Japan, whose carapace—that is, the shell covering the back—bears a well-carved and clean-cut face. This is no matter of imagination. It is a



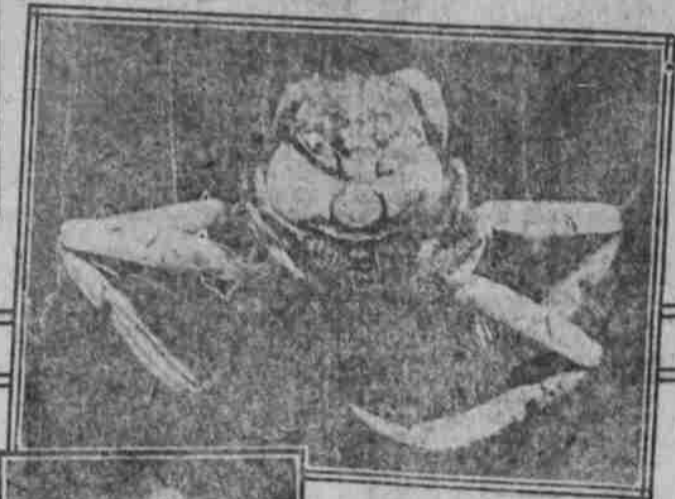
Dupe of Butterfly Fly, Fenitacea Parvianis (Courtesy of Entomological News)

human face; and, what is yet more remarkable, it is the face of a Japanese.

The story goes that many centuries ago there was a plague of piracy in those waters. The pirates were well organized, having a formidable navy of their own, and were secretly supported in their activities by some of the feudal barons, who in those days held themselves almost independent of the central government. Eventually this situation gave rise to war, which culminated in a great naval battle in the Sea of Japan.

In this battle the pirate fleet, numbering some hundreds of ships, was entirely destroyed; and, no quarter being given on either side, few if any of the sea-rovers survived. Since then it is said all the "raira" crabs (as the species is called) have borne on their backs the faces of Japanese fighting men.

The face is a man's face rather ferocious. But strangest of all, it is the face of a drowned man, with open mouth and swollen features. The



Crab that Wears a Face



Burrows of Fishback Whale

Japanese regard the phenomenon as evidence of the transmigration of souls; for, as they believe, the spirits of the departed pirates still survive in the crabs.

#### Mysterious "Corkscrews"

A mystery to science until very recent years were the so-called "devil's corkscrews," otherwise known as "fossil testicles," which in Nebraska are found scattered over hundreds of square miles. There are millions of them. One may see them projecting from the faces of cliffs, or in other places where "weathering"—i. e., the action of wind and water—has worn away the rocky formation.

This formation is sandstone, but the "corkscrews" are of quartz—vertical spirals of mathematical symmetry. Some of them are as much

as forty feet high and a couple of feet in diameter. They look like works of art, and how or why nature should have made them was long a puzzle and a matter of dispute. At the bottom of each one is a sharp-pointed instrument which has some what the appearance of a root.

One theory suggested was that the "corkscrews" were the fossil burrows of a huge extinct species of gopher or other rodent animal, whose nest at the bottom was represented by the aforementioned "root." But scientists now say that they are fossil water-works, which millions of years ago grew on the bottom of a vast lake that covered Nebraska.

These gigantic water-works, which grew in a spiral form, were buried beneath sand and silt brought to the lake by rivers. Eventually the silt dried up, the sand and silt hardened into solid rock, and the spiral holes left by the decay of the woods were filled in with silica deposited from water percolating through the stony remains. Thus were made perfect casts of the huge water-works, including the peats turned in imperishable quartz.

#### Freaks Made by Water

Not long ago somebody sent to the Smithsonian Institution what was declared to be the fossil foot of a child. It was apparently real to the eye, but actually clad in a rock which



A Sea Horse



A Devil's Corniscrew



Holy Ghost Orchid

lamb," which to the Chinese is known as the "golden-haired dog". It is supposed to combine the attributes of animal and plant. Sprung from a seed, it is popularly believed to turn on its root until it has eaten all the green food within reach, and then to die of starvation. The truth is that it is merely the rootstock of a rare Asiatic plant, which, covered with soft golden-brown hairs and standing upon what look like legs, suggests a likeness to a quadruped.

Familiar among nature's imitations is the "sea-horse," a little fish which has a horse-like head, while its body is so shaped as to resemble the neck of that quadruped.

The "sphenoid" bone at the base of a rabbit's skull is carved in the likeness of the head of that animal's arch-enemy, the fox. In its way, this is certainly one of the most curious of nature's little jokes. Fox-hunters in England commonly wear the bone, mounted in gold, as a scarf-pin.

#### Prodigy Of The Garden

The seed-pods of the common garden snapdragon look like diminutive human heads arranged on the stalks like the "poles of skulls" which in Homer, where head-hunting is a popular outdoor sport, are set up as trophies. The pods have the color of mummified heads, and show not only the head and face, but dried portions of the scalp, eyelids, and lips. Grim-looking this, but in the insect world are found some

of the strangest and most striking of nature's counterfeits. Some butterflies imitate dead leaves when their wings are folded on alighting, even the veins of the leaves being faithfully reproduced. The so-called "walking sticks" of India, are vivid green in color, but so much like leaves that the deception almost defies detection.

Our common "measuring worm" will remain motionless for hours in the attitude of a twig. Of "walking sticks," which imitate twigs, there are many species, some being half a foot in length. They are plentiful in all woods, but it is rarely that one of them is captured, so admirable is their disguise.

The "diabolical specter," an African species of mantis, imitates a violet colored flower, quite beautiful to the eye. Perched on a plant, it remains without motion, its extended arms (resembling petals) waiting to grab any unfortunate insect that ventures within reach.

A number of localities in the United States are famous for rocks or monoliths which bear the aspect of human faces. One of the most remarkable of these is to be seen in the Blue National Forest, New Mexico. It is called the Hooded Knight.

Everybody has observed the funny little faces that panthers have. It is one walks around a circular bed of those flowers, the faces seem to turn and follow him. Imagination, of course. That always helps. Nevertheless, there are in nature many things which are obviously meant to be imitations, and some of them—as in the case of the fishback's carbons and the Japanese crab—are positive and unmistakable jokes.

## AMONG THE MOVIE STARS



Edna Olga Purviance



Catherine Perry and Owen Moore in "The Chicken in the Case"



Gloria Swanson and Milton Sills in "The Great Moment"



Vivian Osborne in "Over the Hill"

### "The Heart of Maryland"—Famous Comedian Returns To Screen—"The Great Moment"—Chaplin's Leading Woman—Borrow's His Friend's Wife.

IN the screen adaptation of this fine old drama, all the beloved characters and familiar incidents of the original play have been preserved; and, in addition, President Lincoln and General Robert E. Lee are introduced in events of a characteristic nature.

In the heart of Maryland, the State, lives Maryland, the girl—whose intense devotion to the South leads her to sever her engagement to Alan Kendrick, a loyal officer of the Union Army, when the Civil War starts. During the war, Maryland becomes famed as "the fairest little Southerner of all," and her rebel work wins her the personal commendation of General Lee.

Later Alan is captured and denounced as a spy. Maryland in her wild despair and grief, not knowing whom it is she is accusing, shrieks denunciations of the prisoner as the real spy. There is a tremendous scene, with Alan in an adjoining room overhearing Maryland's frenzied cries as she unwittingly and unjustly denounces him. Finally, when Maryland reaches the pitch of her accusations, Alan, pale as death, steps into the room. Maryland, speechless, stares at him—"Alan! Alan! I didn't know!" Maryland swoons at his feet.

Seven Years Bad Luck

Ever break a mirror? If you haven't, don't! You have no idea how a busted reflector will mar the daily life for seven years, until you have seen what happens to Max in his new picture, "Seven Years Bad Luck." The comedienne's trouble really begins at his last bachelor dinner, when he manages to consume enough of the heretofore prohibited by the eighteenth amendment, to make his homeward course a "shimmy."



Max Linder in "Seven Years Bad Luck"

Edna Olga Purviance, leading woman for Charlie Chaplin, is considered one of the most beautiful young women of the screen. This fact is being recognized now more than ever before

been said many times that she was previously a stenographer in San Francisco, this fact is untrue. She was "discovered" by the great comedian when she was appearing in an amateur theatrical entertainment and joined his organization during the making of the production entitled "The Bank."

The young woman is a native of Lovelock, Paradise Valley, Nevada, and was born in 1896. She is fair, with light brown hair, big blue eyes and is five feet in height.

### "The Heart of Maryland"—Famous Comedian Returns To Screen—"The Great Moment"—Chaplin's Leading Woman—Borrow's His Friend's Wife.

The inspiration back of this happy thought was caught by the fact that in order for Steve to acquire his inheritance he had to be either forty-four or married, and Steve was neither. So the plot was hatched and Winnie Jones introduced to Steve's Aunt Sarah, the guardian of the family treasury, as Mrs. Stephen Perkins. So far, so good. In fact, it was immense—but Aunt Sarah took a great liking to Winnie, and dragged her and her "hubby" off to a little cottage in the country. Of course Percy Jones had to trail along, he wasn't going to let his new bride out of his sight if he knew it.

Then, to make matters even more interesting, it develops that living right next door was Major Whitman and his daughter Ruth, the latter being the young lady that Steve was violently in love with. Aunt Sarah thinks she suspects an "affair" between Percy Jones and Winnie; in fact, she is sure of it, and she makes up her mind—and when Aunt Sarah's mind is made up—good night! The more Auntie tries to straighten out matters, the more mixed up things become, until at the end and the only way out is to tell the truth.

Owen Moore takes the part of Steve and Catherine Perry is Ruth. Vivian Osborne The Great Moment is the story of Nading, daughter of a gypsy woman from the plains of Tartary, and has its scenes laid in Russia, the hills of Nevada and strident the background of diplomatic life in Washington.

The Chicken in the Case Steve Perrine had a bright idea. He would borrow Percy Jones' wife.