

THE ART OF PRIMITIVE MAN.

BY THE EDITOR.

PRIMITIVE man was an artist to a much higher degree than we might suppose, and it almost seems as if all the faculties that depend on intuition were developed first; a scientific comprehension appears to have come later. Even to-day we may be astonished at the artistic taste of such races as the Mexicans. Their skill in manufacturing ornaments of filigree silver, and in shaping human figures from clay, wax or other materials which they sell at low prices, is remarkable. If some American youth born and brought up in one of our large cities could do the same and would apply his talent to the manufacture of great art works he would be deemed a genius.

Anthropologists have discovered in ancient caves drawings scratched and painted on the walls which indicate that these prehistoric humans who antedate even the savage must have possessed remarkable gifts of an artistic kind. Discoveries have been made in the cave of Cro Magnon near Les Eysies, in the bluffs of Le Moustier and in the caves of Mas d'Azil, all of which may date back to 10,000 B. C. and earlier. In the cave of Brassempouy the torso of a female figure, an ivory carving, has been discovered which is perhaps the oldest statuette of a woman in existence, and is therefore most appropriately called the Venus of Brassempouy. The head and legs of this statue are broken off, but the figure itself is said to show remarkable ability in its creator, who must have worked with insufficient utensils and could have had no schooling of any kind.

If we look over the drawings and paintings that adorn the several caves, we notice that primitive artists like to represent the animals which play the most important part in their lives, the bison, the hind, the reindeer, and the mammoth. If we contemplate these first attempts at art, we feel inclined to think that artistic interest prevailed to a greater extent at the dawn of human evolution than it exists to-day, and although art may be more highly appreciated at

the present time, the larger portion of human activities have been turned into other channels.

We may assume that this holds good generally. Sentiment was



CAVES IN THE BLUFFS OF THE RIVER BÊUNE NEAR LES EYZIÈS.

After a photograph.

developed first and a calm consideration of facts followed slowly in the wake of progress. Speech was less articulate and more musical,

and the communication of ideas more poetic or even dramatic. Intonation and gesture were integral parts of language, and the differentiation of the meaning of the various sounds presumably remained for a long time of secondary importance. Men thought in unison, they felt in unison, and they expressed their sentiments in unison. To be sure they must have had leaders, but he only could be a leader who anticipated the sentiment of his tribesfolk.

The extraordinary artistic faculties of prehistoric man may appear to many as a new problem, and in fact we believe that with a



BLUFFS OF LE MOUSTIER WHERE PREHISTORIC CAVES OF THE PALEO-LITHEAN PERIOD HAVE BEEN FOUND.

After a photograph by M. Belvès.

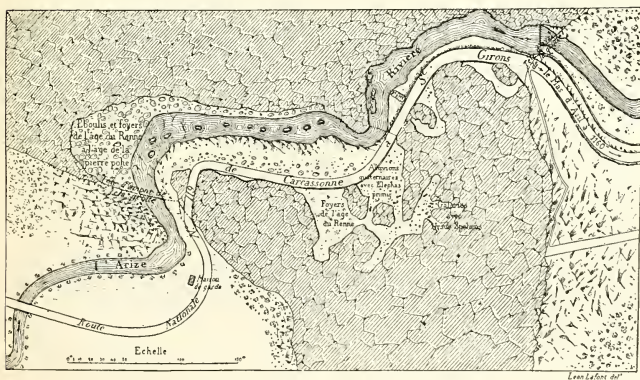
greater knowledge of his accomplishments we shall be compelled to view this early stage in a new light, and it seems probable that this new light will not be unfavorable to the *homo alalus*, the speechless man, the human being in his stage of brute infancy.

Schopenhauer has called attention to the fact that children are much more ingenious than adult people. He claims that a genius is more like a child with his naïveté and other charming attributes, while the commonplace man of a civilized period becomes hardened by his experience in this worst of all possible worlds. Though we



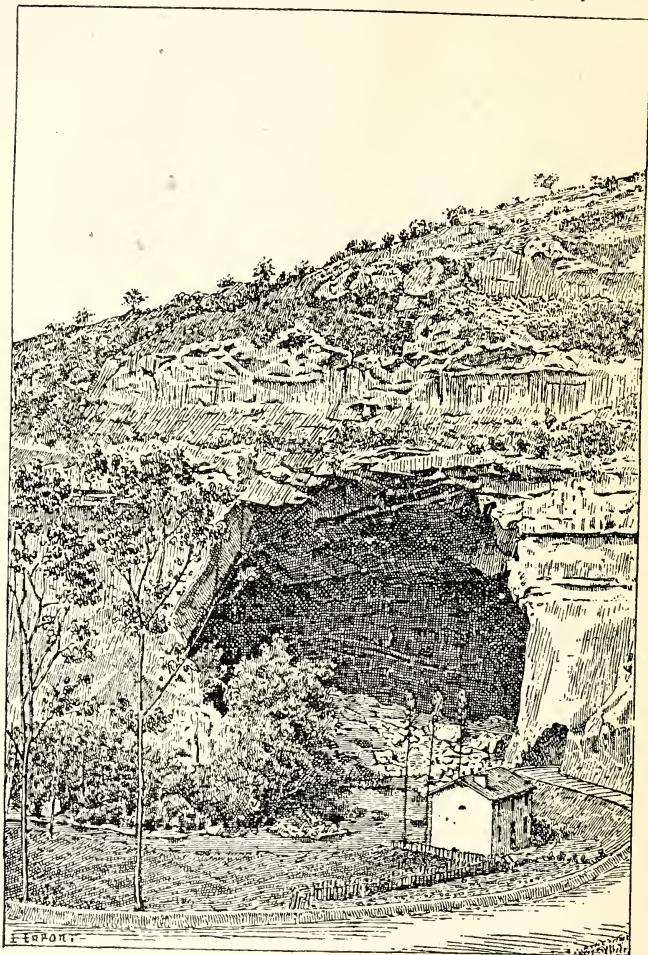
CAVE OF CRO-MAGNON ON THE RIVER VÈZÈRE NEAR LES EYZIÈS.

After a photograph.



MAP OF THE CAVES OF MAS D'AZIL.

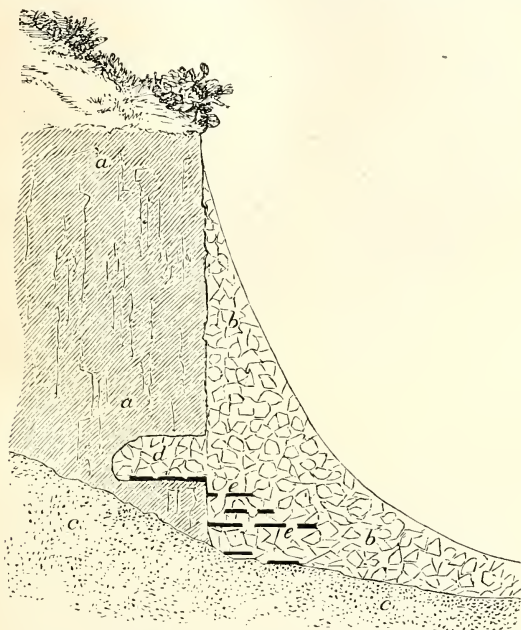
would not endorse Schopenhauer's views or make converts to his exaggerated pessimism, we feel that there is a truth in his observation. There is a peculiar charm in childhood which is perhaps most



THE CAVES OF MAS D'AZIL.

obvious when we see children of lower races, pickaninnies or papooses. The cunning attractiveness of the baby is absolutely lost in the adult, and we may assume that something analogous existed in primitive man.

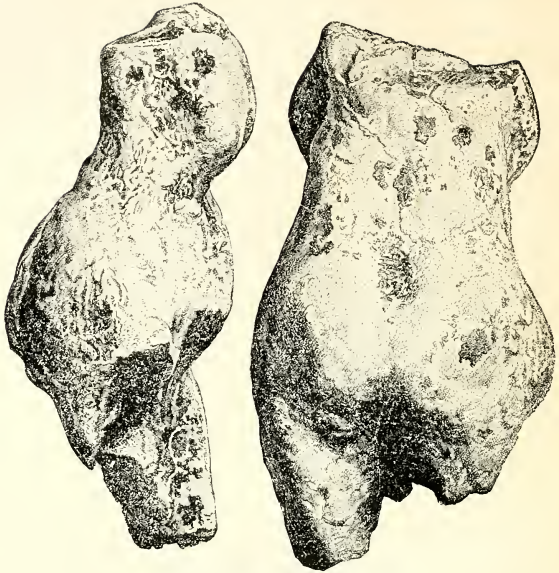
The same temperature in spring by no means represents the same weather as the same temperature in autumn, though this is more true of the European climate than of the American where the Indian



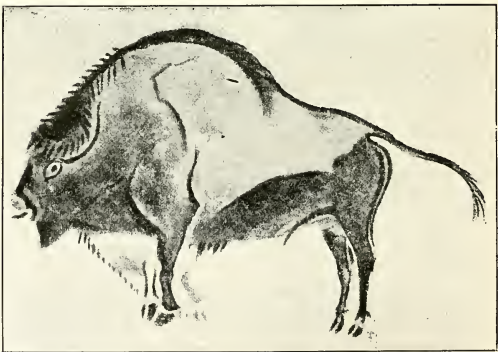
CROSS SECTION. DIAGRAM TYPICAL OF A CAVE MADE BY PRIMITIVE MAN IN LOESS, COVERED LATER ON BY ALLUVIUM.

a, loess; *b*, alluvium; *c*, tertiary sand; *d*, the cave; *e*, primitive fire places.
According to Mathäus Much.

summer has a peculiar charm of its own entirely lacking in European countries. A spring day prepares for the coming summer. Everything is growth. Plants and animals are filled with the expectation of a new and more bounteous life, while the same temperature in a European autumn presages the dreary winter and is only a last glimpse of departing summer.



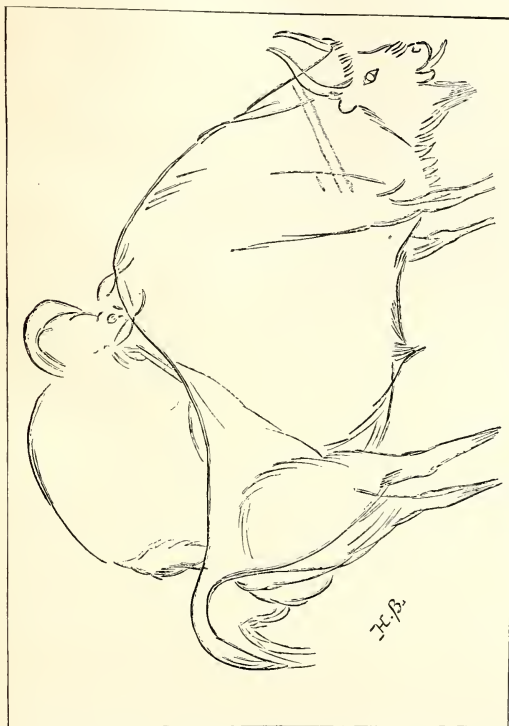
THE VENUS OF BRASSEMPOUY.



BISON PAINTED IN SEVERAL COLORS.

After a pastel reproduction by Abbé Breuil. Size of original 1.30 meters.

Man certainly passed through a stage which is analogous in amount of knowledge and intellectual abilities to the comprehension of the ape. But there is this difference, that the brute representing the pre-human existence was rising; his intellectual abilities were sprouting and blossoming and developing new faculties; his soul was stirred by great hopes which were to be fulfilled in a not too distant time. There is a difference between a rising and a stagnant



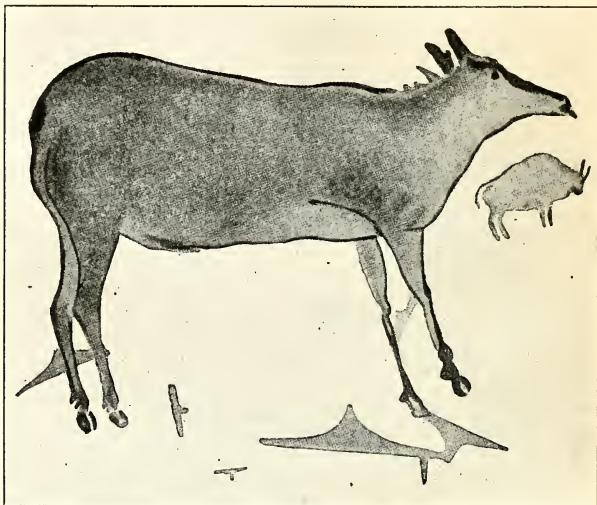
DRAWING OF A BISON SCRATCHED INTO A WALL.

In the background is a figure which may have been intended for an elephant. After an impression taken by Abbé H. Breuil. The original is .50 meters long.

or descending motion. They may be on the same stage, just as the thermometer may mark the same point in spring and fall, yet what a difference between the upward aspiration and the dull stagnation of brutish indifference! While we grant that man actually passed through a stage which can be compared in many respects to conditions of animal life, it would be very wrong to say that he is des-

cended from the ape. There was never an ape or any one of the monkey tribes among the ancestors of man; whatever similarities the ancestor of man possessed to the anthropoids, the actual state of mind was all the time incomparably different.

In connection with these considerations we might mention an article by Professor Schwalbe¹ which proves that the skull of the Neanderthal man is in many respects much nearer to the formation of the anthropoid apes than to the skull of the present *homo sapiens*,



PICTURE OF A HIND.

Painting in colors after a pastel of Abbé Breuil. Reproduced from *Les peintures et gravures des cavernes murales pyrénéennes*, by E. Cartailhac and Abbé H. Breuil.

and yet it would be very wrong to consider this most interesting specimen of creation as an ape. He may have been a species of *homo sapiens* that died out, and present man may have developed from some other primitive race. This would offer a scope for new problems. But one thing is sure that if we could see the ancestor of man we might on superficial observation judge him to be a mere brute, but a careful appreciation of his aspirations would reveal the

¹"On the Specific Characteristics of the Neanderthal Skull" in the *Verhandlung der Anat. Gesellsch.* With 13 diagrams. May, 1901. Pp. 44 ff.

dawn of his higher destiny and would show him in a light which has so far not been sufficiently recognized.

If we try to imagine the details of primitive human life, we may be sorry for our remote ancestor because he lacked the conveniences of civilization; we may pity him for the dangers of his precarious existence and may look down upon him on account of his ignorance and savage habits, but at the same time we may envy him for what he has accomplished. When we consider the story which primitive art productions tell us and bear in mind the guesses which suggest themselves with reference to the communal joys and hopes, sorrows and fears, labors and struggles and successful triumphs, we may very well assume that even then life was worth living. Think of the



REINDEER IN A CAVE NEAR FORT DE GAUME IN THE VALLEY OF THE VÉZÈRE.

After a photograph by Professor Capitan of Paris.

communal sing-song of a primeval tribe, of their wailings, their mournings, their longings, their rejoicings; what a warmth of feeling must have pervaded them, and how these half-understood sentiments must have thrilled their souls. Such communal life gradually shaped sound into language and laid the foundation of the humanity of man.

Every age has troubles and charms of its own, and it is not improbable that as the dawn of morning is more beautiful than the broad daylight, so the time when man was in the making was possessed of a grandeur and a poetic freshness which we in our artificialities and conventions can no longer fully appreciate.