TENNESSEE, Mississippi and Arkansas are particularly rich in prehistoric relics; the mounds of various shapes and sizes scattered over the valley of the Mississippi river yielding to the enthusiastic archaeologist thousands of stone implements, and a rich harvest of pottery in singular designs. In the Cossitt Library Museum, in Memphis, there was installed, in March of this year, one of the most complete collections of Mound Builders' pottery ever seen: the gift of Mrs. Carrington Mason to the city of Memphis. While in the possession of Mrs. Mason, it became known as the finest private collection of its kind in the world, and it has been compared favorably with the pottery in the Smithsonian Institution. There are nearly one thousand pieces in all, the designs being varied and wonderfully striking, if one considers the limited resources of the potters of that remote age.

The Memphis collection is interesting from the fact that every piece in it came from one mound in Arkansas. This place is situated about forty miles from the city, and each piece was dug, under Mrs. Mason's personal supervision, by a half-Indian, half-negro workman, who soon became expert in recovering the treasures unbroken. The mound rises in a rectangle, in a wooded flat, occupying a remote corner of a large plantation, and covers a piece of ground quite large enough for a good-sized village, if it were compactly built. Indeed, it may have
been the place of a village, as investigations show many to have been built on sites similar to this. The mound now stands two
ashes, which seemed to have been placed over each interred body.

The pottery is generally made of the clay peculiar to the country contiguous to Memphis, but many pieces of different material show that a commercial spirit existed even among these primitive craftsmen; being probably the result of trading with nations to the east and to the west. The vessels were fashioned for many different uses, and have often the shape of birds, beasts, fishes, human beings; while some are idealized objects. Certain pieces have peculiar marks. One bears the famous swastika, or Greek scroll pattern (Figure I.), borrowed by the Greeks from the ancient Egyptians. The design is intricate and the specimens bearing it are exceedingly rare. This is one of the best known. Others like it have been found in a few instances on the Mediterranean sea floor, the possible flotsam and jetsam of older civilizations than the world remembers.

or three feet above the surrounding country, and possibly, when built, stood much higher; since, the low land surrounding it has been filled in with the rich alluvial deposits brought by the overflows. From this fact, it is believed that this mound and many others in the valley were thrown up as refuges for the villagers and farmers, when the Mississippi overflowed, just as the planters to-day build mounds, on which to drive their cattle, during the high-water season, when the river has left its banks.

The pottery was all found in graves which had been made side by side, on the outer edge of the rectangle,—possibly just beyond the village walls. The presence of each grave was recognized at the time of the excavations by a little heap of wood

Another design shows the inverted pyramid (Figure II.), used by potters and dec-
orators of the Mediterranean countries. Many of the faces represented are distinctly Egyptian in type (Figure III.), many are Peruvian (Figure IV.). The animal forms are usually good, although occasionally the observer finds himself in doubt as to the meaning of certain designs. There are frogs, fishes and turtles. One, the model of which is difficult to determine, may represent either a turtle or a camel with equal accuracy, for the head is crudely fashioned, the legs bowed, and in order to make the vessel useful as a holder of food or water, the body has been distorted until the original outline is lost in obscurity (Figure V.).

Some of the jars are so carefully modeled that, if an animal be represented, the legs are made hollow (Figure VI.), and when a jar is made to be a triple vessel, each bowl, as well as the slender neck, is hollow (Figure VII.).

The most notable jar in this collection is modeled in exact imitation of an old Norse rowing vessel, of the design in use more than a thousand years ago. In securing the jar, the old digger shattered the middle or bowl part, leaving intact the end pieces. These represent accurately the figure-head from the prow, and the ornamental piece from the stern of the boat (Figure VIII.).

This piece of ware was evidently an exact copy of the “Viking:” the boat which was sent across the open sea from Norway to the Columbian Exposition, in Chicago. It will be remembered that this “Viking” was reproduced accurately from an old vessel taken from the sands on the coast of Norway, after having been buried for more than a thousand years.

Several jars have a peculiar pattern, seeming to be overlaid with cords of twisted grass. This effect was produced in the clay, and is evidently an imitation of the net-inclosed water-jars found to this day in the possession of the Aztecs and the Peruvian Indians.
These pieces are not one or two debated points in primitive handicraft. It has been asserted by several good authorities that the art of glazing was unknown in prehistoric times. The Memphis collection shows a fish-shaped jar or bowl, of a red color exquisitely glazed (Figure IX.). The ability to use different colors in the same jar is also proven. The swastika, or Greek scroll pattern already mentioned, this pottery is exceptionally valuable. In the copy of the Norse vessel lies the long-

sought proof that at one time the adventurous sea-kings touched the American shores. For they must have been seen by the aborigines, and this little clay vessel is the tangible thing binding the history of the New with that of the Old World. It may be that some trader from the Mound-Builders' country, traveling to the East, saw this strange little craft over on the Atlantic coast, and modeled for his people its unfamiliar outlines. Or can it be that, at some time, in those dim ages, the strange vessel was pulled by sturdy arms through

the Gulf and up the Mississippi, and that wondering, hospitable natives reproduced
it in clay, as it swung at anchor in the yellow tide?

The antiquity of the pottery cannot be questioned. Just how old it is, none can say. Professor Schliemann, in his exhaustive archaeological investigations, spent much time in the study of the site of ancient Troy. He found there evidences of six perfect and distinct civilizations lying one under the other; the latest of them dating to 1000 B. C. Beneath the oldest of the six, he found a civilization similar to that of the American Mound-Builders. Therefore, this handiwork of the ancient Americans must date back almost to the beginning of time itself.

Evidences of travel are many in these relics. There is pottery made of clay from “the great red Pipe-stone Quarries” of the Northwest; there are shells from the Pacific, stone weapons from the Appalachian range, and from the Rocky Mountains.

These jars and pots, arrow-points and spear heads, the sole remaining proofs of a vanished race, form a most interesting passage in history, preserved by kindly Nature for her youngest children to read.

It has been frequently remarked that plant forms are rarely represented by savages. A possible explanation may be found in the fact that plant life is so passive, it does nothing actively or aggressively as compared with the irrepressible vitality of animals. Thus it does not impress itself on the imagination of backward peoples.

Another explanation has been suggested to me by Dr. Colley March. The need of ornament is based on expectancy. The eye is so accustomed to something in a certain association, that when this is not seen there is experienced a sense of loss. Among savage people the eye is accustomed to dwell on vegetal forms which are always present. It is only when they cease to be present, as in the exceptional circumstances of desert places, or walled towns, that the sense of loss can arise.

It is very probable that the reputed paucity of ornamentation derived from the vegetable world amongst primitive folk may be partly due to our not recognizing it as such. Their conventions are not the same as ours, and they are often satisfied with what appears to us to be a very imperfect realism.

Backward peoples have to be taught to see beauty in nature, and it is very doubtful if the elegance of the form of flower or leaf appeals to them. Bright colors we know please all, and it is the color or scent of flowers and leaves which causes them to be worn or used in decoration.

Where plants are represented by savage peoples we shall probably find that as a rule their employment is primarily due to other causes than the selection of beautiful forms and graceful curves for their own sakes.

—it From “Evolution in Art” Scientific Series