

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers 1*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86)

Antiquity of Life at the North Pole

October 10, 1885 Joseph Cox

Among the very many able works which have been published in the past few years, no one has attracted such intense interest or been more puzzling in the facts and theories to scientific men, than the recent one by Dr. William F. Warren, President of Boston University entitled "Paradise Found: The Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole."

Untiring as have been the efforts for centuries of navigators who have borne all the terrors of the approach to that as yet unreached goal, their object and hope have been, not to find the relics of an ancient and prehistoric race, but a country in which shall now be, living human beings, enjoying a climate, which, while surrounded by perpetual ice and storm, is yet so temperate as to afford all the necessary means of existence. Disastrous as have been the many expeditions carried forward by different nations, there is yet a fascination about the problem which impels, and will forever impel, men to attempt, until it is solved.

The darkness and immense pyramids of ice outside the circle are lightened by auroral flashes from the inner, which will still lure the navigator, it may be to his certain destination (*sic*), but only serves to attract others to seek for his very grave and to take a step beyond a degree or two, perhaps nearer to the central orb, and his remains will afterwards be sought for by other enthusiasts, till the final mystery will be disclosed. Too much has been written of, too many lives and much treasure sacrificed ever to permit the inquiring and far seeking mind of man to rest until his eyes shall gaze on the Pole or pass over very interesting spot of land or sea to find it a myth. There is a strange and wonderful fascination about it and mythical as it may seem to the general reader, the ultimate success of its discovery is a reality which cannot be driven from the minds of men who have risked the most and advanced the farther.

The last day Capt. Hall was in this city previous to the voyage which proved to be his last, he spent at my house, and it was wonderful to hear him discourse on the absolute certainty of its discovery. All the hardships and sufferings and labors of all preceding expeditions were familiar to him in their minutest details. He spoke of and dilated upon them, pointed out the mistakes which prevented their success, but never once expressed a doubt of the existence of a land of pleasant temperature exuberant life, bright skies and wonderful fertility. Nay, further he reiterated in the most positive manner that he had obtained almost a full view of it, more complete and satisfactory than had ever before been obtained, that he had the key to the whole mystery and only held it back because he wanted the final result to be obtained under the flag of an American vessel, chartered by the government. That in the event of his failure in this last expedition, he had left such memoranda carefully prepared and in safe hands to be published after his death as would no longer leave any doubt in the minds of the world.

But the work of Dr. Warren is devoted not so much to the present of the Pole or to any possibility of finding it a place suitable for the abode of human beings as to show its amazing fertility of life in the past, and to prove that it was the cradle not only of human, but of all life. The book is intensely interesting, not only in the fascination of its style, but in the elaborate argument which he puts forth, and the immense weight of authority he cites from all nations, ages and authors to sustain the position he lays down. I have prepared this essay, not with the idea of attempting to refute any of his statements, or of giving adhesion to them, but in the hope that it will call the attention of the club, and others may read and find a rich mine of thought, theory and fact, which is nowhere so attainable in such a brief and attractive style.

The doctor takes up, describes and discourses on all the theories of all nations as to the Paradise or original spot of existence of the human family, cites the most eminent of authors and writers, criticizes and explains until one would that there was no room for further learning on the subject.

He affirms strongly the unity of human race, its origin at one place and subsequent dispersion over the world. This place he affirms to have been the North Pole, charges it is a new popular fallacy that the North Pole has always been a region of perpetual ice, and unendurable cold; that science has long since dissipated this idea, and now that all the discoveries of the past ages have tended to show abundantly that once it was the only part of the Earth habitable for man or beast. In support of this, he claims that all the best authorities of science hold and teach that the earth was once a globe, too hot to support any form of life, and then only at some particular time in the cooling process was there a temperature reached which was adapted to the necessities of living things. In what portion of the Earth's surface would this temperature be first reached, is the great question to be solved.

He argues that in those far geological ages, the heat received from the great central furnace of our system, the sun, cannot have been less than at the present time. Some geologists claiming it to have been greater. That the surface of the globe must have had a temperature determined, first by the fixed and uniform inherited heat of the Earth's mass, and secondly, by the varying quantity of heat received from the sun. But the difference between the solar heat received under the equator and that received at a point at the Pole, cannot have been less in those days than at the present time and this incessant [] of the equatorial heat of the earth by the direct rays of the sun suggests at once the portions of the globe to which we must look if we would find the regions which first became cool enough to sustain organic life. Then, as now, the polar regions must have been cooler than the equatorial; and hence as far as the teachings of theoretical geology can be trusted, the conclusion is inevitable that in the polar regions life first became possible.

He then claims that at the pole are the longest known days of light. That the idea of an unbroken night of six months is not true in fact, exists only in our imaginations. That astronomical geography teaches us that, as respects daylight, the polar regions are and always have been the most favored portions of the globe. When the sun sets there, about

the 22nd of September, the inhabitants enjoy a perpetual aurora till he has descended 18 degrees below the horizon. In his course through the elliptic, the sun is two months before he can reach this point during which there is a perpetual twilight. In two months more he arrives at the same point, when a new twilight commences which is continually increasing in brilliancy for two months more when he is seen rising in all his glory. So that the light of day is enjoyed in a greater or less degree for ten months without interruption, and during the remaining two months, the moon is shining above the horizon for two half months without interruption, and there are in reality but two separate fortnights of darkness in the year and this was attended by the brilliancy of the stars and the curuscations of the Aurora Borealis. To support this theory, he quotes many astronomers and officers of Arctic expeditions. The officers of an Austrian Expedition in 1873 saw the sun three days before he was expected to rise.

Another in 1882 gives the same. In Bounty Expedition in 1595, it is said that the sun was seen sixteen days before the time in which he should have risen according to calculation, and his light was seen when his body was actually more than 4 degrees below the horizon. And summing up all the authorities and giving them the largest length of darkness claimed, he states the fact to be that there are at the pole 289 days of light and only 76 days of darkness in the year; and that so far as light is concerned, the polar region is twice as favorable to life as any equatorial region that can be named. That after these long unbroken months of daylight the soul would yearn for a new vision of stellar glories of the night. The moon and the silent stars and the mystic play of the northern light would transpose the familiar daylight world into a veritable fairy land.

He then proceeds to claim for Prehistoric Climatology, that the temperature of the North Pole was such as to admit it to have been the habitation of men originally and he argues that if the Earth from its earliest consolidation had been steadily cooling, it is hardly possible to conceive of a method by which any region, too hot for human residents, can become too cold, except by passing through all the intermediate stages of temperature, some of which must have been precisely adapted to human comfort, and all scientific authorities admit that at our time there was within the Arctic Circle a tropical climate. The best authorities in science in Europe and America conclude that all the floral types and forms revealed in the oldest fossils of the earth originated in the region of the North Pole and then spread, first over the northern & then over the southern hemisphere from north to south. That no plants except a few lichens or sea weeds ever originated near the South Pole. At the highest northern latitude, Sir Charles Lyell says 30 species of coniferae have been found, including several allied to the gigantic Wellington of California. Also birches, oaks, planes, poplars, walnuts, limes and even magnolias, two cones of ulud have been lately obtained, proving that this splendid evergreen wants not only lived but ripened its fruit within the Arctic Circle. Of the limes, planes and oaks, all were of [lean] species, and both flowers and fruits and immense quantities of leaves have been preserved. In Spitzenberg, within 12° of the Pole, ninety species of fossil plants have been obtained. And many species, which in our time are humble plants, are proved by the fossils found to have been trees of 80 or 90 feet high.

The proof of animal life is not less remarkable. Small shells, corals, crabs and lobsters are

very abundant. Of insects, not less than 1300 species have been determined. Mollusks are abundant. Bivalves and univalves. Fishes very abundant. Huge reptiles and land tortoises, one far exceeding any living tortoise length 20 feet from snout to extremity of tail and seven feet high. Rhinocera, but larger than those of our day. Whalebone, whales, tapirs, sloth, mastodons and elephants, weasels and otters, cats, tigers, monkeys, some equalizing [] in stature; numerous birds.

Natural history of our time can produce no species of fishes or [amphibians], reptiles, birds, apes or other animals whose dimensions are not surpassed by the fossils found of those which once existed in the highest latitudes.

If all these once existed at the North Pole, it must have been a tropical or semitropical climate for many of the species now existing are only found in these climates. And if they existed there, can we not easily conceive that it was also a climate in which the human family might once have lived, enjoying all the comforts derivable from such animal and vegetable life which everywhere surrounded them.

The Arctic [] tells us of the wonderful ivory [] of Siberia. From the days of Pliny they have constantly been undergoing exploration and still they are the chief headquarters of supply. The northern islands of Siberia seem built up of the covered bones of the mammoths; and northward of the river Lena large quantities are dug out of the ground every year. Indeed, some of the islands are believed to be nothing but an accumulation of drift timber and the bodies of mammoths and other Arctic deluvial animals forged together, and the ignorant natives have an idea that the mammoth is an underground animal, plowing his way through the earth like a mole, and that he still lives in subterranean passages.

The traditions of the earliest nations of the world point to the North Pole, not only as having been inhabited, but also as the seat of the supreme power of God, or the gods. The Hebrews regarded the North as a sacred quarter, from where promotion comes. They designated the cardinal points by personal terms, before for east behind for west; left-hand for north and right hand for south. And Job, in the 8th & 9th verses, Chapter 23, speaking of the left hand or North, designates it is the place "where God doth work." He cites many passages that danger sometimes comes from the right hand, or the South, but that on the North was God's holy [], the "city of the great King." The place where divine power had hung the world on nothing, and hence the priest, officiating at the altar in the tabernacle faced the North and according to the Talmud, David had an Aeolian Harp in the North window of his bedchamber, that the North wind might wake him at midnight for prayer.

The Egyptians conceived the earth as rising to the north so that in the northern part it joined the sky, and they located their gods in the extreme north, and they conceived the northern hemisphere the realm of light, and the southern, the realm of darkness. The passage out of the secret chamber of the great Pyramid pointed precisely to the North Pole, and all the other pyramids have the opening to the North.

The Akkadians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Indians, Iranians associated the true heaven, the abode of the highest gods with the northern celestial pole, and all their priests in sacrifice faced the North. The first actions and words of the infant Buddha on his arrival in this world identifies the North with the abode of the gods.

The Phoenicians, Greeks, Etruscans and Roman conceptions hold also the same idea. Heaven was, according to their idea, upheld by Atlas which was at the North Pole, and Olympus, the home of the gods, was there also, and they regarded thunder and lightning from the northern sky more significant than from any other quarter "being bright and nearer to the abode of Jove."

So the Chinese locate the palace of the gods in a celestial space, about the North pole; they worship the Pole Star as the Lord of Heaven. The same tradition is found in the ancient German and Finnish religions.

As to the dispersion of the human race and animals and vegetable life from the North Pole, he claims that the progressive cooling of the region at the pole is all sufficient as a natural cause. "As might be readily supposed, these Arctic regions which first became cool enough to maintain life moved from the same cause be the first to become too cold for the same purpose and the life being naturally forced downwards to each successive point when the earth became cool enough for existence, and forced from that spot as it became too cool. For the purpose of this migration, the earth is admirably adapted. Nearly the whole of the Earth's surface is corrugated North and South with alternate continents and deep-sea channels from pole to pole. The great ocean current, due north and south, the mountain ranges are mainly north and south, as also the great rivers. The North wind would bear the seed and pollen of plants to a South latitude through their [] the insects and herbivorous animals would follow the plants the birds and carnivorous animals would follow the herbivorous animals and the insects.

These facts and arguments are set forth in every possible and plausible light which if they do not carry conviction to the author's views, are difficult to overthrow.

But I have already written more than I intended. To those who are interested in the antiquities of our race and world, this book will afford an infinite delight in the many and various facts it states, and the theories it draws, of which this sketch gives but an imperfect idea.