Letters to the Editor.

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Australoid Element in the Korannas.

IN a short paper which I published six years ago on the craniology of the yellow-skinned races of South Africa, I pointed out that the Hottentots and Korannas seemed to me to be very distinct from the Bushmen. The former have dolichocephalic skulls and are well-built men, often of tall stature: the latter are a small race with skulls that are nearly brachycephalic. The Hottentots of south-west Africa, and the Korannas of the Vaal River valley, while apparently branches of the same race, have certain distinguishing characters. The typical Hottentots are not improbably the primitive race contaminated by a considerable Bushman admixture; while the Korannas are apparently nearer to the primitive type, but with a considerable Australoid element.

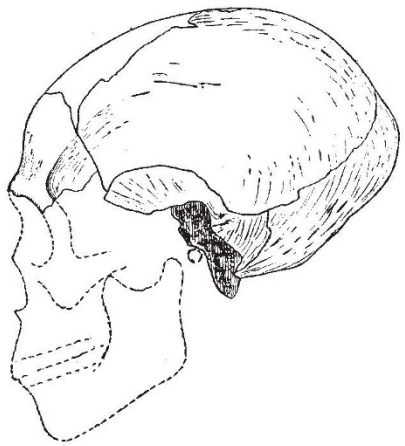

FIG. 1.—Orthoprojection of Australoid skull from Barkly West, South Africa. One quarter natural size.

A few months ago, the discovery of the Springbok skull revealed to us the fact that many thousands of years ago there lived in South Africa a large-brained powerfully built race which was neither Bushman nor Bantu, and a race which in all essentials resembles the living Korannas so closely as to leave little doubt that the Korannas are the descendants, somewhat degenerate and somewhat mixed with another race. In my paper I suggested the possibility of contamination by *Homo rhodesiensis*. Whether later discoveries will confirm this suggestion there can now be little doubt that a race has lived in South Africa with a skull which with a low brow and well-marked supraorbital ridges recalls in many ways the Neanderthaloids and the Rhodesian man.

A skull has just been discovered by Mr. G. J. van Alphen, magistrate at Barkly West, near Kimberley, which though very imperfect seems well worthy of description. The fragments of the skull were got in a deep alluvial bank at Canteen Kopje. The fragments obtained are the practically complete occiput, most of the left parietal, much of the left frontal, parts of both temporals and fragments of the right parietal, and some fragments of limb bones. As no jaws or teeth were found, it seems unlikely that the remains are from a grave. The bones are much mineralised and certainly old, but there is no satisfactory evidence to decide how old. Most probably they are much more recent than either the Boskop skull or the Springbok skull.

Fortunately, the fragments of the left side of the skull enable us to make a complete restoration of the brain case. The occiput is very long and moderately flat, and the parietals exceptionally large. As a result, the part of the skull behind the plane of the ear is unusually large. The frontal, on the other hand, is low and relatively narrow and there is a very large but thin and flat supraorbital ridge. The antero-posterior measurement of the skull is 205 mm., and the greatest breadth about 140 mm.; the basi-trigmatic height is estimated to be also about 140 mm. The greater part of the temporal is preserved on one side or the other, so that it can be restored with confidence. The mastoid process is exceptionally well developed.

The face is entirely lost except for the upper margin of the left orbit, but as the position of the auditory meatus is certain, the face can be restored with some probability.

When the whole skull is restored it is seen to be very unlike that of the Bushman or Bantu, and only a little like that of the typical Koranna. Most probably it is the skull of a representative of the early Australoid race of South Africa, or possibly a Koranna in which the Australoid characters are unusually prominent.

In the absence of the face, it is scarcely safe to discuss the affinities further, but this skull, when added to the other early types already known—the Rhodesian, the Boskop, and the Springbok—shows that our craniological problem is by no means a simple one.

R. BROOM.

The Original Home and Mode of Dispersal of the Coconut.

ALMOST simultaneously with the publication of my article under this title in NATURE of July 27, Dr. John K. Small, head curator of the Museums, New York Botanical Garden, published an article on "The Early History of the Coconut Palm" in the *Journal of the New York Botanical Garden* for July (vol. 30, p. 153), which reached Kew on Aug. 9.

The early history given by Dr. Small is adapted from a letter received from the late Dr. William E. Safford, a well-known authority, and it is of interest to find that he considered there seems to be no evidence pointing to the probability of its American origin.

Beccari has pointed out, as I have indicated, that the American species of *Cocos* are not nearly related to *Cocos nucifera* and that it is more closely allied to *Jubæopsis Caffra* of South Africa than to any of the so-called *Cocos* of South America. In his interesting paper, "The Origin and Dispersal of *Cocos nucifera*" (*Philip. Jour. Sci.*, **12**, Bot. pp. 27-43; 1917), to which I regret I did not refer in my article, he brings forward very conclusive facts against the suggested American origin of the coconut. Beccari also, from the evidence afforded by the Palmyra Islands, Cocos-Keeling, and Krakatau, produces convincing proofs that the coconut can germinate when washed ashore on coral atolls or sea beaches without human aid.

The historical points referred to by Dr. Safford, which are published by Dr. Small, seem to be worthy of wider attention, so I have extracted those of most importance.

"The supposed *Cocos* from northern South America observed by Cieza de Léon (born 1518), which through an incorrect translation was considered to be *C. nucifera*, must have been a genus of palms closely