

**Obituary notice of Sir E. Ray Lankester / [J. Reid Moir].**

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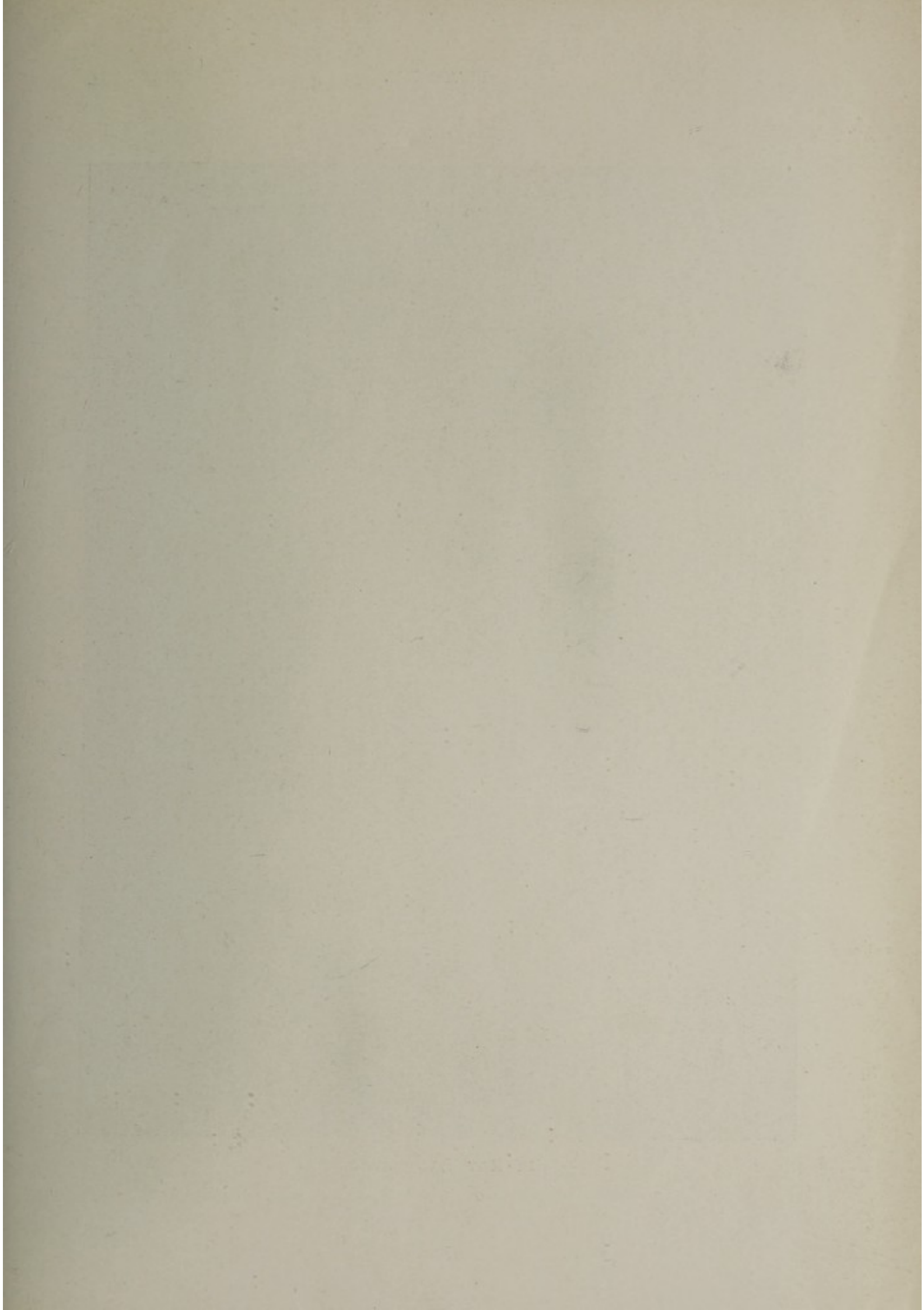
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VOL. VI.—PART II.

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OBITUARY NOTICE  
OF  
SIR E. RAY LANKESTER  
BY  
J. REID MOIR.

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SIR RAY LANKESTER.



## OBITUARY.

## SIR EDWIN RAY LANKESTER, K.C.B., F.R.S., D.Sc., LL.D., 1847-1929.

Though to those who were intimate with Ray Lankester, the passing months of 1929 had saddened us with the knowledge that the end of his life was fast approaching, yet the sense of loss when his death was announced was unmitigated, and still remains. It is by no means an easy task to write in a fitting manner of so great, and, to those who were admitted to his friendship, of so lovable a man as Ray Lankester. This is especially so in my case, as it was he who trained me in science, who was a tower of strength when I was engaged in making public the then revolutionary views of the antiquity of man, and who was always my dear and loyal friend.

Though Ray Lankester's name will, in scientific matters, be always rightly associated chiefly with his work in zoology and biology, yet he took, during nearly the whole of his life, a deep and abiding interest in prehistoric archæology, and it is of this side of his great services to science that I wish to draw attention here. When, between 1860 and 1890, the extensive diggings in search of "coprolite" were being made in Suffolk below the Red Crag, Lankester's attention was drawn to the remarkable series of mammalian, and other fossils, contained in the Bone Bed at the base of the Crag. The examination which he carried out of these remains resulted in the publication, in 1870, of a paper in the *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society*, in which, for the first time, a detailed and lucid account was given of the varying age, and nature of the contents of the Suffolk Bone Bed. Lankester was, in fact, the greatest authority upon this deposit and its associated problems, and, to the last, his interest in it never waned. During the year 1909 I discovered beneath the Red Crag at Ipswich a number of flints which, after due consideration, I decided had been flaked by man. If this conclusion were correct, it meant that the long-debated question as to whether human beings were present on this earth in Pliocene times was at last to be settled. It meant, also, as I realised at the time, that, in all probability, a long and heated controversy would be inaugurated when my claim to have discovered the flint implements of Pliocene man was made public. But I felt so strongly that such a discovery had come about that I decided to make it known, and I did so by means of a letter to the "Times," which was published on October 17th, 1910.

In those days I did not know Ray Lankester, but, thinking he would be interested, and with some amount of trepidation, I wrote to him giving an account of the specimens I had found, and asking him if he would care to examine them. He was abroad when my letter was sent, but, on his return, he replied to it, and subsequently visited my house, where he carefully went over the material I had collected. With this he was much impressed, and, accepting the view that it had been modified by man, he read a paper before the Royal Society in November, 1911, which was published in the *Philosophical Transactions*, and in which his acceptance was expressed with force and lucidity. The fact of the occurrence of flint implements in the Suffolk Bone Bed was, apart from its scientific importance, of great interest to Lankester, who often remarked to me that he would always regret that when engaged in examining the fossiliferous contents of this deposit, he had never entertained the notion that among them might be found humanly-flaked flints. In his paper before the Royal Society, Lankester laid great and—as has since appeared—justifiable stress upon the beak-like implements, to which he gave the descriptive name "rostro-carinate," and drew attention to the fact that this



type had been hitherto unrecognised by archæologists. His examination of these particular specimens from below the Red Crag had enabled him to realise the ideal design which the flint flakers of Pliocene times had, as it were, set before themselves, and this ideal was closely approached in a wonderfully symmetrical rostro-carinate found in the Stone Bed beneath the Norwich Crag. This implement, discovered by the late W. G. Clarke, was named by Lankester "The Norwich Test Specimen," and described by him in an elaborate monograph published as an "Occasional Paper" by the Royal Anthropological Institute.

Two other papers in the *Proceedings* of the Royal Society—one dealing with a series of ancient flints collected by Mr. Heron-Allen, F.R.S., upon the beach at Selsey Bill—followed, while in Lankester's "Kingdom of Man" (1907), there is an account—with illustrations—of some typical eoliths from the Kent plateau. He wrote also about the various phases of prehistoric man's existence, and of the nature of flint, in his popular books on science, and in numerous articles and letters to newspapers and periodicals.

When Lankester was a young man he visited Abbeville, and the famous archæologist, Boucher de Perthes, who gave him some palæolithic flint implements which were not then accepted universally as the work of man. These specimens formed part of a choice and extensive collection, the greater portion of which was presented by Lankester to the Ipswich Museum, of which he was the President. But, though the well-known palæolithic implements attracted him, there is no doubt that the artifacts from beneath the Red Crag were—ever since he became acquainted with them—his chief archæological interest. Of these he was never tired of learning, or of visiting the places where they had been found, and many were the excursions we took together to the excavations I conducted in East Anglia. Lankester, some of whose ancestors were Eastern Counties people, was Vice-President of "The Prehistoric Society of East Anglia" in 1914-15, and always took a practical and real interest in its activities.

Such, in brief, is an account of his associations with prehistoric archæology, but I cannot conclude these notes without some reference, however inadequate, to the man himself.

Lankester, as all who knew him quickly recognised, possessed a gigantic intellect, and a complete devotion to scientific truth. In fact, science to him was, as it were, holy ground, and any who deliberately failed to realise this were to be treated with uncompromising severity. There was no one who could be more helpful and encouraging to those who were sincerely in search of the truth—but at any sign of sham or pretence, Lankester was roused to a cold fury. Though this unchanging view of the sacredness of science, together with a passion for justice, and complete fearlessness in its attainment, were the mainsprings of his conduct, there was, perhaps, a trace of the intellectual aristocrat in Lankester which made him, on occasions, inclined to be intolerant with those not so gifted mentally as himself. Another characteristic which has left a lasting impression upon me was his constant habit of what I would term "ruthless" thinking. There was no "half way house" in intellectual matters with Lankester, and he followed with eagerness, and as far as his mind was capable of taking him, any line of thought, with a complete disregard as to whether this method resulted in the rejection of opinions previously held. As he often told me, Thomas Henry Huxley, who he spoke of as his master, was his pattern and hero in scientific matters, and no one since Huxley's day more firmly upheld the flag of true science, or described its achievements in clearer and more compelling language than did Lankester. Like Huxley, he was also a great and unexampled expounder of the truths of science to the public, and this—perhaps one of the most beneficial tasks to which any scientific man can apply himself—may, in the long run, rank even as high in value as Lankester's discoveries and contributions to zoology and biology.



But, in addition to being a great scientist, Lankester was a man of the world, and his wonderful knowledge of men and affairs made his ordinary conversation both charming and instructive, while his mastery of the art of being able to say, in an inimitable manner, diverting things, though still retaining a grave and solemn countenance, was altogether delightful. I visited him for the last time a few weeks before his death, and found him, though bodily much enfeebled, as mentally alert and as anxious as ever to discuss the latest developments in science.

His death on August 15th, 1929, removed from our midst an outstanding and unique scientific personality, and as a friend and devoted pupil I pay this last tribute to his genius.

J. REID MOIR.



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