

CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Editor of the Geologist.

SIR,—When a subject of so much importance as the antiquity of the human race is being discussed, there is a liability to the production of fallacious facts, as well as the possibility of “true facts” being pressed beyond their legitimate value.

A correspondent has furnished you with some particulars concerning the discovery of a human skull in the valley of the Trent, near Newark—a very different locality from the vale of Belvoir.

I am of opinion that some caution is necessary before this discovery can be taken in evidence upon the subject in support of which it is brought forward. There are facts associated with the locality which, I conceive, do not support the apparent testimony—that the skull in question belonged to an individual who lived in the age of animals now extinct. The position in which it was discovered—so near to the river Trent—would give a degree of suspicion to its being a genuine witness; besides, its being so near to a bend in the river would make its value additionally questionable. The horns of deer, and bones of extinct animals, with which it was found, do not supply a sufficient reason in this particular instance for its being produced in evidence of a high antiquity.

Any one who is familiar with the geological phenomena of the Trent Valley would regard with considerable doubt the claims which this skull should have in bearing testimony upon so important a question, because an apparently undisturbed condition of the drift could not be relied upon as a safe criterion by which to judge of the antiquity of its animal remains, in localities near to the present channel of the river. The Trent, in various parts of the valley, is ever changing its course, especially at the curves. In the course of a few centuries, therefore, it is possible the stream might deviate considerably from its original channel. This fact has been observed in several instances. In one example, a few miles from the place at which the remains alluded to were discovered, the gradual erosion of the land from one side at a bend in the river, and an equivalent deposition on the opposite margin, has continued until several acres have been transferred from one side of the river to the other, within the memory of living individuals. The river, moreover, does not continue at the same depth at any particular place; places which were once fordable are now too deep to pass over, and *vice versa*.

If human remains were discovered at a depth of twenty-five feet in these drift gravels, over which it was known the river had passed in recent times, it is certain they could not supply any satisfactory evidence of a high antiquity.

The diagram at p. 351 represents the locality of the discovery. The sharpness of the curve in the river would undoubtedly in a few centuries cause the stream at this place to deviate more or less from its original course. This skull may, therefore, have been in the first instance at the bottom of the river with the bones of animals and horns of deer washed out from the drift gravels, and as the stream gradually removed from the channel in which it then flowed, they would be covered by its deposits. In course of time the river would have removed to a distance from its former bed in which the remains were found.

The association of pottery with the other relics in so limited a space as fifteen feet would seem to indicate a depression in the bed of the river, into which they would be collected by the current.

The river's deposition of sand and silt would also assume that natural form which would have the appearance of an undisturbed stratification, because it had been formed by natural causes.

If those who have inspected the locality have fully estimated these facts, it may be the discovery is as valuable as your correspondent appears to consider it.

I am, dear Sir, yours respectfully,

Nottingham, 13th Sept., 1861.

J. H. W.