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LETTERS

To the Editor

Energized, Si!

Dear Sir:

As to St. Elmo's Fire in the April 15 issue and the point discharge we call corona, "... molecules of gas in the air are ignited and the region around the point becomes ionized and glows."

Ignited? No!

While writing, let me say that I very much like the new form of the magazine.

A. D. Moore
Professor Emeritus
The University of Michigan
College of Engineering
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Tempest in the Flower Kingdom

Dear Sir:

Just read Glenn Walthall's letter in April 29 SCIENCE NEWS about the classification of Indian pipe, and your reply. I am not a botanist but have considerable botanical knowledge. I know there have been differences of opinion on the classification of plants.

All of the sources available to me separate the saprophytic plants having no green chlorophyll, including the Indian pipe, pine drops, and the beautiful bright red snow plant of the California Sierras, from the Wintergreen group; that is, the latter are in the family (or subfamily) Pyrolaceae, and the former are in the family (or subfamily) Monotropaceae. Some authorities make both of these subfamilies under the family Ericaceae (the Heaths).

It seems to me these botanists are justified in separating the saprophytic, non-chlorophyll containing plants from the more normal green plants of the Wintergreen group, at least into separate subfamilies.

Very truly yours,
E. J. Newcomer, Editor
The Lepidopterists' News

A rose by any other name smells just as sweet, and an Indian pipe is still as ghostly white whether it is listed as a member of the Wintergreen family or the Heath family. Actually, Indian pipe is listed under both families, depending upon which source or which edition is used. According to a Smithsonian Institution botanist, the Wintergreen family can now also be considered as part of the Heath family.

Intense debates on exact nomenclature

of plants have been going on for centuries among the botanists. Scientists around the world find that taxonomy, as systematic classification of plants is called, is often complicated by obscure or conflicting basic information. More than 50 different names may be used for the same plant—and sometimes the same name is given to different plants. Like lexicons, dictionaries, encyclopedias and other vital documents of today's civilization, books of taxonomy are also constantly being reworked and revised. An international plant index using IBM cards is underway at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, New Haven, to assemble, for the first time in one compilation, some 1.7 million Latin plant names.

No Slight Intended

Dear Sir:

In preparation for one of our classes dealing with the biological sciences and public policy, and perhaps for an address I am preparing, I desire to point out some of the areas where the biological sciences are not receiving their just due.

One example of such "prejudice" I should like to use is the manner in which SCIENCE NEWS has failed to recognize the biological sciences in the special "Notes" pages now running in your magazine. One can look through issue after issue of SCIENCE NEWS and find "Social Sciences Notes," "Physical Sciences Notes," "Medical Sciences Notes," "Technology Notes," but never have I found a page headed "Biological Sciences Notes" or, if you prefer, "Life Sciences Notes."

I am not quarreling with the general coverage you give the biological sciences. I merely wish to point out to my audiences an example of how you consistently have special feature "Notes" pages for most other major disciplines, but rarely, if at all, do you run such a page on the biological sciences. With the tremendous "explosion" of knowledge in the biological sciences, plus the excitement that notes concerning the new biology would bring your readers, my colleagues and I are mystified with regard to your policy in this matter.

Edward A. Steinhilber, Dean
University of California, Irvine

(It has been on our mind; this may be all the encouragement we need. Ed.)