

## FIRST GLANCES AT NEW BOOKS

A TEXTBOOK OF SYSTEMATIC BOTANY—Deane B. Swingle—*McGraw-Hill* (\$3). For a generation at least, ever since the study of botany forsook the ways of the "scientia amabilis" and began to devote itself more and more to morphology, to genetics, to physiology and ecology, botanists have been wishing for a book which they could put into the hands of their more promising students, who are not satisfied with just "keying things out in Gray," but want to know something about the philosophy of the process. Here it is at last, and it should prove a potent means for raising taxonomy, now the Cinderella of the botanical sisterhood, out of the ashes of neglect and restoring this amiable study to its rightful place. Professor Swingle gets together into one place and presents very compactly and yet very readably the gist of taxonomic science. He speaks without fear on the ticklish questions that rouse controversy among the brethren, but with such moderation and good nature as to offend no one. He sums up the principal families in brief descriptive sections. He suggests whither future taxonomic development may lead. The McGraw-Hill Book Company have good right to be proud of having published this volume—and it ought to sell like hot cakes.

*Botany*  
*Science News-Letter, June 23, 1928*

SOME FAMOUS MEDICAL TRIALS—Leonard A. Parry—*Scribner's* (\$2.50). Readers of detective and mystery stories will be disappointed in this book, which, on the other hand, will doubtless appeal to criminologists. Famous trials of physicians are briefly reviewed with comments on the judicial and legal procedures. While the material would furnish the basis for many a thrilling tale, the treatment is not such as would appeal to the popular imagination.

*Medicine*  
*Science News-Letter, June 23, 1928*

WILD ANIMAL PETS—William and Irene Finley—*Scribner's* (\$3). The authors have made friends and domestic companions of such shy creatures as snowshoe rabbits and armadillos and of such unlikely ones as bobcats and condors; in their book they tell most entertainingly how it is done.

*Zoology*  
*Science News-Letter, June 23, 1928*

THE BRAIN FROM APE TO MAN—Frederick Tilney, New York—*Paul B. Hoeber* (\$25). Dr. Tilney set out to prove the theory of evolution by a careful study and comparison of the brains and skulls of all primates, historic and prehistoric. The results of his studies have so far convinced him of the truth of the theory that he now considers interest in the subject to be centered about the future development of man's brain.

While it is unfortunate that many of the specific points in support of the theory are so technical as to be unintelligible to the average lay reader, there are many other chapters that give a vivid picture of man's development in terms which anyone can understand. Nor does Dr. Tilney fail to make himself understood when it comes to a restatement of his anatomical observations and their significance. "That there was a definite prehuman stock, a stock capable of producing both anthropoid apes and man, cannot be disputed. But at least five critical and closely interdependent specializations determine the status of the human race: the appearance (1) of the human brain, (2) of the human foot, (3) of the human hand, (4) of the erect posture with bipedal locomotion, and (5) a terrestrial mode of life."

Further consolation for those unhappy ones who believed that the evolutionary theory implied a direct simian ancestry may be found elsewhere in Dr. Tilney's book. "There are unquestionable differences between the anthropoids and man which justify the opinion of extremely remote kinship at best, even in spite of striking similarities." These very similarities, Dr. Tilney believes, are due not so much to kinship as to similar problems in the prehistoric struggle for existence which caused similar structural modifications in the anthropoids and in man.

Dr. Tilney is one of those who advance the theory that man first appeared on the earth somewhere in Central Asia, much further east than legendary geography leads one to believe. From this point Dr. Tilney traces man's migration along eastern, northern, western and southern routes, showing that only along the western route has there been marked development along intellectual and cultural lines.

*Evolution*  
*Science News-Letter, June 23, 1928*

## NATURE RAMBLINGS

BY FRANK THONE

*Natural History*



### Muskrat

A generation ago, muskrat furs were not held in very high regard; today, with the supply of the more precious peltries of the Canadian high north becoming depleted and the Siberian supply seriously interfered with by the effects of political revolution, muskrat has become a valuable staple in the fur market. So much so, indeed, that muskrat "farming" is taking its place among our industries, along with the farming of the highly expensive silver fox and the rigidly protected sealeries of the Pribilof Islands.

Muskrat "farming," however, partakes more of the nature of protected and systematized trapping on private preserves than it does of the exploitation of fairly well domesticated animals like the fox. The principal commercial muskrat area is in the vast swamps of the Gulf edge of Louisiana, where great private holdings of the almost valueless land (if it can be called land) are parcelled off and leased out or sold to the trappers. These men know from experience how much trapping a given piece will stand without being depleted, and practice conservation of the animals for the benefit of their own business.

The great Mississippi flood last year temporarily disrupted muskrat "farming" in Louisiana. It did not wipe out the animals, as was at first thought might be the case, but it scattered them through a considerable stretch of new territory. Last winter the trappers were actively engaged in following them to their new haunts and trapping them alive for transportation back to their old homes. It is expected that the restocking will be successful, and that soon the muskrat "farms" will once more be going full blast.

*Science News-Letter, June 23, 1928*