

Natural Inventions

➤ **MAN'S** invincible egotism is reflected in the names he gives to natural objects and structures which his own mechanical inventions chance to resemble. If someone mentions a pitcher-plant, or a hammerhead shark, or a shoebill stork, we all conjure up a vision of the fantastic creature at once, and think how aptly it was named—disregarding the fact that these things existed long before any human being had contrived a pitcher, or a hammer, or a shoe, or any other artifact; long before human beings were on the scene at all.

Fish and other sea creatures seem to have been especial victims of this tendency of man to play the part of a god and make things, not in his own image, but the image of his handiwork. Thus we have such names as sawfish, swordfish, pipefish, filefish, ribbonfish, threadfish, swordtail, sailfish, gafftops' catfish, and a hundred others. Sometimes they are named not for their actual appearance but for the fancied resemblance of their activities to our own, as in the fiddler crab, angler-fish, archerfish,

drumfish. One such naming seems to be justified: inkfish. Men use the dark fluid secreted by this squid (which is not a real fish) for ink; its brown tint is known in the water-colorist's box by the mollusk's zoological name: *Sepia*.

Fish are not the only examples of this tendency to name natural things for artificial objects or activities. Plants, especially wild-flowers, come in for a lot of it. Consider: bottle tree, barrel cactus, organ-pipe cactus, Indian paintbrush, Indian pipe, lady's slipper, Venus' flytrap, Venus' mirror, Solomon's seal, Dutchman's breeches, trumpet-flower, pincushion flower, Spanish bayonet, silversword, swordgrass, sawgrass, chain fern, shield fern, sword fern, cannonball tree, bell-flower, screw palm, sword bean, knife bean, inkberry, telegraph plant.

Sometimes a shape will reflect itself in half-a-dozen names. There's a whole set of cups for example: buttercup, creamcup, cupweed, leathercup, deathcup mushroom. Or a particular texture will sponsor several plants: silk-oak; satinwood, velvet-leaf.

In a few cases, the process has been reversed, and man acknowledges his debt. Such names may recognize merely chance or fanciful resemblances, such as a carpenter's horse or catheads on a ship or fire-dogs on the hearth or wormgears in machinery. Or they may show a definite tendency for man to study the works of nature and profit thereby.

(A reprint from SNL, Oct. 16, 1943.)

Science News Letter, September 17, 1949

PSYCHOLOGY

Rats Bewildered First Time They Feel Hunger

➤ **RATS** that are very hungry for the first time do not know what to do about it.

This was found in an experiment with 12 albino rats tested by Dr. Keith J. Hayes, of the Yerkes Laboratories of Primate Biology. He reported results to the meeting of the American Psychological Association in Denver, Colo.

Seven thirsty rats learned to run straight down an alleyway to reach water in a box through a trap door at the end of the alley. Each time they made the run they had to climb over a heap of food in a pan halfway down the runway.

For five hungry rats the experiment was reversed. They learned to run down the alley to find food and half way down the runway they waded through water in a pan. Later the thirsty rats who had run over the food to get to their water were made very hungry and put into the alleyway. They did not stop to eat when they came to the food, but ran right on according to their habit. When they got to the box at the end, some of them tasted the water, but did not actually drink. After a few runs, most of them stopped at the food pan, but ate only a little. Some took pieces of food through the trap door to eat it there.

By contrast, the rats who had been hungry during learning and had waded through water on their way to food, stopped to drink when they went down the alley thirsty. They did this on the very first trial.

No explanation was offered by Dr. Hayes of why the rats know what to do the first time they are very thirsty, but ignore the food the first time they feel hungry.

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PSYCHOLOGY

Businessmen Gain by Increasing Reading Speed

➤ **IT PAYS** for business executives of above average reading ability to take a training course in reading, Carol S. Bellows, a psychological counselor of Grosse Pointe Park, Mich., told the meeting of the American Psychological Association in Denver, Colo.

Mrs. Bellows bases this conclusion on what happened when several groups of executive personnel from two industrial plants and a bank took a 10-week course of one and a half hour training periods.

At the beginning, these executives read at about 275 words a minute. In comprehension of what they read, they scored as well as 45 per cent of college seniors.

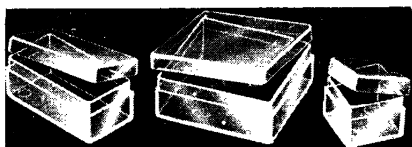
By the end of the 10-week course, they had gained 175 words per minute in speed, now reading at the average rate of 450 words a minute. In comprehension they scored as well as or better than 70 per cent of college seniors.

The course included discussion of various reading skills and practice in their application as well as use of the Harvard reading films as a pacing device.

It pays to take such a course, Mrs. Bellows concludes, because "there is probably a significant saving in time for the business or industrial executive who increases his rate even as little as 50 words a minute.

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Words in Science— CENTRIFUGAL FORCE

➤ **CENTRIFUGAL**—you say it cent-riff-you-gal, accenting the riff—is just the opposite of centripetal, pronounced cent-trip-i-tal.

It means away from the center. It is centrifugal force that separates the lighter cream from the milk in a separator, and that throws the water out of wet clothing in the "whirl-dry" of the washing machine.

It is centripetal force that holds the earth and the other heavenly bodies in their paths around the sun, or any object in a circular path.

Science News Letter, September 17, 1949