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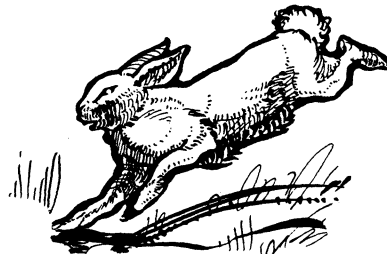
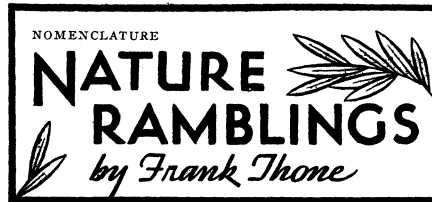
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Jumbled Names

NAMES are supposed to be, in effect, brief definitions. Things called by the same name are supposed to be alike; things that are not alike are supposed to be given different and distinctive names. But because we are often a bit fuzzy in our ideas of what things are alike, and what are unlike, we fall very easily into a very Babel-confusion of misnaming.

Sometimes the error arises through lack of the technical knowledge needed to split superficially similar things into classes that represent their real differences. Frequently this lack will be in a very simple and elementary department of knowledge, where the average man is as well equipped to know (and hence to distinguish) as the scientist or philosopher.

Thus, of the long-eared, long-legged, leaping animals we commonly know simply as rabbits, there are two distinct classes or groups. The animals in one class never dig burrows, and their proper name is hares. Those in the other class do dig burrows, and they are the real rabbits. All species of native American "rabbits" are non-burrowers, and should therefore be called hares. But they never will be, of course.

A more frequent cause of misnaming is an easy-going pragmatic habit of calling things by the same name if there is a superficial resemblance, even when it is realized that there really is a basic difference. Our American robin, for example, was named by homesick English settlers for its resemblance to the red-breasted little bird they had known at home. Really the two birds do not even look very much alike; and in the ornithologist's lists of species they are yards apart.

Another source of nomenclatural confusion is the lumping of things found

in the same place, or having similar general habits. We all know that oysters, clams, and other creatures we call shellfish are not fish, but because they live in the water we keep on calling them by the name of an entirely different class of animals that also live in the water. Similarly, we give false ichthyological tags to such diverse and utterly un-fishlike things as cuttlefish, jellyfish, and starfish.

There is no use scolding ourselves about this laxity in handing out wrong names, even though it actually does a certain amount of harm in fixing wrong notions in people's heads. It is too old a habit, and of too long standing, to do anything about it. But it might nevertheless be a wholesome thing if we were to stop once in a while, in the presence of almost any object, and ask ourselves, "Is this thing really what I am calling it?"

Science News Letter, April 11, 1936

MUSEUMS

Night-Illuminated Museum Offers "Spooky" Sights

See Front Cover

SCAARY folk, who shiver at skeletons even in broad daylight, had best keep away from the neighborhood of museums at night. Else they may be treated to a view of a spooky-looking array of bones apparently suspended by magic in the lurid light within. Actually, of course, the thing is nothing but the skeleton of some sea creature hung from the ceiling to spare floor space. The picture was taken through the windows of the U. S. National Museum in Washington.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1936

A California dairy company delivers "ice cream" in pint bottles, like the dairy milk; and by freezing the mixture in an electric refrigerator, a quart of ice cream is produced.

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