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THE TAXONOMIC OUTLOOK IN ZOOLOGY¹

By W. T. CALMAN, D.Sc., F.R.S.

THE selection of a systematic zoologist for the honor of addressing you from this chair implies a belief that systematic zoology may have something to say that will not be without interest to those whose studies lie in other fields. I am not sure how far this belief is generally shared. The anatomist, the physiologist, the field naturalist, the student of one or other of the innumerable specializations of biological science, has always been inclined to regard with distaste, if not with contempt, the work of those whose business it is to denominate, classify and catalogue the infinite variety of living things. The systematist is generally supposed to be a narrow specialist, concerned with the trivial and superficial distinctions between the members of some narrow group of organisms which he studies in the spirit of a stamp collector; happy when he can describe a new species, triumphant if he can find an excuse for giving a fresh name to an old one.

It would be idle to deny the truth that there is in these criticisms, just as it would be easy, although unprofitable, to point out that the substance of them might be directed against the practice of most other branches of research. The specialist, of whatever kind, has a tendency to mistake the means for the end, to become fascinated by technique and to suffer from a myopia that blurs his vision of other fields than his own.

I think, however, that there are some signs of an increasing appreciation of the usefulness and even of the scientific value of taxonomy among the younger generation of zoologists. More particularly, those who are concerned with the applications of zoology to practical affairs are, for the most part, although not invariably, aware of the need for exact identification of the animals they deal with. They do not always realize the difficulties that may stand in the way of this identification. It is a common experience with us at the Natural History Museum to have some mangled fragments of an animal brought in by a

¹Address of the president of Section D—Zoology, British Association for the Advancement of Science, Bristol, September, 1930.

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