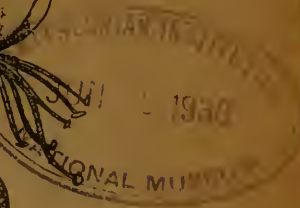
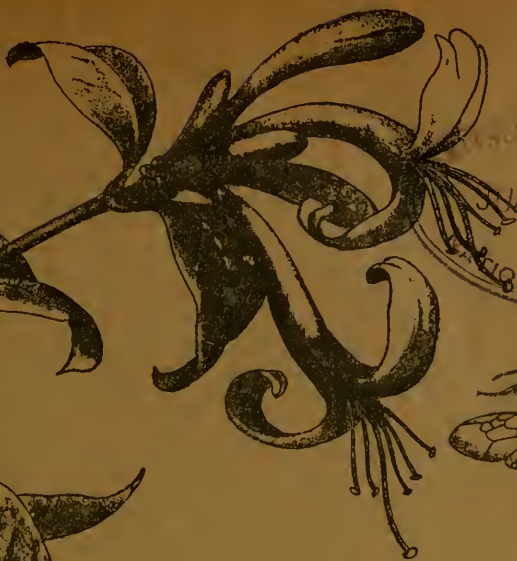
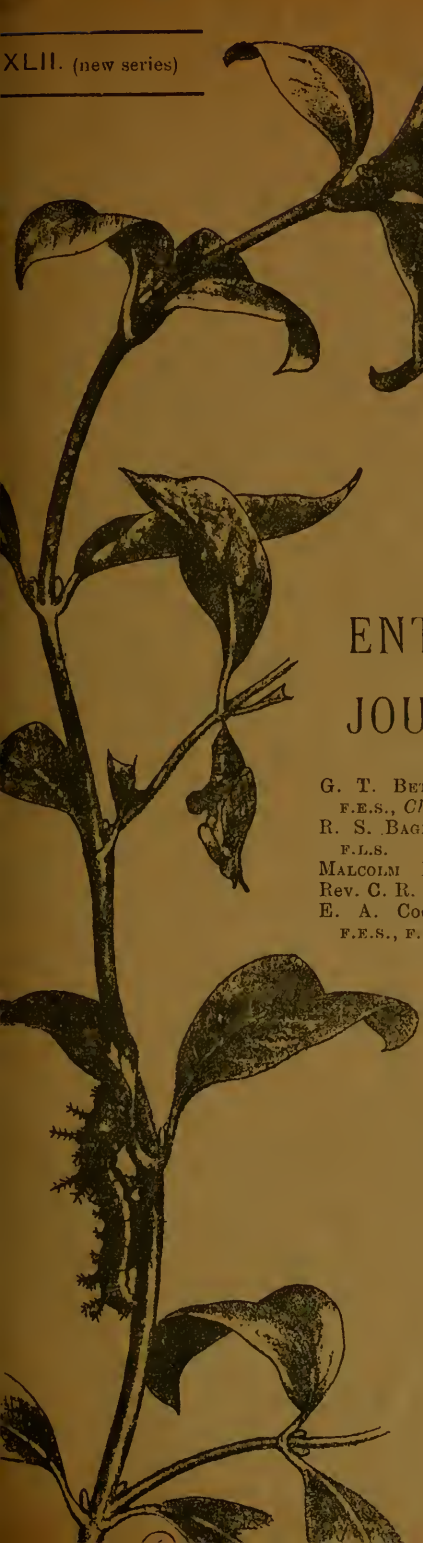


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Should all Variations receive Names?

By G. TALBOT, F.E.S.

Many entomologists will answer this question in the affirmative, and Mr. G. Curtis Leman is one of them. His article, in the February number of the *Record*, is a startling one, at least to me. He gives names to 54 aberrations of the Coccinellid *Synharmonia conglobata*, L., and admits that this "Cannot pretend to exhaust all the possible combinations." Therefore it may be presumed that if another thousand or so were discovered somebody would have to give them names. Each name represents a certain arrangement of the eight spots. Excepting, perhaps, a Coccinellid specialist, no one will be able to remember what any one name stands for. These variations might have been numbered or lettered in some way, and reference to them thereby made even easier than by using a name.

If this method of naming "aberrations" is employed in treating of the variation of all insects subject to variable combinations of pattern, the existing literature on insects, enormous as it is, may be multiplied several times. It is some consolation to reflect that such names have no rank in nomenclatorial priority, and are not likely to burden bibliographical records.

If Mr. Leman had, for instance, the genus *Heliconius* (Lep. Rhop.) before him, he would find that in more than half the species each specimen would have to be named, and furthermore, he could obtain thousands of such specimens. We submit that this kind of variation cannot be dealt with by the use of names (not terms), and we regret the growing tendency to give a name to every slight variation. This important study of variation is only retarded by such obstacles to its progress.

A name represents a variation of some importance. These variations include all sorts of lesser ones which themselves include other and even microscopic variations, and so on, for no two things are exactly alike. The line must be drawn somewhere.

Names ought, perhaps, only to be given to forms which, if not anatomically distinct, are possessed of a definite pattern either known to be recurrent (including colour forms), or which is not a mere rearrangement of the species pattern shown by a typical form.

The tendency to name these comparatively trivial variations is due to various causes. We have the dealer who, by creating a "type" is able to enhance the value of a common insect very considerably, and so dispose of it in a certain market at a good profit. We have the general entomologist who, knowing little about the group concerned, fails to grasp the significance of the variation he sees. Then also there is the collector who is most anxious to see type-labels in his collection, and who may often be inclined to stretch a point and pin a name to yet another variation or maybe a freak he has secured.

Whether it be due to the cold commercialism of the dealer, or to the hot enthusiasm of the collector, the periodical literature continues to be burdened with a mass of useless names, work which does not commend itself to the scientific student. We need hardly mention the vogue in Germany of giving names to teratological aberrations, rightly called by Gunder the "Unnameable."
