

## ON NAMING MINERALS

H. E. MCKINSTRY, *West Chester, Pennsylvania.*

One can join most heartily in Professor Eakle's appeal for more thought in the naming of minerals.<sup>1</sup> His plea to continue immortalizing in stone (so to speak) the leaders of the science can only meet with general approval. With him we regret that the rules now in vogue require certain eminent mineralogists to remain unhonored in this manner because, through no fault of their own, their namesakes' names have turned out to be synonyms. We rejoice that no one can become familiar with mineralogy without being frequently reminded, through the nomenclature, of Werner, Wollaston, Silliman and Dana.

While applauding the judicious use of personal names, one is forced to admit that at times they may cause difficulties to those of other nationalities than that of the scientist in question. Thus smithsonite, simple enough for an Anglo-Saxon, contains a "th", unpronounceable for a Frenchman or a German and an initial "sm" which would appall a Spaniard, just as we ourselves may at times be at a loss as to how to cope best with ännerrödite, gmelinite, haüynite and szmikite.

Desirable as personal names may be, there is little to be said for an attempt, at this late date, to make mineralogical nomenclature rigidly uniform. Were we, like Adam in the Garden, confronted with a world of unnamed things, it would be our glorious opportunity and sacred duty to name them systematically. But fortunately or unfortunately, all of the fifteen hundred minerals now known are already named and certainly no one would propose to re-christen them in violation of all laws of priority. Any struggle for uniformity would at best effect only the species yet undiscovered—probably in the main a relatively small number of the less common ones. The new standardized names would be lost in the forest of older heterogeneous ones, the increased uniformity would be barely perceptible and in just what way would science be benefited?

It would seem that really the most desirable object would be to aid the suffering student who, as Professor Eakle says, is confronted with a formidable array of names to master. To him, any

<sup>1</sup> *Am. Mineral.*, vol. 13, p. 533.

name which even remotely suggests some characteristic of the mineral is little short of a godsend. And therein lies the great boon of physical and chemical connotations. Though we Americans, fostered in a utilitarian contempt for the classics, have, like Shakespeare, "small Latin and less Greek", these languages possess at least the advantage of being in some degree international. An educated person needs no great linguistic training in order to recognize that "ortho" suggests "straight" and "clase" suggests "break" or "cleavage." What name could be more descriptive than tetrahedrite unless it be azurite, not to mention hematite, magnetite, pyrite, and the less obvious cyanite, actinolite, and staurolite?

But perhaps the chemical names are the most suggestive of all. What matter if they do not express the composition in detail? Nothing short of a formula could do this. Consider the mental associations aroused by the words argentite, cuprite, bismuthinite, cobaltite, fluorite, and dozens of others; or by the compound chemical-and-physical names: arsenopyrite, cerargyrite, pyrargyrite. Barytocalcite may be cumbersome but at least it signifies something which is more than could be said had its discoverer been forced by a convention to name it, let us say, mcgillicuddyite (keeping unmutilated the name of a not impossible scientist).

It is truly regrettable that chalcophanite contains no copper, and that hydrocyanite is anhydrous, but is this an indictment of the practice of deriving names from chemistry? Say rather that the fault lies in the failure to derive these names chemically. As well abandon the ending "*-ite*" altogether because some misguided person has made use of it in naming a widely advertized antiseptic which is not a mineral!

While mines are ephemeral and many place names signify nothing, one may even defend certain names based on localities: atacamite suggests the Chilean desert whose dryness alone is responsible for the preservation of the mineral; vesuvianite suggests the volcanic emanations from whence it sprung; labradorite suggests the bleak cliffs of deep-seated intrusives which have afforded the beautiful feldspar.

Thus, since complete uniformity cannot be attained without throwing overboard a thousand names in common usage (atrocious as some of them are), let those who have the good fortune to

contribute to the nomenclature be merciful and discrete in naming the children which are still to be born to mineralogical research. Let their names do honor where honor is due; let them be euphonic if possible, universally pronounceable if possible, short if possible, but above all, let them be significant and appropriate. In short, this paper, while not in any sense an outcry against the use of personal names is intended as a mild plea for the retaining of such rich sources as may be found in the fields of chemistry, physics, geography and the classical languages.