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THE ECONOMIC TREND OF BOTANY¹

It can scarcely be successfully denied that the most significant recent advances in American botany have been along economic lines. By many of our younger botanists the dominance of the practical point of view is taken for granted, but to some of our older investigators and teachers the changing attitude has brought something of a shock. And there are a few who are not yet conscious of the great economic tide which is engulfing us. For the sake of this last group it will be well to consider briefly a few historical facts. As yet within the memory of the older living botanists, American botany was scarcely more than the taxonomy of the vascular plants. In the eighties we began importing the laboratory method from Europe, particularly from Germany. It was the psychological moment, and naturalization took place with surprising swiftness. At first, the new movement found expression mainly in the direction of morphology and anatomy. By the early nineties, however, a pronounced physiological trend found large place, and in the late nineties ecologists began taking the laboratory method to the field.

No attempt will be made to picture here the rise of economic botany. It may be pointed out, merely, that in our older programs it had very little place. A somewhat notable exception to this is afforded by medical botany, which has long been paid attention to by botanists. Indeed,

¹ Address of the vice-president and chairman of Section G, Botany, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Philadelphia, December, 1914.

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