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PANDEMIC BOTANY¹

By Dr. C. STUART GAGER

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IN his "Life and Letters of Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker," Leonard Huxley tells us that early in 1867 Sir Joseph "was urged" to accept nomination at the next meeting of the British Association for the presidency for 1868. Whether any American botanist ever had to be "urged" to accept the presidency of the Botanical Society of America "deponent sayeth not." In fact, there is no historical record that any such method of securing a president for this society was ever tried. The method is that of the botanist in search of material for study. He goes out into a field of unsuspecting plants, seizes the one he wishes, puts it into his vasculum and closes the lid. Later, in the laboratory, he brings out the plant, makes longitudinal and cross sections, peels off the epidermis, soaks some of it in chloral hydrate to make it transparent and by various other ruthless details of technique compels

¹Address of the retiring president of the Botanical Society of America, given at the "Dinner for all Botanists" at Indianapolis, on December 29, 1937.

the plant to disclose its most intimate and personal characteristics. Everything so disclosed is embodied in a "contribution to knowledge" and published where all the world may read.

So the committee on nominations of this society meets in secret conclave and decides on a few names, as soldiers are drafted for war. To safeguard the principle of democracy (still dear to science), the entire membership is urged to do likewise. From the preliminary list of victims so chosen the plebiscite of the society makes the final choice of one. He is not "urged" nor even invited; he is notified. A careful search of the literature of this subject has failed to disclose a single instance of a botanist so lacking in unselfish patriotism as to refuse to serve his botanical country in her time of presidential need.

And then comes the laboratory treatment, in all the brilliant setting of an annual dinner, when the retiring president is compelled to advance and, like the

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