

SCIENCE

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THE UNIFICATION OF AMERICAN BOTANY¹

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A GLANCE at the history of botany in America shows that on several occasions special branches of the science have attained prominence, have separated from the parent stock and taken independent root. These offspring are now counted as separate sciences which yield little or no allegiance to the parent stock, and whose devotees no longer call themselves botanists. As examples we may mention bacteriology, forestry and the group of agricultural sciences represented by agronomy and horticulture—all subjects essentially botanical, with large and active corps of workers, but belonging to botany no longer.

This dissociation is undoubtedly the natural result of the growth of botany and the development of its several fields, each of which, as it assumes a position of special importance, develops more or less of autonomy and sometimes independence. Other sciences show the same tendency, and I shall not attempt to decide whether botany shows this trend toward dissociation to an exceptional degree. The questions of immediate importance to us are: What are the causes of this dissociation? Are they still operative? What new developments may be expected? How far can the process go without serious injury to botany in general? Can the tendency be overcome in whole or in part? And if so, how? It is fitting that these questions should receive the serious consideration of all botanists at this time for the future is heavy with possibilities. The changes of reconstruction may prove to be more fundamental than those of war, and the responsibility

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