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THE FAD AS A FACTOR IN BOTANICAL PUBLICATION¹

By Dr. NEIL E. STEVENS

BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY

IF, as Pope and many others have asserted, "the proper study of mankind is man," botanists may occasionally study botanists and no apology is needed for asking this botanical society to direct its attention to one of the manifestations of botanical psychology. It is obvious that all we know about plants comes to us through the medium of the botanical mind, and in studying the botanical publications of any period, it is important to know what botanists were thinking about at that time. For, much as we may dislike the idea, we must admit that the conclusions which investigators draw from their observations, perhaps even the observations themselves, or at least the kind of observations they are most likely to make and to

publish, are influenced by what others are observing, publishing and talking about.

In the work of the Plant Disease Survey we deal constantly with observations made by others, and in an attempt to study the relative incidence of disease at different periods it becomes of first importance to discover what particular diseases were in fashion and thus most likely to be noticed at any given time. It was, then, this practical necessity which led me to spend a good deal of time during the past year in reviewing American botanical literature. Some of the incidental results of this study I wish to discuss tonight. To avoid wearying you beyond endurance I have confined the statistical portion of this paper to the last 50 years, 1881 to 1930, and to the following representative American publications: *Bulletin of the*

¹ Address of the retiring president of the Botanical Society of Washington, D. C.

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