

EDITORIAL.

IT is hard to eliminate personal prejudice from any discussion of the nomenclature question, and as the contention proceeds extreme views seem to become more pronounced. Such a condition of things is always unpleasant, but it is necessary, and all progress is the result of contest between conservative and radical. It would be unfortunate if either spirit had its way unchallenged. What we should desire is a resultant of opinions, for no one should have the temerity to believe that his own personal views are the only ones worthy of acceptance. For this reason, it is probable that permanent good will come from the discussion now attracting so much more attention than its importance deserves.

THE GAZETTE has been more conservative than radical, but it has always been open to conviction, and has allied itself with every movement that has promised to advance the interests of American botany. At the same time, it has repeatedly urged that ripe preparation and experience are necessary in the direction of any profitable change. One of the greatest obstacles in the way of the proposed American code of nomenclature has been the eager and hasty fashion in which it has been applied in all sorts of lists by all sorts of botanists. We are firmly convinced that the fundamental principles of the proposed code are sound and tend to permanency, but its hasty application has brought about some unwise and unwarranted changes. Nothing short of monographic study can properly apply any code of nomenclature. We question whether many of the younger botanists who are publishing in this country really appreciate the amount of critical skill and wide investigation involved in questions of synonymy. Much of the synonymy that has been handed down to us is but reputed synonymy, and when these transmitted opinions are simply juggled according to any code of nomenclature the confusion is likely to be increased.

EVEN IF a code acceptable to all could be formulated it would take many years of study by all of our systematists to properly apply it throughout the American flora, and until it can be done with certainty it should not be attempted. An old name should stand until a thorough and competent investigation has proven it faulty. In this we are not condemning the action of the Botanical Club in directing the application of the Rochester Code by a committee to the "Manual flora." We believe that action was wise and in the result we have

illustrations of the working of the rules which will serve to clarify discussion and form a basis for future action. The "List" prepared by that Committee must not be looked upon as a list of the authorized names of our eastern plants. While the general principles of the American code are believed to be sound, certain details seem to work unhappily in that List, and certain things are left unsettled. Only careful consideration can suggest the necessary modifications. Our taxonomists ought to give serious thought to all these questions this year. We particularly commend to their consideration the propositions by Messrs. Ascherson and Engler elsewhere recounted. There should be wise action taken at Springfield this summer.

THERE IS A conservatism which means self-opinionated obstinacy, and a radicalism which means a greediness for change. With neither of these should we have any sympathy. But the conservative and the radical who are open to conviction are in the proper judicial attitude to settle this question. Our contention, therefore, is by no means against the American code, for we are partly responsible for its promulgation, but against the idea that all its details are finally settled, and more than all against its hasty and unstudied application.

THE PROPOSED "Systematic Botany of North America" has been placed upon a sure financial basis, and work has already been begun upon many parts. The present assignment is published elsewhere in this number, covering nearly half the entire work. Whatever may be said of its general merits it marks an important stage in the co-operative spirit of American botanists. A uniform style of presentation has been adopted, that is, as uniform as widely different groups will permit; and a system of nomenclature has been outlined for general guidance. Further than this each monographer is as independent as though the work were all his own, and the work of editing will only concern itself with seeing that uniformity of style is preserved. Diversity of opinion may and does exist as to some of the rules for general guidance, but when once adopted it needs no argument to show that they must be followed. The really significant part of the work, the subject matter, is in the control of the individual monographer. As a consequence, this great work offers the largest opportunity for independent individual effort in systematic botany that has ever been given in this country. As a result, our whole flora will be passed in review as it never has been before, and the facts brought to light will form the basis of future work even though many of the opinions expressed may be discarded.



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