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THE BOTANICAL WORK OF DR. L. H. PAMMEL AT
IOWA STATE COLLEGE¹

A. T. ERWIN

The task of reciting the history and activities of the work in botany at Iowa State College under the leadership of Dr. L. H. Pammel for the last thirty-five years is no small one and while worthy of an abler pen, is an assignment which I accept with pleasure.

A few figures taken from the college catalog the year Dr. Pammel took up his work here, 1889, and for the current year, may be of interest to this end.

At that time there were seven post-graduates at the Iowa State College. Last year there were 375. In no other form does the spirit of research find more tangible expression than in graduate study. In this field botany has always been well represented both by post-students majoring in this subject and also by those specializing in the plant industry group who elect it as a supporting line. Both faculty and graduate students will testify to the fine spirit of co-operation and the friendly interest accorded them by Dr. Pammel in the pursuit of their problems.

Botany affords the foundation for the applied sciences of horticulture and farm crops. This prerogative appears, however, to have been a hidden talent in the early days at Ames. The catalog of 1890 reveals the name of not one single student specializing in agriculture. Today, we have 394 freshmen agricultural students in the collegiate courses. The material development, that is, buildings and equipment has increased in a corresponding ratio. In 1890, according to records, this was valued at \$300,000. A corresponding figure for today totals around six million. This speaks much for the confidence reposed by our commonwealth in the Iowa State College and for the generous way in which it has been supported.

In 1889 the department of botany carried eight courses; today it offers forty-two, divided between major lines in morphology, pathology, physiology, ecology, and taxonomy. In those early days the head of the department was both chief magistrate and

¹ Delivered before the Iowa Academy of Science, Ames, Iowa, 1924.

executioner. At that time the department was strictly a one-man affair; today, the department has a staff of fourteen, including a number of full professors who are immediately responsible for major lines of work.

In the Agricultural Experiment Station there has been a similar growth in which botany has shared, and in the research work to which it has contributed its full quota. Reference should also be made to the direct contribution botany has made to the applied plant lines in horticulture and farm crops. Practically all field work dealing with cultural problems, in the last analysis, rests squarely back on some underlying principle of botany.

The list of contributions made by the botany department staff would be too lengthy for this occasion, but I am sure that I voice the sentiments of my associates in the plant industry group, in saying that they not only represent an important contribution in themselves, but have also been of material aid to those of us dealing more directly with cultural problems.

The field of systematic botany is probably Dr. Pammel's favorite theme and represents his special line of activity. If there is a crannied nook in our prairie flora that he has not scoured, it will take a compound microscope to discover it. Dr. Pammel has also collected widely in the Rockies and along the Pacific coast. One of the interesting features of this herbarium is the collection of parasitic fungi. The college herbarium at present writing according to Curator Cratty contains 170,000 sheets representing the flora of the United States.

Dr. Pammel's early work in the field of plant pathology is also significant. Early in the 80's he spent a summer in Texas studying a disease of cotton now known as the *cotton root rot*. It is interesting to note that at that time when no one had yet found or described a soil plant pathogen, Dr. Pammel arrived at this conclusion in regard to cotton root rot. The findings that he reported have in the main stood the test of time and his contributions on *Ozonium root rot* of cotton will always stand as a monument to his early work.

Another very notable contribution by Dr. Pammel came in 1893 in connection with his studies with *Black Rot* of cabbage. Previous to 1893 the cause of this disease was unknown. He established definitely that this disease was caused by bacteria. I believe this was the first authentic case of a bacterial vascular parasite. This contribution again affords a precedent on other work on bacterial vascular diseases of plants.

This sketch would indeed be incomplete without some reference to Dr. Pammel's work as a teacher of the hundreds of students who have gained their knowledge of plant life and their inspiration for things out-of-doors from him, and mention of the numerous graduates of his department who now hold responsible positions in the various branches of botany in other institutions.

The farmers of Iowa have for years looked to Dr. Pammel for suggestions on how to fight quack grass and other persistent weeds and his investigations along this line have been of great value to the state.

Last, but by no means least, I wish to mention the prominent part played by our botany department in the conservation of our state resources. The State Board of Conservation, under the able leadership of Chairman Pammel, have acquired some 36 tracts, aggregating upwards of 4,000 acres, and this, including the rivers and lakes over which this board has jurisdiction, makes a total of 100,000 acres of state park area for Iowa. In the preservation of these spots of scenic beauty and historical interest, of our wild flowers and arborescent flora and its accompanying bird life, and with this a pleasure ground for our people, a chance for an outing close to home, the value and significance of this movement will become more and more patent and appreciated as years go by.

It is therefore obvious that the botanical work of the Iowa State College has played an important role in the development of our state and that it has enjoyed leadership of a high order. For this we make grateful acknowledgement on this occasion as well as to express appreciation to our governing board which has loyally backed its faculty and protected its ranks from the spoils system which has been the curse of many state institutions.

I believe it was Sir Walter Scott who said, "The man whom I call deserving the name is one whose thoughts and exertions are for others than himself." By this standard, Dr. Pammel, whom we are pleased to honor today has rendered full measure.

IOWA STATE COLLEGE.