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THE GENERIC CONCEPT IN THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE FLOWERING PLANTS.¹

THAT many of the most useful scientific terms defy accurate definition is a fact which can not be denied. Indeed, the recent progress of science, at least in biology, has been away from, rather than towards, any dogmatic form of statement. Many terms, which fifty years ago were smugly defined in the text-books and manuals of the time, are now, when viewed in the light of the developmental theory and from the diverse points of view of modern investigation, either well-nigh obsolete or have, through a gradual accretion of varying meanings, come to express only the vaguest generalities. This change is by no means a matter to be deplored. It is, in fact, an evidence of advancing thought. Loose and general terms are giving place to more technical and specific ones at about the same rate that the older and vaguer concepts are being supplanted by the more refined distinctions of modern science.

In some cases, however, the wide usefulness and general familiarity of terms have made them, notwithstanding some vagueness, far too valuable to discard and difficult to replace; and in these cases it is a matter of great importance that scientists should from time to time examine such terms theoretically in order that they may be applied with reasonable uniformity. An excellent example in point is the word

¹Address of the vice-president and chairman of Section G—Botany—at the New Orleans meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.