

# **SCIENCE AND SCIENTISTS**

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Science and Scientists by John Gerard

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**JOHN GERARD**

**SCIENCE AND  
SCIENTISTS**





# SCIENCE AND SCIENTISTS

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CALIFORNIA

BY THE

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## Dr. Grant Allen's Botanical Fables

"Every one of these English plants and weeds has a long and eventful story of its own. In the days before the illuminating doctrine of evolution had been preached, all we could say about them was that they possessed such and such a shape, and size, and colour: and if we had been asked why they were not rounder or bigger or bluer than they actually are, we could give no sufficient reason, except that they were made so. But since the great principle of descent with modification has reduced the science of life from chaos to rational order, we are able to do much more than that. We can now answer confidently, Such and such a plant is what it is in virtue of such and such ancestral conditions, and it has been altered thus and thus by these and those variations in habit or environment" (Grant Allen, *Flowers and their Pedigrees*, p. 2).

"The relation of our existing vegetation to preceding floras is beyond the scope of our present inquiry: it has been frequently made the subject of exposition, but to handle it requires a more lively imagination than I can lay claim to, or perhaps than it is desirable to employ in any strictly scientific investigation" (*Address to Biological Section, British Association, 1886*. By William Carruthers, F.R.S., F.G.S., President of the Section).

THERE is a very active and very influential school of philosophers at the present day who could invent for themselves no better designation than "peripatetics." Not Peripatetics, be it observed, in the traditional and transferred sense: Aristotle they repudiate; and if he had the opportunity, the repudiation would probably be mutual. But, according to the original and literal meaning of the word, they are "walking" sages. They stroll out to the fields, or the moors, or the sea-shore, and every object they meet—beast, bird, insect, or weed—furnishes them with a text wherewith to enforce the great creed formulated by exact science and exact thought concerning the origin of the heavens and the

## 2 *Mr. Grant Allen's Botanical Fables*

carth. The late Laureate familiarized us with the truth that in the lowliest of living things there is something that must remain incomprehensible until we shall have fathomed the whole mystery of being :—

Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies ;  
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower ; but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

Our peripatetics quite agree with the poet, that the key to all truth is needed in order to unlock the riddle of the flower's life ; but they differ from him altogether in this, that for them there is no mystery : they have the key, and therefore are they able to compel the blossom to display to us all that we should know, about ourselves, and about the forces which brought us into being.

The writers with whom at present I am concerned, though they are not scientific men, yet claim to speak in the name of Science. They have not themselves engaged in original research, but they profess to expound the discoveries of specialists for the benefit of the general public, a large proportion of whom firmly believe that in them they are listening to the accredited agents of scientific thought. This is not strictly speaking the case, and yet scientific men have in great measure only themselves to thank for the confusion. Writers who publicly profess to popularize the new philosophy, should be publicly disowned if they misrepresent it. Men of science are quick enough to assail the exponents of the old belief when they seem to trench on their own ground: they ought, one would think, to be even more solicitous that the sacred name of science should not lightly be invoked on behalf of unsound doctrine.

It must be remembered too that, whether scientific or not, these writers are eminently popular. They claim for their method, and claim justly, that they can be understood of the people to a degree which is impossible for those who treat subjects in a more technical