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**Review of *Science with Practice: Charles E. [Edwin] Bessey and
the Maturing of American Botany* by Richard A. Overfield**

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Science with Practice: Charles E. [Edwin] Bessey and the Maturing of American Botany. Richard A. Overfield. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1993. xiii + 262 pp. Charts, photos, and references. \$37.95.

Science with Practice thoroughly treats the professional life of Charles Edwin Bessey, a prominent nineteenth-century American scientist, professor, and educational reformer, who helped to lay the foundation of modern plant biology. The book focuses on Bessey as a prime promoter of the laboratory as an important learning center in college and university teaching of botany and agriculture. Bessey used his broad knowledge of plant classification to innovate the Bessey System, one that is still in use. It explains Bessey in the context of American botany—student of Asa Gray and intellectual forebear of the American botanists Roscoe Pound, Pier A. Rydberg, Jared Smith, Herbert Webber, and Albert F. Woods. Overfield explains Bessey, in an educational and philosophical context, as an agent of change who gave impetus to the early American conservation and forestry movements. We learn how Bessey worked to revitalize botany via two important journals (the *American Naturalist* and *Science*) and how he promoted a scientific role for the USDA. Bessey acted as Chancellor of the University of Nebraska, the University where his students founded *Sem Bot* (a “Dead Poets’ Society” for botany students and founding group of the Botanical Survey of Nebraska).

Bessey, primarily a plant physiologist, left a small legacy in phytopathology, an area that interested him because of its practical applicability. He recognized early the importance of the studying lower plant forms. He developed a deep understanding of both the existing phytogeography of Nebraska, and the *history* of vegetation in that state.

Overfield has produced a well-researched book—a challenge given that Bessey was a prodigious writer. This is a biographical study incorporating intellectual and social history. The author displays a fine breadth of knowledge of the science and technology of the era and places Bessey in this context. Although the study relates Bessey’s work to similar research in Europe, it is an American treatise.

The chapters on grasslands and forests, and on Bessey as a progressive are particularly enlightening. Notes are extensive and readable, the index is good, but the writing style is dryer than the subject warrants. The book might benefit from a stronger treatment of the relationship between Bessey's science and today's, additional place names and cross references in the index, and a subdivided bibliography.

The botanist will enjoy this book most. It also should be of interest to diverse subject specialists, such as ecologists, historians, and educators. Librarians who collect for the history of agriculture, botany, or forestry should buy it. Bessey's relationship to European science should interest foreign readers.

After having anxiously awaited the publication of *Science with Practice*; the book is a worthy reward, one that makes a useful contribution to American botanical biography and history. One hopes to see additional volumes of the *Iowa State University Press History of Technology & Science Series* that Hamilton Cravens edits. **Linda Johnson Rossi, M.A.L.S. West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania.**