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[T H I R D   S E R I E S.]



ART. XXXIV.—*Remarks concerning the Flora of North America ;*  
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[Read to the Botanists at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, at Montreal, August 25, 1882.]

IN the remarks which I have to offer to this Section, you will understand the word *Flora* to be written with a capital initial. I am to speak of the attempts made in my own day, and still making, to provide our botanists with a compendious systematic account of the phænogamous vegetation of the whole country which the American Association calls its own.

I shall make no effort to avoid the personal turn which my narrative is likely to take. In fact, it will be seen that I have partly a personal object in drawing up this statement.

Only two Floras of North America have ever been published as completed works, that of Michaux and that of Pursh. A third was begun (by Dr. Torrey, assisted by a young man who is no longer young), by the publication in the summer of 1838 of a first fasciculus; the first volume of 700 pages was issued two years afterward; and 500 pages of the second volume appeared in 1841 and in the early part of 1843. The time for continuing it in the original form has long ago passed by. Its completion in the form in which I have undertaken it anew, is precarious. *Precarious* in the original sense of the word, for it

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is certainly to be prayed for: precarious, too, in the current sense of the word as being uncertain; yet not so, according to an accepted definition, viz: "uncertain, because depending upon the will of another;" for it is not our will but our power that is in question; and it is only by the combined powers and efforts of all of us interested in Botany that the desired end can possibly be attained.

It were well to consider for a moment how and why it is that a task which has twice been—it would seem—easily accomplished has now become so difficult.

The earliest North American Flora, that of the elder Michaux, appeared in the year 1803. It was based entirely upon Michaux's own collections and observations, does not contain any plants which he had not himself gathered or seen, is not, therefore, an exhaustive summary of the botany of the country as then known, and so was the more readily prepared. Michaux came to this country in 1785, returned to France in 1796, left it again in Baudin's expedition to Australia in 1800, and died of fever in Madagascar in 1802. The Flora purports to be edited by his son, F. A. Michaux, who signed the classical Latin preface. The finish of the specific characters, and especially the capital detailed characters of the new genera, reveal the hand of a master; and tradition has it that these were drawn up by Louis Claude Richard, who was probably the ablest botanist of his time. This tradition is confirmed by the fact that Richard's herbarium (bequeathed to his son, and now belonging to Count Franqueville), contains an almost complete set of the plants described, and I found that the specimens of Michaux supplied to Willdenow's herbarium at Berlin were ticketed and sent by Richard. Not only the younger Richard but Kunth also habitually cited the new genera of the work as of Richard, and some others have followed this example. Singularly enough, however, there is no reference whatever to Richard in any part of the Flora, nor in the elaborate preface. The most venerable botanist now living told me that there was a tradition at Paris that Richard performed a similar work for Persoon's *Synopsis Plantarum*, and that he declined all mention of his name in the Synopsis and in the Flora, because the two works—contrary to the French school—were arranged upon the Linnæan Artificial System. He had his way, and the tradition may be preserved in history; but his name cannot be cited for the genera *Elytraria*, *Micranthemum*, *Elodea*, *Stipulicida*, *Dichromena*, *Oryzopsis*, *Erianthus*, and the like. For, by the record these are of Michaux, *Flora Boreali-Americana*, and not of Richard.

Michaux's explorations extended from Hudson's Bay, which he reached by way of the Saguenay, to Florida, as far, at least,

as St. Augustine and Pensacola; he was the first botanical explorer of the higher Alleghany Mountains, and, crossing these mountains in Tennessee, he reached the Mississippi in Illinois, and was as far south as Natchez. His original itinerary, which I once consulted, is preserved by the American Philosophical Society, at Philadelphia, to which it was presented by his son. It ought to be printed. That little journal shows that it was not Michaux's fault that the first *Flora of North America* was restricted to the district east of the Mississippi River. He had a scheme for crossing the continent to the Pacific. He warmly solicited the government at Washington to undertake such an exploration, and offered to accompany it as naturalist. This may have been the germ or the fertilizing idea of the expedition of Lewis and Clark, which was sent out a few years afterward by Jefferson, to whom, if I rightly remember, Michaux addressed his enterprising proposal.

Leaving out the Cryptogams of lower rank than the Ferns, we find that the *Flora of Michaux*, published at the beginning of this century, say eighty years ago, contains 1530 species, in 528 genera. No very formidable number; as to species (speaking without a count) little over half as many as are described in my *Manual of the Botany of the Northern States*, which covers less than half of Michaux's area.

Eleven years afterward, namely, in the year 1814 (the preface is dated December, 1813), appeared the second *Flora of North America*, namely the *Flora Americæ Septentrionalis*, by Frederick Pursh. This was not confined to the author's own collections, but aimed at completeness, or to give "a systematic arrangement and description of the plants of North America, containing, besides what have been described by preceding authors, many new and rare species, collected during twelve years' travels and residence in that country."

It appears that Pursh was born at Tobolsk, in Siberia, of what parentage we do not know. He himself tells us, in his preface, that he was educated in Dresden, and that he came to this country—to Baltimore and Philadelphia—at the close of the last century, when he must have been only twenty-five years old. He was able to make the acquaintance not only of Muhlenberg, who survived until 1815, and of Wm. Bartram, who died in 1823, but also of the veteran Humphrey Marshall, who died in 1805. His early and principal patron was Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton, who supplied the means for most of the travels which he was able to undertake, and who, as Pursh states, "for some time previous had been collecting materials for an American *Flora*." Pursh's personal explorations were not extensive. From 1802 till 1805 he was in charge of the

gardens of Wm. Hamilton, near Philadelphia. In the spring of the latter year, as he says, he "set out for the mountains and western territories of the Southern States, beginning at Maryland and extending to the Carolinas (in which tract the interesting high mountains of Virginia and Carolina took my particular attention), returning late in the autumn through the lower countries along the sea-coast to Philadelphia." But, in tracing his steps by his collections\* and by other indications, it appears that he did not reach the western borders of Virginia nor cross its southern boundary into the mountains of North Carolina. The Peaks of Otter and Salt-pond Mountain (now Mountain Lake), were the highest elevations which he attained. Pursh's preface continues: "The following season, 1806, I went in like manner over the Northern States, beginning with the mountains of Pennsylvania and extending to those of New Hampshire (in which tract I traversed the extensive and highly interesting country of the Lesser and Great Lakes), and returning as before by the sea-coast." The diary of this expedition, found among Dr. Barton's papers and collections in possession of the American Philosophical Society, has recently been printed by the late Mr. Thomas Potts James. It shows that the journey was not as extended or as thorough as would be supposed; that it was from Philadelphia directly north to the Pokono Mountains, thence to Onandaga, and to Oswego,—the only point on the Great Lakes reached,—thence back to Utica, down the Mohawk Valley to Saratoga, and north to the upper part of Lake Champlain and to the lesser Green Mountains in the vicinity of Rutland, but not beyond. Discouraged by the lateness of the season, and disheartened—as he had all along been—by the failure and insufficiency of remittances from his patron, Pursh turned back from Rutland on the 22d of September, reached New York on the 1st of October, and Philadelphia on the 5th. The next year (1807) Pursh took charge of the Botanic Garden which Dr. Hosack had formed at New York and afterward sold to the State, which soon made it over to Columbia College.† In 1810, he made a voyage to the West Indies for the recovery of his health. Returning in the autumn of 1811, he landed at Wiscasset, in Maine, "had an opportunity of visiting Professor Peck of Cambridge College, near Boston," and of seeing the alpine plants which Peck had collected on the White

\* In herb. Barton and herb. Lambert.

† Expecting, no doubt, that it would be kept up. But "the Elgin Botanic Garden" was soon discontinued. It occupied the block of ground now covered by the buildings of the College, and the surrounding tract—now so valuable—from which the college derives an ample revenue. *Noblesse oblige*, and it may be expected that the College—so enriched—will, before long, provide itself with a botanical professorship, and see to the careful preservation and maintenance of the precious Torrey Herbarium, which it possesses along with other subsidiary herbaria.

Mountains.\* At the end of the latter year or early in 1812 he went to England with his collections and notes; and at the close of 1813, under the auspices of Lambert, he produced his *Flora*, consulting, the while, the herbaria of Clayton, Pallas, Plukenet, Catesby, Morison, Sherard, Walter, and that of Banks. Evidently such consultations and the whole study must have been rapid. The despatch is wonderful. One can hardly understand the ground of the statement made by Lambert to my former colleague, Dr. Torrey, that he was obliged to shut Pursh up in his house in order to keep him at his work.

I know not how Pursh was occupied for the next four years, nor when he came to Canada. But he died here at Montreal, in 1820, at the early age of forty-six. More is probably known of him here. If I rightly remember, his grave has been identified, and a stone placed upon it inscribed to his memory.† A tradition has come down to us—and it is partly confirmed by a statement which Lambert used to make, in reference to the vast quantity of beer he had to furnish during the preparation of the *Flora*—that, in his latter days, our predecessor was given to drink, and that his days were thereby shortened.

In Pursh's *Flora* we begin to have plants from the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, and the Pacific Coast, although the collections were very scanty. The most important one which fell into Pursh's hands was that of about 150 specimens, gathered by Lewis and Clark on their homeward journey from the mouth of Columbia River. A larger collection, more leisurely made on the outward journey, was lost. Menzies in Vancouver's voyage had botanized on the Pacific coast, both in California and much farther north. Some of his plants were seen by Pursh in the Banksian Herbarium, and taken up. I may here say that in the winter of 1838-39 I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of the venerable Menzies, then about ninety-five years old.

\* It is at Wiscasset, therefore, that Pursh's "*Plantago cucullata* Lam. . . . in wet rocky situations, Canada and Province of Maine," is to be sought. Mr. Pringle has recently found the related *P. Cornuti* (which may be the plant meant), in Lower Canada, not far from the other side of Maine.

It must have been in Professor Peck's herbarium (no longer extant), that Pursh saw what he took to be *Alchemilla alpina*, which he marks "*v. s.*" and refers to from memory only, probably mistakenly. For it has not since been detected either in Vermont or New Hampshire, or anywhere in North America; and Pursh's *Journal* makes it certain that he did not reach any alpine region in the Green Mountains.

† In the Canadian *Naturalist*, Principal Dawson gives a brief account of the transference of the remains of Pursh from a grave-yard below Montreal, in which they were interred, to the beautiful Mount Royal Cemetery, where they rest in a lot purchased for the purpose and under a neat and durable granite monument, provided by the naturalists of Montreal and their friends. A small company of botanists, led by Dr. Dawson, visited the spot shortly after the reading of this paper. We learned that Pursh had botanized largely in Canada, in view of a Canadian *Flora*, and that his collections were consumed by a fire at Quebec shortly before his death, to his extreme discouragement.

In the Supplement, Pursh was able to include a considerable number of species, collected by Bradbury on the Upper Missouri, in what was then called Upper Louisiana,—much to the discontent of Nuttall, who was in that region at the same time, and who, indeed, partly and imperfectly anticipated Pursh in certain cases, through the publication by the Fraser's of a catalogue of some of the plants collected by Nuttall.

To come now to the extent of Pursh's *Flora*, published nearly sixty-nine years ago. It contains 740 genera of Phænogamous and Filicoid plants, and 3076 species. Just about double the number of species contained in Michaux's *Flora* of eleven years before.

I must omit all mention of more restricted works, even such as Nuttall's *Genera of North American Plants*, which came only four years after Pursh's *Flora*; also the *Flora Boreali-Americana* of Sir Wm. Hooker, which began in 1829, but was restricted to British America. I cannot say how early it was that my revered master, Dr. Torrey, conceived the idea of the *Flora* which he at length undertook. But he once told me that he had invited Nuttall to join him in the production of such a work, and that Nuttall declined. This must have been as early as the year 1832, that is, half a century ago. My correspondence with Dr. Torrey began in the summer of 1830, when I was a young medical student, and three or four years afterward I joined him at New York and became, for a short time, his assistant, for all the rest of his life his botanical colleague. He was very much occupied with his duties as professor, chiefly of chemistry; he had not yet abandoned the idea of completing his *Flora of the Northern and Middle States*, the first volume of which was finished in 1824, while yet free from all professional cares. Although working in the direction of the larger undertaking, the *Flora of North America* did not assume definite shape before the year 1835. I believe that some of the first actually-prepared manuscript for it was written by myself in that or the following year. I was then and for a long time expecting to accompany the South Pacific Exploring Expedition, as originally organized under the command of Commodore Ap. Catesby Jones, but which was subject to long delay and many vicissitudes; during which, having plentiful leisure, I tried my 'prentice hand upon some of the earlier natural orders. Before the expedition, as modified, was ready to sail, under the command of Capt. Wilkes, I had accepted Dr. Torrey's proposal that I should be his associate in the work upon which I had made a small beginning as a volunteer. Two parts, or half of the first volume (360 pages), of this *Flora*, were printed and issued in July and October, 1838.

It was thought at first, in all simplicity, that the whole task could be done at something like this rate. But, apart from other considerations, it soon became clear that there had been no proper identification of the foundation-species of the earlier botanists, from Linnæus downward; and that our Flora could not go on satisfactorily without this. Dr. Torrey had, indeed, some years before, made a hasty visit to Hooker at Glasgow, to London, and to Paris; but the taking of a few notes upon some particular plants in the herbaria of Hooker, Lambert, and Michaux, and the acquisition, from Hooker, of a good set of the Arctic plants of the British explorers, was about all that had been done. I proposed to attempt something more; so, taking advantage of a favorable opportunity, I sailed for Liverpool in November, 1838, and devoted a good part of the ensuing year to the examination of the principal herbaria, which I need not here specify, in Scotland (where the important one of Sir Wm. Hooker still remained), England, France, Switzerland and Germany, namely those which contained the specimens upon which most of the then-published North American species had been directly or indirectly founded, especially those of Linnæus and Gronovius, of Walter, of Aiton's *Hortus Kewensis*, Michaux, Willdenow, Pursh, and the later ones of DeCandolle and Hooker.\*

After my return the work made good progress; the remaining half of the first volume was brought out in the spring of the year 1840, and by the spring of 1843 the 500 pages of the second volume, mostly occupied by the vast order *Compositæ*, had been issued. But meanwhile I had in my turn to assume professorial duties and incident engagements,—with the result that, although the study of North American plants was at no time pretermitted, either by Dr. Torrey while he lived, or by myself, we were unable to continue the publication during my associate's life-time; and it was only recently, in the spring of 1878, that I succeeded in bringing out, in a changed form, another instalment of the work, completing the *Gamopetalæ*.

In the interval I had made two year-long visits to Europe for botanical investigation, the first partly relating to the botany of the South Pacific, the second wholly in view of the North American flora. And since this last publication still another visit—the fourth and we may suppose the last—of the same character and the same duration, has been successfully accomplished.

The serious question, in which we are all concerned, arises, whether this work can be carried through to a completion, and the older parts (wholly out of print and out of date), re-elabo-

\* See, in this connection, "Notices of European Herbaria, particularly those most interesting to the North American Botanist," in this Journal, vol. xi, January, 1840.

rated—I will not say by my hands—but in my time, or soon enough to render the whole a reasonably full and homogeneous representation of the North American flora, as known in this latter part of the nineteenth century. And it brings us to consider why the undertaking to which so much time has been devoted, should be so slow of accomplishment.

If this slowness is a constant wonder and disappointment to most people interested in the matter, I can only add that it is hardly less so to myself. It is a constant surprise—if one may so say—that the work does not get on faster.

Of course the undertaking has become more and more formidable with the enlargement of geographical boundaries and of the number of species discovered. As to the increase in the number of species to be treated, we have by no means yet reached the end. The area, that of our continent down to the Mexican line, we trust is definitely fixed, at least for our day. And, since we cannot be rid of the peninsula and keys of Florida, which entails upon us a considerable number of tropical species, mostly belonging to the West Indies—the southern boundary is now as natural a one as we can have.

The area which Pursh's *Flora* covered was, we may say, the United States east of the Mississippi, with Canada to Labrador, to which was added a couple of hundred of species known to him outside these limits northwestward.

Torrey and Gray's *Flora* took the initiative in annexing Texas, ten years before its political incorporation into the Union; although the only plants we then possessed from it were certain portions of Drummond's collections. California was also annexed at the same time, on account of Douglas's collections, and those of Nuttall, who had just returned from his visit to the western coast, which he reached by a tedious journey across the continent over ground in good part new to the botanist. Douglas had already made remarkably full collections along a more northern line. The British arctic explorers, both by sea and land, had well developed the botany of the boreal regions, and Sir Wm. Hooker was bringing out the results in his *Flora of British America*. Of course our knowledge of the whole interior and western region was small indeed, compared with the present; and the botany of a vast region from the western part of Texas to the Californian coast was absolutely unknown, and so remained until after the publication of the *Flora* was suspended.

As to the number of species which Torrey and Gray had to deal with, I can only say that a rapid count gives us for the first volume about 2200 Polypetalæ; that there are 109 species in the small orders which in the second volume precede the *Compositæ*; and that there are of the *Compositæ* 1054. So one



may fairly conclude that if the work had been pushed on to completion, say in the year 1850, the 3076 species of Pursh's Flora in the year 1814 might have been just about doubled. Probably more rather than less; for if we reckon from the number of the *Compositæ*, and on the estimate that they constitute one-eighth of the phænogamous plants of North America, instead of 6150, there would have been 8430 species known in the year specified.

It most concerns us to know the number of species which, after the lapse of thirty years more—years in which exploration has been active, and has left no considerable part of our great area wholly unvisited—the now revived Flora has to deal with. We can make an estimate which cannot be far wrong. In the year 1878, my colleague, Mr. Watson, finished and published his Bibliographical Index to the Polypetalæ of North America, covering, that is, the same ground as the first volume of Torrey and Gray's Flora, completed in 1840. In it the 2200 species of the latter date are increased to 3038. The "*Gamopetalæ* after *Compositæ*" in the Synoptical Flora, brought out in the same year, contains 1656 species. The two together must make up half of our phænogamous botany, that is, adding the increase of the last four years, about 5000 species. And so Mr. Watson adopts the estimate of 10,000 species for our known Phænogams and Ferns. My impression is that the species of *Compositæ* have increased at a rate which, unless they exceed the eighth part of our Phænogams, will warrant a still higher estimate. The number of introduced species of various orders, which will have to be enumerated and most of them described, is, unhappily, fast increasing;\* and new indigenous species are almost daily coming to us from some part or other of our wide territory. So that the 10,000 species of this estimate may before long rise to eleven or twelve thousand. Only the experienced botanist can form a just idea of what is involved in the accurate discrimination and proper coördination of 10–12000 species, and in the putting of the results into the language and form which may make our knowledge available to learners or to succeeding botanists.

Moreover, there is of late an *embarras des richesses* which is becoming serious as respects labor and time. The continued and ever increasing influx of materials to Cambridge, beneficial as it ever is, is accountable for this retardation of progress in a greater degree than almost any one would suppose. The herbarium, upon whose materials this work is mainly done, and which has been, like the Temple, full forty and six years in building, has received the contributions of two generations of

\* I say "unhappily," for they adulterate the natural character of our flora, and raise difficult questions as to how much of introduction and settlement should give to these denizens the rights of adopted citizens.

botanists, and the Torrey herbarium goes back one generation further. Still the number of American specimens annually coming to it is greater than in most former years. Apart from the mere selection and care of these, consider how in other ways it affects the rate of progress of the Flora. The incoming of additional specimens may at a glance settle doubts as to the validity of a species; but new specimens are as apt to raise questions as to settle them; more commonly they raise the question as to the limitation and right definition of the species concerned, not rarely, also, that of their validity. When one has only single specimens of related species, the case may seem clear and the definition easy. The acquisition of a few more, from a different region or other conditions, almost always calls for some re-consideration, not rarely for re-construction. People generally suppose that species, and even genera, are like coin from the mint, or bank notes from the printing press, each with its fixed marks and signature, which he that runs may read, or the practised eye infallibly determine. But in fact species are judgments—judgments of variable value, and often very fallible judgments, as we botanists well know. And genera are more obviously judgments, and more and more liable to be affected by new discoveries. Judgments formed to-day—perhaps with full confidence, perhaps with misgiving—may to-morrow, with the discovery of new materials or the detection of some before unobserved point of structure, have to be weighed and decided anew. You see how all this bears upon the question of time and labor in the preparation of the Flora of a great country. If even in old Europe the work has to be done over and over, how much more so in America, where new plants are almost daily coming to hand. It is true that these fall into their ranks, or are adjustable into their proper or probable places, but not without pains-taking and tedious examination.

Of our Flora, it may indeed be said, that "If 'twere done when 'twere done, then 'twere well it were done quickly." But I may have made it clear that, in the actual state of the case, it is likely to be done slowly. At least you will understand why thus far it has been done slowly. As to the future, if it depended wholly upon me, the completion would obviously be hopeless. I need not say that our dependence, for the actual elaboration, must largely be upon associates, upon the few who have the training and the vast patience, and the access to herbaria and libraries, requisite for this kind of work, but above all upon my associate in the herbarium at Cambridge, to whom, being present with us, I will not further allude.

Of course we rely, very much indeed, upon the continued coöperation of all the cultivators of botany in the country; and

it is gratifying to know that their number is increasing, new ones not less zealous than the old, and better equipped, are taking the places of those that have passed away, and some of them extending their explorations over the remotest parts of the land, and into districts where there is most to be discovered. All can help on the work, and all are doing so, by the communication of specimens and of observations. Those within the range of the published manuals and floras get on—or should get on—with only occasional help from us. They should send us notes and specimens to any amount; but they should not ask us to stop to examine and name their plants, except in special cases, which we are always ready enough to take up. Those who collect in regions as yet destitute of such advantages may claim more aid, and we take great pains to render it; partly on our own account, that we may assort their contributions into their proper places, partly for the encouragement of such correspondents, who otherwise would not know what they have obtained, and who naturally like to know when they have made interesting discoveries.

But the scattered and piecemeal study of plants is neither very satisfactory nor safe. And it involves great loss of time, besides interrupting that continuity and concentration of attention which the proper study of any group of plants demands. As respects the orders of plants which are yet to be elaborated for the Flora, and as to plants which require critical study or minute examination, necessarily consuming much time, it is better to defer their complete determination until the groups to which they severally belong are regularly taken in hand.

The coöperation of all our botanical associates is solicited in this regard, as a matter of common interest and advantage. For we are all equally concerned in forwarding the progress of the Flora of North America; and we may confidently expect from our botanical associates their sympathy, their forbearance, and their continued aid.