



Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation
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About the Institute

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, a research division of Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in the history of botany and all aspects of plant science and serves the international scientific community through research and documentation. To this end, the Institute acquires and maintains authoritative collections of books, plant images, manuscripts, portraits and data files, and provides publications and other modes of information service. The Institute meets the reference needs of botanists, biologists, historians, conservationists, librarians, bibliographers and the public at large, especially those concerned with any aspect of the North American flora.

Hunt Institute was dedicated in 1961 as the Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt Botanical Library, an international center for bibliographical research and service in the interests of botany and horticulture, as well as a center for the study of all aspects of the history of the plant sciences. By 1971 the Library's activities had so diversified that the name was changed to Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Growth in collections and research projects led to the establishment of four programmatic departments: Archives, Art, Bibliography and the Library.

Mr. P. Melne
May 30 — 92

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Walter Benjamin
655 Fyfe Ave N.Y.C.

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Deptford, 28th May, 1792

Sir —

I am honoured by your acceptance of the first Number of my Botanical Work; and, as you appear to have formed an unfavourable opinion, must beg your indulgence, whilst I briefly endeavour to remove it. If, indeed, as you seem to apprehend, the work were confined to the Loca Natalia of Common Plants, it would be difficult to conceive, that such a subject Genius itself could ever render sufficiently interesting to engage attention. The materials, however, of the present design, I flatter myself, you will find, in the course of the publication, to be very different. That an objection might arise from the occasional mention of the Place of some of the officinal Plants, and of others not very uncommon, had early foreseen, and therefore endeavoured to lessen, if not ~~forever~~ destroy its force, in my address to the Public. The fact is, that the term Common, when used of Plants, is not of very determinate signification. Were a person to enumerate, and describe with minute particularity, all the places of growth of such plants

as are literally common, because every where to be met with - for instance, Nettle, Dock, Burdock, Hemlock, Elder, Hawthorn, and the like, his labours would as amply merit contempt, as he himself must irresistibly excite ridicule. I cannot, however, discover the same impropriety in mentioning the Place of Plants, which are of less frequent recurrence, though not entitled to the Epithets of rare and curious. Of this description, in my First Number, are Salvia verbenaca, Circaea Lutetiana, Veronica officinalis, and some others. These are not every where to be found; and, though familiar to the experienced Botanist, require to be pointed out by distinct specification to the mere Novice in the Science. But it is not to plants of this intermediate kind, that are neither very common, nor very unfrequent, that our materials are restricted; and, were I favoured with the honour of an interview, I doubt not to be able to remove any prejudice, which a perusal of the First Number may have occasioned, by submitting to you a List of Scarce Plants, which have occurred in the course of our Perambulations,

and in such a variety of Places, as to those who are
unaccustomed to Botanical researches, might appear
almost incredible.

I cannot take my leave, without
earnestly soliciting your pardon for this second in-
trusion, to which a regard for my reputation, in some
measure, compelled me; and at the same time
expressing a hope, that, as a Lover and Patron
of Science, you will not, by any marked disappro-
bation, contribute to the Failure of a Work, which,
at least, has the merit of industry to recom-
mend it - which, if it reach that excellence,
may not, therefore, be deficient in utility; tho'
it enlarge not the boundaries of our Vegeta-
ble Empire, may, perhaps, increase the num-
ber of its Subjects; and, however despised by the
frivolous, and minds less liberal and com-
prehensiv than yours, may call forth the
excursions of others, and prove a not uninte-
resting Companion to the beginning Botanist.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,
Your very Faithful &
obedient humble Servant,

Colin Milne