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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.

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Dec. 1, 1892

Dear Professor Bessey:

I am glad to know that the committee are working upon the program for the Madison meeting. In view of the several other botanical gatherings which are contemplated for about the same time, I think the program should be very carefully arranged.

Besides the meetings of the botanical section, there will be the usual meetings of the Bot. Club, which should take all the informal and brief papers, as it was originally intended to do. Then I suppose that the new "American Botanical Society" will perfect its organization and be in readiness to hear papers; but of this I know nothing definitely, and ~~do not~~ ^{have} ~~known~~ ^{heard} what the committee contemplate. Although the botanists at Rochester decided to abandon the World's Congress matter, things have changed since then, and the committee are now working on a program for a World's Botanical Congress in Chicago next August. This, however, will be a briefer and less formidable affair than its name would indicate. Then apart from all these

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the necessity has arisen since the Genoa Congress for an International Congress next year, to hear the report of the nomenclature committee appointed there, and to further discuss and decide upon questions of international importance. When we also include the Agric. Society and others that meet about the same time and ~~include~~ ^{have some} botanical papers, it would look as if we were to have a down-pouring of botany next August, such as the country has

never before seen.

Before I attempt any suggestions for the A.A.A.S. programme, I would like to present this "International Congress" matter, and have your opinion. As soon as Prof. Underwood returned I arranged with Prof. J. W. Coulter to meet him, and talk over the matters his trip may have suggested. Prof. Burrill was also invited, but could not come. We met at Prof. Underwood's home. I can not tell you in a letter the numerous things Prof. Underwood had to say, or the numerous reasons that led to a fixed conviction that an international congress in America next year was strongly demanded. I must content myself with briefly stating that a committee was

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appointed in Genoa, which is only empowered to report to a ~~similar~~ International Congress, which it was at the time generally understood would be in this ~~the~~ country next year. The Congress at Genoa did not make more than a beginning upon the nomenclature problems, not even touching upon several of those presented by the American botanists. And the nomenclature tangle is not the only one requiring authoritative consideration by the whole body of botanists. The American Association is national in its character, and could not assume international authority, even if it were desirable. Prof. Underwood was positive that the only suitable thing to do was to have an International Congress in Madison, and that a committee should be formed to take the matter in charge. I have written Prof. Barnes essentially what I have written you, and he commends the movement. I have not time to explain the matter to others by letter. Now if you agree to all this, I would suggest that in order to start the matter, that, as there is to be no meeting of any representative body of botanists within the necessary time, you as vice-president of the

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botanical section of the A.A.S., appoint a committee to take the matter in hand. I would further suggest the following persons, L. M. Underwood, Geo. Vasey, F. B. Galloway, ^{J. M. Coulter,} Wm. Trelease, B. L. Robinson (of the Gray Herbarium), N. L. Britton, Conway MacMillan, D. H. Campbell, and upon the urgent request of Profs. Underwood and Coulter I have consented to act as chairman. I offer all this as a suggestion ^{names of the} that the committee should be announced through the botanical journals, and that a statement of the movement accompany the same.

Supposing now that this plan is carried out; the congress will have enough to fully occupy its time, if only subjects of international character be considered. I think it would be best to confine the program of the congress solely to discussion, having each topic introduced by some designated speaker. All technical papers relating to research or to subjects of limited interest should be excluded. Such papers as the latter can appropriately be presented before the Am. Assoc., whether by foreign visitors or our own botanists. The time for holding

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the International Congress, it seems to me, should be immediately after the close of the Amer. Assoc., or better yet, the time of the Botanical section could be shortened, and the Congress begin on Monday of the second week of the Association, and continue three days, or as long as may be needed.

I think you will want to know why there should be two general Congresses next year. It was originally contemplated to have but one, and when the *World's Columbian Exposition* took up the matter (without consulting any botanist) the place and time and much of the character of the gathering had to be made to conform to the great scheme of the Exposition. The Committee (J. W. Coulter, C. B. Atwell, H. Folman, T. J. Burrill, C. R. Barnes, and myself as chairman) found that the difficulties in the way of making suitable arrangements for such a Congress were almost insurmountable, even if they could be assured of a sufficient attendance from abroad to keep the term, "World's Congress," from being a misnomer. The Committee's idea of a Congress, and that of the Chicago management which controlled everything, did not at all coincide.

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The result as you know, although this was not the ostensible cause, was the abandonment of the whole thing. We have lately, however, started up again upon an entirely new basis, and I think the movement will meet with success. It is now proposed to hold a "World's ^{Botanical} Congress" in Chicago, either just before or just after the Amer. Association, to consist of but one or two sessions, say an afternoon and an evening. At each session one longer (30 min.) and three or four shorter (15 min.) papers will be presented. There will be no discussions after the papers. The subjects are to be treated in a way to interest a mixed audience, with the aid of charts, drawings or lantern views, and will only cover the scope, development and present status of the different departments of the science, and the relation of the science to the rest of the world of thought, its economic bearings, and general value to the world. This is the program now contemplated. It has not yet been made public. We shall wait till January before saying much about it, as we hope then to get the promise of some money from the Auxiliary in order

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that we may offer a small compensation to those whom we ask to fill the numbers of the program. If no money can finally be had, I am not sure but the whole thing will be again abandoned.

Now I have written at such a tiresome length (and I fear not very connectedly, as I have been constantly interrupted by questions from workers in the laboratory and visitors), because if these two Congresses materialize, as I hope they may, certain subjects are at once eliminated

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What suggestions I have for you can be given in a few words, I think. Prepare an outline of the different departments and subdepartments of botany, to as fine divisions as you choose to make, then select persons to represent these several domains of the science, and learn by correspondence if they will act. But as most independent thinkers do not like to have their subjects selected for them, it would be well to send each person the outline of topics and ascertain if he thinks he can present a paper of a different character from the one selected by the committee more to his own satisfaction. When the persons you select are heard from, I should

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think a programme could be made out that would be of interest to all botanists. It seems to me that the character of papers desired is not that of a résumé, such as those given on physiological botany two years ago, of which mine on "Gases in plants" is a fair example, but the results of special research, which shall, so far as possible, touch upon some important generally known facts or received theories. The higher philosophical aspects of botany should have a share of attention. As I understand it, what is desired is an outline program, filled in with a few good names of persons whose presence will insure an interesting meeting in advance, and then a general invitation to all others to present papers, whether Americans or foreigners.

My suggestions may not be of much help to you, but I will promise to reconsider the matter if you wish and will again write me.

Now will you not do me the favor to reply in regard to the matter of an International Congress, although I will not insist upon so lengthy a communication as I have inflicted upon you.

Yours truly J. C. Arthur