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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.

1 Feb. 49 ~

Dear Miss Curtis,

"Biology for Australian Students". O.U.P.

Your book arrived the other day [Egypt] – quite an event, really, I mean the consistent illustration throughout by native plants. It was I think my father who circa 1869 brought out his "Elementary Lessons in Botany" followed this up a few years later by an Indian Edn. in which Indian plants were substituted throughout – otherwise the text remained much as in the original.

Later came an Indian botanist to Kew, & meeting my father, said – "Congratulations, etc. on your book; odd thing, but I should never have heard of your visit to India".

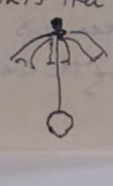
My father then explained that with the Kew Herbarium at his disposal there was no need for globe-trotting; all the data were conveniently accessible in the Hbm cases.

The point was that my father's central position had enabled him always to utilize as subject matter plants widely dispersed in India & accessible to students in any part of the continent. These 2 bks. circulated for 50 or 60 years, & together sold was 70,000 copies. – as I discovered when handling the file of annual returns from the publisher –

Your bk. is very bright, & one may stress the excellence of the illustrations; typography also. I like your choice of Avicennia (p.259) to illustrate lenticels – a stroke of genius!

"Good wine needs no bush" — but I suppose the publisher was thinking of its circulation in the larger, adjacent continent when he secured the "foreword"!

It must be rather jolly to have Proteaceae in your wild flora – is the Silver tree (Leucadendron argenteum) planted anywhere? Years ago a S. African correspondent sent me some fruits of this tree. On ripening, the perianth comes away from its moorings, slips up the style, & is arrested by an expanded stigma, & wd. appear to serve as a species of parachute that might be useful in dispersal.



What I ask is

(the specimens were not decisive)
whether this parachute has any biological significance [either by way of catching the wind to detach the fruit from the infructescence, {or later to help suspend it aloft & thus promote lateral transport}]. Fruit & seed-ripening is accompanied by such a rush of food to the inflorescence that the conditions ~~are~~ favourable, not only ~~to~~ actual seed-maturation, but so plentiful is the provision # that the plant seems to be stimulated to form structures of all sorts (or have become) (hairs, wings, hooks, etc.) many of which are obviously functional in dispersal. 40 years ago [cf. Ann. of Bot. Jan. 1909. p. 104] I trotted out the idea in relation to the ~~[illegible]~~ facility with wh. so many plants produce excrescences or "encasements" (arils, etc.) to their ovules or other propagula, & fancy the cognoscenti frowned ~~on~~ at this suggestion of "new formations", — the current idea being that everything was a transformn. of some pre-existing organ. These old memories recall an ~~[illegible]~~ episode relating to Penicillium. I was taking round a gelatine culture of P. & demonstrating it to a class. The culture was becoming clouded ~~through bacterial contamination~~ but immediately around the submerged hyphae it was clear. This I stressed as a sign of the bactericidal action of these hyphae. One student remarked, "And what are you going to do about it, Sir?" I replied, "You're a medical student, aren't you? — it's up to you!" That must have been prior to World War I.

I've decided to clear out of this village this coming summer & resettle at home — so perhaps I may see you when you visit England in 1950. It's just 20 yrs. since I came to Egypt — time runs along. I was home for 5 months in 1947, & rationing has no terrors for me. One of my sons (Phil) bought a small farm in Suffolk (near Saxmundham) & his wife has become an ardent farmer. They keep a cow or two, & other stock, so I can rely on her as a source of extra butter & bacon —! This winter has brought lots of rain & there shd. be a glorious flora by the spring. Anything over 200 mm. of rain secures a ~~[illegible]~~ flora — knee-deep for hundreds of miles along the coastal belt.

Yo. Yours sincerely, F.W. Oliver

\# plants are sort of exponents of the virtue of capitalism!