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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.

17 Dec. 1966

from Oliver

Dear Miss Curtis

With all the material world between us there's little sense in aiming at a target, like Christmas - movable, you are the antipodes & a mid-Summer Christmas is inescapable -

So I posted a bk. at random, addressed to the Family (though primarily of intent to your father; skd. he surely possess a copy) & let him feel perfectly free to pass it on to some fellow craftsman. When your mother has once more returned to her normal sphere (which I ardently hope shall have happened ere this season arrives), & your father can resume his hobby at the bench & conserve his shoe-leather, he may find this little book suggestive. Why not a gate-leg table? It wd. combine utility & beauty. Here in this house I have two: one, a "genuine antique", (17th cent?) picked up in Winchester 50 years ago; the other I took over from Prof. Newberry when he left Giff 14 years ago. It was made by a student at the "School of Arts & Crafts" 30 or 40 years ago (and)

+ technically admirable - nearly 6ft long & 1 1/2' broad.

Or, skd. he incline to a dresser - how splendid it would look in your Orthofagus Cunninghami. You wd. notice in the little photo of mine here that, contrary to tradition, I insisted on the drawer handles being turned, wooden knobs in preference to brass drop-handles - wh. artistically are incongruous - at least in the scheme of keeping them bright. As to locks & other ornamental brass plates commonly used - there are anathemas - both artistically & economically. A dresser is for constant domestic use & there is no point whatever in locking the drawers. It is an anti-burglar gadget - it is really silly: I wd. not be likely to remove the drawers, but only attractive contents like plates, table mats & so on. I locked the wd. new burst open the drawers

2

I beguile you the ^(at night) ransomed remains! Here
nothing is enclosed except the grille wh. marks the
entry. This country perhaps holds the record for
pilferage, but in 12 years not the value of 1 million (=
has been stolen fr. the Louvre. The matter (1 farthing)
of the car-seizure in an open garage was isolated
& different - probably I told you all about that?

Shd. you further embark on a dressed the important
problem of dimensions in relation to the proposed site
is all-important: i.e. height & length, position of shelves,
with the panels, to avoid too much tendency to pigeon-
holing: also, here & there & in woodwork, vertical ribs
not to be produced right down to the "deck", but end
bracket-like; also extreme austerity of ornamentation;
nothing appliqué - of course my little experiment
is far from perfect - a first effort. Your enquiries
to the Carpenter's reaction: there was some, except the
fact that the blue-print whereon
all dimensions were given in centimetres, the figures
being duplicated in Arabic [27 = IV]. I inspected
it in the shop & finally when finished the cost-
(in three days) was trifling, betw. 5 or 7 £. inclusive -

Also I had a set of chipendale chairs (copied from
an authentic specimen I bought out fr. home - of good
vintage) done by an Italian craftsman in Alexandria -
in beech, at a charge of 19/6 each, including leather
covers for the seats. And his carpenter was, definitely,
superior to that of the English 18th century country
carpenter. But for price this was far in excess of
of a set of 6 chipp. chairs (2 with arms) done for me
by a famous Cambridge craftsman, by name Peake, in
1883. These were in mahogany & the 6 cost £2.2 -

Peck, as I remember, used to drink a good deal, & if he saw his way to prompt cash he didn't worry about prices. He was so competent at his job that he could secure all he wanted at their almost right, the charges. 25 yrs. later a man who was an expert in old furniture happened to remark on one of these chairs with arms (how well mellowed) - I said, "are you sure it's a genuine period piece?" - "Oh, yes", he gave me 3 reasons! I hadn't the nerve to enlighten him. He had already said, - "that chair was certainly full price £25 at auction?"

When I was living in Jersey at the age of $7\frac{1}{2}$ - 9 with my paternal Grandfather I used to dig in the garden - digging for gold - there might have been a gold-mine in Australia. On reflection, I began to think how I should manage to pull up a cable & lay a "pipe-line" by which to post letters direct to some distant cousin who had settled there - thus evading postage stamps. But then I got puzzled. Even if I did - how far w'd the letters go? I must have had vague ideas abt. gravitation. I understood that people in Australia, who on earth, walked with their feet on the ground. So gravitation must peter out somewhere & begin again in space. I concluded there w'd be a jam somewhere - presumably at the centre of the earth, & the enterprise was abandoned. This probably was rationalization after the event when I'd wearied of the job. Newton's problem about the apple was child's play to mine! Immediately, I think the revival of planetaria an excellent notion - must give children a clearer idea of the lay-out. I was brought up on oranges & a candle. There was a total eclipse at the last full moon - hence these reflections.

Like yours, my father was bus-shy. I doubt if he ever travelled in a bus, as we know buses. As a boy doubtless he travelled in stage coaches (he was born in 1830), & when he visited France, wh. he did on many occasions, he wd. take to the "diligence" like a native. As a child he took me about quite a lot. What impressed me was how different he was in the absence of me smokes. He would "eat hearty" - no fussing & returning of chunks of pudding to the dish! and in other ways. These things I noticed, but abstained from remarking on. When I married, from the first I did rather outrageous things as my wife shd. accept them from the outset, & was fuss or worry. And thus we established from the first mutual latitude or toleration, & never were guilty of play-acting betw. ourselves - thus laying the foundations for a happy life.

Very interesting what you describe about sheep-penning, etc. & the technique adopted. In Wales, near Aberystwyth, I recall one or two little streams wh. descend from head-takes. The banks & adjacencies of these are absolutely sterile of vegetation; the soil crumbles & is liable to erosion. Sometimes of the sort, I fancy, on Helvellyn - an early memory.

Was Kirschens glance included among R. L. sent? That shd. give results quite soon. The leguminous must fruit for years, but it has nothing in common with the squinting cucumbers!

Always yours sincerely,

J. W. Child