

Dawson Turner to Ellen Hutchins, 9th August 1810

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It happened by a singular coincidence, my dear Madam, that just at the time when I had the pleasure of receiving your last most interesting letter, I also got the July no. of English Botany, in which I found the very Pinguicula you had the goodness to send me figured as a new species, under the name of P. grandiflora. It had been described a few years ago by de Candolle in the Flora Francaise, & really seems to have full right to be considered a good species, tho' its claim to such a title as distinct from P. vulgaris seems to be much more on relative than on positive characters. This latter plant does not grow near Yarmouth, & is now everywhere, I fear, out of flower, so that I must beg of you to be for the present satisfied with a very bad specimen, the only one in my possession which is indeed considerably worse by having been pasted on paper. There is a manifest difference in the size of the two plants, & the flowers of P. vulgaris have never, as far as I have seen, the streaked interior of the other: the bifid nectary would indeed be an excellent mark, if it were only constant, but this, I fear, from your specimens it is not. Neither de Candolle nor Vahl, the latter of whom is an excellent observer, mentions anything of it. In a future season I shall beg the favour of you to send me more specimens of P. grandiflora, if you have an opportunity of gathering them without too much trouble, & I will promise you any quantity you please of the more common species, to enable you to compare them in all states. It is a sad pity that they change so much in drying. I would like prodigiously to see P. lusitanica in a fresh state, when it must be a singularly elegant & interesting little plant. With the Utricularia vulgaris I am situated exactly the same as with the Pinguicula, except the time of gathering it is now come, & in the course either of this afternoon or tomorrow Mr Hooker & myself will walk & get you a good stock. Do you want the pretty little Malaxis paludosa? - I have just heard of a tolerably abundant habitat of it near Yarmouth, & I mean to visit it at the same time as the Utricularia. I must, however, once more repeat the request I have so often made you, that you could send me from the Flora Britannica a complete list of all the plants of which you have not specimens. I have hoards of duplicates, now fast becoming the prey of all manner of insects, through either indolence or a multiplicity of occupation on my part, & if you will not oblige me by letting me know which among them would be acceptable to you, you will put me to the trouble of sending them all, & yourself to the plague & expense of receiving them. Talking of expense reminds me of poor Hooker, who on leaving Iceland accepted a civil offer from the Bishop to have a few plants gathered for him, & they are now come (few indeed in number & most worthless in quality!) but charged to him at no less than £20. -, such being said to be the expense incurred by the Botanist in his wanderings after them. The man's Journal is really a curiosity, & I wish I could send it to you: he prides himself vastly in it for having added Ophrys ovata, Polypodium vulgare, & Achillea millefolium to the Flora of Iceland, & the regularity with which he details occurrences reminded me of the Bill of a Welsh or Norfolk Lawyer, thus his first day's work consists in receiving the letters of the most venerable Bishop, requiring his excursions: the 2nd, 3rd & 4th in making preparations etc etc etc - It at least proves that, much as those poor wretches may be behind us in civilisation, they are not our inferiors in the art of making charges. I wish Mr Hooker could have returned there again; for I do not half like his exposing himself to the various dangers of the torrid zone. I bought the other day, my dear Madam, a new edition of Aristo, in which that most delightful, but licentious, part is stripped of every passage that could offend the chastest ears, & in buying it I had principally in my mind the hope that you might not have seen it, & could not refuse to accept it. Tell me so, & you will give me exceeding pleasure.

Your new drawing of your beautiful little conferva No 65 is admirable – ? What are we to do with this plant? – It cannot, I think, but be a conferva, & yet its mode of growth seems to be just the same as that of Rivularia angulosa – ? Am I right? perhaps, after all, nature, who laughs at our puny efforts to make genera & build systems, has made no difference whatever between Rivularia & Conferva, & as for Fucus, I find, to my infinite vexation, that the nearer I draw to the conclusion of my work the farther I am from being able in any view to satisfy myself as to the arrangement of this heterogeneous mass. I thought, when I began, that the eternal snows were already past, but I am now literally worn out, & find, after all the growing labour of the lengthening way, that “hills still peep o’er hills, & alps on alps arrive”. I am at this moment more satisfied that I can tell you: I have just met with the Bishop of Norwich & begged this frank, & I have mislaid to my exceeding mystification a letter of yours, telling me what Confervae you wished to have. What most vexes me is that the Bishop is now leaving Yarmouth & that I have no time before the post goes to look for your last letter. Pray send me a complete list of all that are deficient to your collection of those mentioned by Dillwyn, & pardon my present negligence, under the promise that I will not do so again. I enclose you C. reticulata, which I recollect you once asked me for, a miserable morsel of C. paradoxa, C. comata, which I doubt you will be puzzled to make distinct from C. fatida, & C. fuscopurpurea, which I believe you will find different from C. Atropurpurea. I heartily wish I could remember what else it was you desired me to send, or any mosses I should include you, & have reason so to do, at the way for our sending parcels to each other being open, were you more happily situated than you now are. Believe me, my dear Madam, I enter so much into all that concerns you that it is not an idle curiosity that leads me to beg you would continue from time to time acquainting me with the state of Mrs Hutchins’ health; & much as I prize your letters, never write to me except when your mind is free from anxiety or when you think that such anxiety may find relief in being disclosed to one who really esteems & values you. You will share in my regrets that I am likely to be disappointed in the expectation of seeing Mr Borrer on his way from Scotland. His wife, who never before was 20 miles from her own door, has found that climbing mountains & alpine fare are to such a person most pleasing in the prospect or retrospect, & she can no longer be comfortable away from her relations, towards whom they are hurrying as fast as they can without meaning to stop in Norfolk. I love Borrer so much, & so thoroughly enjoy his Society, that I am quite fretted at disappointment. You please me very much by joining my opinion of the Lady of the Lake. Is not the rowers’ song truly alpine? – is not the Coronach beautiful? & all about the Coronach still more so? Is not the whole gathering & prophecy magnificently terrific? – do you not admire section 5 of Canto 3? – can anything be more beautiful than the simile in p.155? not but I think there are detached passages in the Lay of the Last Minstrel (particularly the opening of books) more impressive than any in the Lady of the Lake, but this latter is so sweet so uniformly delightful, just like Loch Catherine itself, when it is either quite calm or merely ruffled by what Rousseau calls the “frémissement argenté des flots” – Farewell, my dear Madam, what a task I have imposed on your good nature in setting you to read all this long letter! But I will not say a word on the subject lest I should be punished, as I should deserve it be, by either similar apologies on your part or by your curtailing your letters, which would indeed be a punishment, except when I see reason to fear that the reading of them ill suits with your tone of mind or interrupts more serious cares. That the blessings of heaven may be upon yourself & all that belongs to you & is, I assure you, my dear Madam, the earnest wish of

Your very much obliged friend

Dawson Turner

Yarmouth 9th August 1810