

## TILLAEA IN NANTUCKET.

MARIA L. OWEN.

IN 1841, William Oakes reported *Tillaea simplex* Nutt. amongst other plants found in 1829 in Nantucket. (Hovey's Magazine of Horticulture and Botany, Vol. VII. p. 182.) This name now gives place to the earlier *T. aquatica* L., while at least a part of the specimens of *Tillaea* from Nantucket show the stalked flowers and fruit as in *T. Vaillantii* Willd. We cannot doubt that Mr. Oakes collected a *Tillaea* in 1829 and that no more of it was found till 1894. It is the circumstances of this late find which I wish to record and its second disappearance from that year up to the present time. Its correct name, whether *T. aquatica* L., *T. Vaillantii* Willd., or even some different one cannot be settled until we catch the elusive little plant again. Mr. Oakes stated that he collected it "on the dried borders of small ponds" on the island, and in my collecting days I used to hope to come across it, and I have mentioned it to botanists visiting Nantucket, as something to look for.

From about 1890 on, Mrs. Mabel P. Robinson with her family spent several consecutive summers on the island; she was a diligent collector and student of its flora, and I made my usual recommendation to her. This time not in vain!

I was living in Springfield then, and with the specimen which Mrs. Robinson sent me there, she wrote that she had come home from one of her long walks with her box full of plants, and had analyzed most of them and decided on their names when she took up this little thing, in poor condition for it was then a day or two old. It was, indeed, so far gone that after some study she gave it up and was just going to throw it away, when what I had told her of *Tillaea* flashed into her mind. She took up the specimen again and was quickly convinced that the long-sought rarity was hers — *Tillaea* had come out of its seclusion of sixty-five years!

This was in August, 1894. In 1896, the first time after that that we were on the island together I invited Mrs. Robinson to drive out to Hummock Pond with me and show me the *Tillaea* locality. We went along the east shore and stopped near the southern limit of the pines; there Mrs. Robinson left me to hunt up the spot, but soon came back



and taking me to the edge of a bank pointed down to what looked to me like a large patch (perhaps twelve feet by six) of *Myriophyllum tenellum* Big. such as I often used to see by the ponds amongst the hills between Almanac Pond and Sankaty Head — “Could any of that growth have been *Tillaea*?” was my quick question. I went out soon afterwards to investigate thoroughly, but my previous visits there were made some fifty years before, and I now found, to my sorrow, the low shores of these ponds invaded by a sturdy growth of cattails which has probably completely filled the water by this time.

I return to Hummock. This bank was some ten or twelve feet high. We went down — it was very wet below, although at a considerable distance from the pond edge — and found the bright green sod composed of “very small tufted plants an inch or two high, rooting at the base,” just as the Manual says, but the numerous flowers of a purer white than I expected to see. The well-formed fruit in all stages was as abundant as the flowers and made the specimens complete and perfect, all that could be desired for the herbarium. I cut out sods for my botanical friends, but the late Mr. L. L. Dame who was at his summer home in Siasconset was the only one who could have received the plant in all its freshness. The last time I saw him, the year before he died, I asked him if he remembered it, “Perfectly” he replied. “The pretty little flowers that starred the sod, and the fine fruit?” “Perfectly” was again the reply. No human being has, to my knowledge seen the patch again. I have looked for it myself a number of times in company with keen and quick-eyed searchers to whom I have described what I wanted, but we never found it.

In 1902 Mrs. Robinson went out with me again; she not only could not find the spot but she seemed to have forgotten it and the plant too. She took me to the edge of the water and after search amongst the floating weeds drew out what she said was *Tillaea*. I was amazed, but I later found that it is so called by other botanists.

*Tillaea simplex* Nutt. is described in every edition of Gray’s Manual, in Gray’s Field, Forest and Garden Botany and in Wood’s Class-book, and always as a low tufted plant with white flowers rooting in the mud. Oakes found it rooting in the mud. Now these three botanists surely never knew of the aquatic form which differs from their plant in many striking particulars. It grows in shallow water, though sometimes two feet deep, rooting at the bottom, but reaching up to the surface; it is apt to break off and then, entangled with other water



growths, is washed ashore by the ripple of the wind-stirred waves. When drawn out of the water it hangs limp from the stick, a pale olive-colored mass; no flower or fruit visible to the naked eye. The land form is beautiful, but this — vegetation can hardly be more unlovely. The land form answers, point by point, Dr. Gray's description in every edition of his *Manual*, while this differs point by point.

But my concern is to find my lost station and to rediscover Oakes's locality, for which our only guide is his statement that it was "the dried-up edge of small ponds." Now he never would have called Hummock, two miles long, a small pond; besides, that accurate botanist used the plural number — he found it in more than one spot. Along the south coast of the island there is a row of shallow ponds, one or two about half a mile long, the others of varying smaller size. Some of them are entirely dry now, though they keep their place on the map, but in 1829 they probably all had water in their beds. Now to give a guess at Mr. Oakes's walks, I should say that his collector's instinct would have led him speedily to the "Head of Hummock" which is not far from town, and, finding the vegetation rich there, he would have kept along the east shore of the pond, and as he got towards the southern end, he would have seen Reedy Pond and from that have been lured along first to Great Mioxes and then to Little Mioxes. These answer his description; they are small, and might be partly dried up at any time, that condition depending on the character of the season for much or little rain. Miacomet, a pond about a mile long, is about as far from town, but if he walked out to that and went down its east side, he might naturally have turned from its lower end along the south shore of the island and have come to Weeweeder, a small pond, and the first of the row just mentioned. They follow, one after another, at such short distances, that he would have been likely to keep on till he had searched them all. These are Nobadeer, Madequecham, Toopcha and Forked, and to my mind, these after the three before mentioned, are the most likely places on the whole island. Moreover, these are the only ponds that I ever knew, which answered Mr. Oakes's description of his locality. The aquatic form is certainly not what Oakes found, and it was doubtless as unknown to him as it was to Dr. Gray after him, so his station is still undiscovered, and mine is lost for the present. But I solemnly advise collectors to keep away from these ponds from Reedy to the Forked Ponds. The life savers who patrol the coast report that recently quicksands have been



discovered near Reedy Pond and the Mioxes so dangerous that they will not bear up the weight of a small dog. Of course they may develop at any time on the edge of the others; the only safe course is to keep away from all. But to console those who long to explore them I will say that Oakes's stations will probably never be seen again — the physical changes of eighty-three years have obliterated them. My patch however doubtless still exists, and there is a happy day in store for any botanist who sees it at just the right season — that bright green sod starred profusely with the small but conspicuous white flowers.

MANHASSET, LONG ISLAND.

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THE SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL FIELD MEETING OF THE VERMONT BOTANICAL CLUB was held at Franklin, conjointly with the Vermont Bird Club, on Thursday and Friday, July 25 and 26. Head quarters were at the Franklin House and about thirty members of both clubs attended. A short business meeting was held the evening before, in the public library of Franklin. The forenoon of Thursday was spent in exploring a sphagnum bog in which besides the plants usual to such a habitat the rare white fringed orchid, *Habenaria blephariglottis* (Willd.) Torr. was found, also the bladderwort, *Utricularia cornuta* Michx. Next day another sphagnum bog was visited about five miles from Franklin and lying in the three towns of Franklin, Berkshire, and Enosburgh. Here the white fringed orchid was abundant and several other bog orchids were found. Some hybrids of *Rumex* were seen by the roadside. *Scirpus Peckii* Britton was found in a low meadow and the European *Malva Alcea* L., var. *fastigiata* was abundant at several roadside stations in the vicinity. At North Sheldon, *Linaria minor* (L.) Desf. and a very dwarf form of *Silene noctiflora* L. were observed, growing abundantly between the railway tracks. About a half a dozen new members were added to the Club and the meeting will be remembered with pleasure by all who were present. The winter meeting will be held at St. Johnsbury in January, 1913.—NELLIE F. FLYNN, Burlington, Vermont.



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