

NORTH EASTON, Mass.

October 11th, 1922.

My dear Mr. Powell:

To supplement the work you are doing we should have somebody collecting all of the time. Every flowering orchid should be pressed, properly labelled as to locality, date etc., and when dry forwarded at once to the herbarium for study. Plants that seem worthy of note, but which lack flowers, should be submitted to you for cultivation. There must be some native or resident of Panama who would enjoy this means of earning money, provided you were willing to give instruction as to proper treatment of specimens and to furnish information as to the best methods to adopt in preparing orchids for the herbarium. If the right man could be found we might make two propositions: either a flat monthly rate of payment, or payment on a specimen basis. The monthly wage might be seventy-five or one hundred dollars. The payment per specimen might range from fifteen to twenty cents, five examples of each species to be made (when possible) and each example to count as one specimen.

You have mentioned in your letters a native who helps you with your work. Perhaps this man might be trained to make specimens. He could carry a strap press and driers into the field when he goes orchid hunting for you and fill the press with carefully arranged and properly selected specimens from every flowering orchid encountered. I am sure that a brief course of training would pay us ample dividends in specimens. This man might have a boy to help him at a fair wage. Some of Merrill's best collectors in the Philippines were natives. Ramos, for example, turned out to be a star.

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Please consider this proposition. If it meets with your approve it should be put in operation at once!

Although we cannot hope to make specimens that will compare for beauty and excellence with those prepared from the Garden, the scientific value of material from the woods will be equally great to that obtained from cultivated plants, and will furnish an abundance of examples from which intensive comparative studies will be made possible.

If you finally approve of my plan, and see an opportunity to send somebody afield on receipt of this letter, cable me the word "Agreed" and I will send one hundred dollars to cover the first month. If seventy-five dollars will prove sufficient, cable me the word "Approved". If the specimen basis of payment is more appealing, cable me the word "Specimen" and I will send fifty dollars as an advance payment and promise to pay twenty-cents per specimen when collections arrive. By specimen, speaking botanically, enough material to fill an herbarium sheet comfortably is understood.

We cannot hope to obtain a satisfactory orchidological survey of any part of Panama until some such plan as I have outlined is put in operation.

If you decide to co-operate with me on this more extensive basis, progress would be rapid and there should be no objection in the way of a change in your present relations with Schlechter. It is improbable that Schlechter would ever make a similar offer to mine. Consequently there is no reason why you should limit your survey to meet his capacity for co-operation.

I have made my proposals with a complete understanding of what is necessary for a scientific investigation of a regional flora. Substantial progress is only possible when an

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abundance of specimens is available. The Garden cannot compete with field-collections for necessary quantity.

In your letter of September 27th, you refer to the probability of Schlechter placing your material in pigeon-holes to be entirely neglected if you discontinue your shipments of specimens. It is really improbable that he would do such a thing. On the other hand you would be justified in writing to him that no more material will be set aside for him until he has published the numerous species that he has detected among your orchids. The delay in publications of your new species has three very unfortunate aspects:

1. It leaves us in doubt as to what Schlechter will finally do with your specimens;
 - a. Because herbarium names are often simply for convenience and do not express finality of interpretation (cf. under 3. below).
 - b. Because new species that lie too long are often described from other material and die in the herbarium.
 - c. Because Schlechter has made revisions that keep you in uncertainty as to the validity of any of his determinations.
2. It places your collection in the realm of uncertainty as to the final worth of your types.
3. It prevents me from making a complete flora of Central America.

Put this situation squarely before Schlechter. He promised to be prompt with determinations. Has he lived up to his promise. Has he, for example, given you lists of names sent

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two weeks after receipt of specimens? Has he published a single species of your collection since your association with him was formed?

At the present time Schlechter is receiving material from several collectors in Costa Rica. He has correspondents in Brazil, Mexico and elsewhere. He is making efforts to turn all material, from every possible source, in the direction of Berlin. It is evident that he cannot handle all of this material with scientific accuracy and with critical vision. Nor can he promise promptness to everybody and at the same time do that type of work that rests on a substantial basis. But as his chief aim is to monopolize the orchid flora of tropical America, he makes the end justify the means.

Americans in tropical countries, and Englishmen for that matter, should be stimulated to make every effort toward the accumulation of material in American herbaria. Every scrap should be tenderly preserved and sent as soon as possible to the United States. The true aspect of the case should be outlined in detail as an additional stimulus. The competitive spirit should be roused.

Fortunately the attention of our botanical institutions is being concentrated on Central and South America. Killip and Pennell are at present in northern Colombia. Dr. Standley has recently returned with rich collections from Salvador and Guatemala. Maxon and Rose have trips in prospect. The New York Botanical Garden is busy in the West Indies. The Mulford Expedition that returned last spring was fairly successful in Bolivia and northern Brazil. From these expeditions the orchids come to me.

For the present Kew on account of the death of Rolfe is out of the orchid game. The young man who is to take up the

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work where Rolfe left off will need several years of hard study to get into the game. Paris has no orchidologist to take the place of Finet. This simple¹ statement should give you a very clear outlook on the situation that confronts us. It should help you to make your plans for future action.

I cannot close this too lengthy letter without an attempt to impress on you the importance of field collections! It is from these that rapid and telling progress is made, in attempts to size up a flora and to accumulate the materials that make exhaustive floristic work possible. Field collections also supply the duplicates that are necessary to bring from other institutions, through exchanges, the materials that swell herbaria and make comparisons and checks possible. If you enter into the field-work undertaking, we can designate the collections as *Orchidaceae Powellianae* and put the actual collectors names in the proper place on the printed label.

Your reaction to this letter will be awaited with impatience and hope.

Yours faithfully,

Oakes Ames.



Ames, Oakes. 1922. "Ames, Oakes Oct. 11, 1922 [to C.W. Powell]." *Oakes Ames Orchid Herbarium correspondence files*

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