

July 17th, 1923.

My dear Mr. Lankester:

Once again I come to you with a pressing need. Vanilla! This is a genus that we know too little about. The specimens in herbaria are too often sterile. The fleshy flowers when dried become agglutinated in such a manner, that manipulation under the microscope is difficult in the extreme. Then from the economic side, everything with a large leaf is referred to Vanilla planifolia Andr. The ideal specimen is one which is accompanied by flowers in alcohol. *V. Pfaviana* Reichb. f. *V. Pittieri* Schltr. *V. planifolia* Andr. These species have been reported from Costa Rica. Do you know whether any but the last are used for economic purposes in Costa Rica?

In drying flowers it is best to place a pad of cotton in such a way that it relieves the pressure, and to hasten drying by suspending the specimens over the kitchen stove. The flowers should, of course be dried apart from the foliage. This makes it possible to use small pieces of blotting paper that are easily handled when attempts to obtain the advantages of artificial heat are made.

Just at present I am pushing forward with my enumeration of Philippine orchids for the Bureau of Science at Manila. This means close attention to bibliography and herbarium material. It also means a constant weighing of those characters which at one time or another have been regarded sufficient to distinguish distinct species. At the end of



twenty years, when hardly a month has passed without several packages of specimens coming in from numerous collectors, a critical survey leads to the conclusion that a broader conception of specific limits must be observed if oncoming generations are to be able to understand us. At this late date I find that a definitive flora of the Philippines cannot be prepared because specific limits are not yet clear in too many cases. And nine-tenths of the types are in my herbarium! In fact my Philippine herbarium has no equal anywhere in the world.

At this point in my work on the Central American orchid flora, I am overwhelmed by the uncertainties caused by lack of material. Too often a decision has to be based on a fragment, on a drawing or on a description. Whereas in studies of Philippine problems I am able to consult not only the type, but sometimes forty sheets of the species from numerous localities, I find in my studies of the Central American problems <sup>often</sup> that/I am obliged to meditate before a <sup>scrap</sup> ~~scrap~~. When we have done as fine a piece of work for Central America as has been done for the Philippines, then the study of the Central American flora will be a pleasure instead of a nightmare. But when can you see fifty collectors searching the forests of Costa Rica. Fully that number of collectors have done botanical work in Luzon. Their names are on the labels in my herbarium.

I am enclosing a postal money order for five dollars to cover postage on mailing tubes that you may send to me. It would be unfair to expect you to go into pocket for this part of our cooperative scheme.

Faithfully yours,

*Walter A. P. ...*





Ames, Oakes. 1923. "Ames, Oakes July 17, 1923 [to C.H. Lankester]." *Oakes Ames Orchid Herbarium correspondence files*

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