

Columbus Sept 25th 1855

My dear Gray — I have been laid up all summer or next thing to it — unable & unfit for any thing. This acc'ts for my long ^{silence} ~~absence~~.

For the last week or two I have been picking up rapidly and hope as cooler weather approaches to be once more on hand.

I have two letters from you unanswered. In a Nomenclature point in your first I have a word to say. — Usage of by far the the larger majority of authors is with you. But majorities are not always right.

Now as I look upon species as a fixity genus as a grand uncertainty if not a nonentity and Authorship of species a distinction valued by botanists, I hold that the name of him who first recognizes defines and establishes a species should always be appended thereto. Species never changes, genus continually according to the crotchets of different shrews. It is not enough to say that in the synonymy the name of the first

author of a species will be on record; synonyms
soon become unwieldy and afterwards are more
or less dropped. If any one is to depend on the
synonymy to show what he has done, let the
genus maker, and not task his Mike to
a species he did not discover and to a species
name he did not originate merely because
his fancy prompts him to day to place it in a
genus for which tomorrow he or some one else
may substitute another. He who first discovers a
species feels a sort of vested right in it and
justly so. He cares not into what assemblage called
genera it may be placed by this or that Systematist,
especially so is it in Musci where after taking out
4 or 5 pretty national groups there is left a material
that would be worked up by Müller into 40 and by
Schimper into 340 genera, and Bryologists would be
pretty equally divided as to which or whether was
right. I have somewhere seen a suggestion
(from Lindley perhaps) which I consider an excellent
one - i.e. to give the authorities where they are differ-
ent both for the genera and the species, thus, Hypnum
reptans (Linn. Michx.) - But if this change cannot be made
and if only one author's name is to be appended to the
two terms (Genus & species) by which it is sought to

make known a given species, then let this name
be appended who manifestly has made far the
largest contribution to that object - viz - the discovery
of the species itself, as is done by Hook. f. and Wilson
in Flora New Zealand (1853) and Wilson in Bryol. Brit. (1855)
who retain the original specific ^{name} with the name of its author
attached thereto, no odds when or by whom the various
genera, it may have passed through or may now be
placed in, were proposed. — — —

There's my gun on this subject!

However I shall not be reproachful - but, when we publish,
follow the crowd though on the wrong track.

Now about the Manual. — I like the plan
of illustrating the genera of Musci & Hepaticae, and
will very cheerfully revise and do all I can in illus-
trating them. Besides the necessary ^{the best of} analysis, a character
in the plant of each genus should be given. After looking
into the matter and making some estimates, I think the
82 genera (Musci & Hepat. of the Manual) can be neatly and
satisfactorily illustrated with four octavo plates. To make
the drawings for all these, as they should and must be
made, is more than I should like to undertake in my
present state of health, but if Mr. Sargent will come
on here & spend with me 10 or 15 days more or less, we

will fix you up 4 as nice plates as any reasonable
man would desire. — I should be very much
pleased to have Sprague come — no doubt a
little flying trip out here would do him good
mind & body — his visit will be a pleasant one — if
it is any inducement his coming staying and
returning shall not cost him any thing. —

as for the letter press I would want for the
additions revising &c to increase that of the Maps
4 to 6 pages — would make very little change in
Hepetusee — the Maps would be considerably im-
proved. —

When do you want all this done? — I am
ready now to begin on it. — could not Sprague
be here by the 10th of next month (Oct)? — Let
me know. — In the mean time I could get things
together & prepare for him. —

you spoke about a notice of Wilbur's Bryd.
Brit. for Lillermans Jun. — To do it as it ought
to be done would take more time than I can
now spare — besides Harker's pot.^r in one of the
late Nos of War. Brit. gives a long notice of T. but not
such a one as it deserves. — Thanks for the Bryd.^e pamph-
lets which I suppose came from you. — I am sorry — other matters
I intended to write about leave for another time — as ever your cordially
Wm. Silliman



Sullivant, William S. 1855. "Sullivant, William Sep 25, 1855." *William Starling Sullivant letters* –.

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