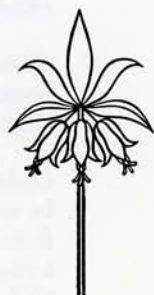


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## Review

PETERSEN, RONALD H. *The mycological association of M. J. Berkeley and M. A. Curtis*. Vaduz, Liechtenstein: J. Cramer, 1980. 120pp., illustr. DM 30 (paper). ISBN 3-7682-1258-0.

The divines Moses Ashley Curtis in North Carolina and Miles Joseph Berkeley in England practically dominated North American mycology from 1842 to 1872. The correspondence between the two men during that period accompanied a substantial exchange of fungal specimens, which culminated in a series of papers in *Grevillea* by Berkeley under the general heading, "Notices of North American fungi." Ronald Petersen has compiled a rather attractive, short book dealing specifically with the three-decade association between these successors of the earlier leading student of American fungi, Lewis David von Schweinitz.

In his short introductory letter of 14 April 1846, Curtis proposed to send Berkeley fungal specimens from the United States in exchange for their accurate identification and for European and exotic (*i.e.*, tropical) specimens. He also asked Berkeley to be his tutor in mycology. To each proposition Berkeley graciously and affirmatively responded. By generous excerpts from the Berkeley-Curtis correspondence, Petersen shows clearly how their "wide interest and knowledge" contributed so much to the early development of American mycology. The letters of Curtis to Berkeley have long been housed at the British Museum (Natural History); those of Berkeley to Curtis were recently donated to the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina after their discovery a few years ago in an attic in Hillsboro, North Carolina, where Curtis had begun

writing Berkeley.

The book is divided into three sections. The first presents the development of "the mycological association" of Berkeley and Curtis through their correspondence. The second—"Footnotes"—affords the interested reader some substantive reading on matters sometimes peripheral yet pertinent to the Berkeley-Curtis relationship. The third section should interest the mycologist alone, since it is Berkeley's commentary on the Hymenomycetes (specimens 739-1825) listed in Schweinitz's "Synopsis fungorum in America boreali media degentium" (*Trans. Amer. Phil. Soc.* 4: 141-316, 1832). Curtis had suppressed Berkeley's commentary—perhaps, hazards Petersen, because the comments would too candidly "reveal to the public the extent of Schweinitz's ineptness or the [bad] condition of his herbarium." Since the data given by Berkeley may be valuable to systematic mycologists and since the commentary has been hitherto unavailable in print, it seems appropriate to have published the work here. In the case of the entry for *Peziza vaccinea*, number 894, one can almost hear Berkeley sighing in exasperation as he denies the very biological nature of that entity, calling it "merely a chemical efflorescence very common on dried cow dung."

Approximately twelve pages of the first section disclose the ultimate value of Schweinitz's work in light of Berkeley's and Curtis' studies. Both indicted Schweinitz for careless research. At the outset of their review, Berkeley wrote Curtis that Schweinitz "is generally right about the new species, and he does not propose as new species those which are already well known. How he escapes this . . . so well I can-

not guess . . ." This was in 1855. Four years later, after Berkeley had received many duplicate specimens from Curtis, who had obtained them after a long study of the original Schweinitz herbarium in Philadelphia, he wrote with less praise: "I have a long list of names for you . . . I am sorry to say that scarcely a single species is rightly named, not even *Sphaeria herbarum*. The strangest matter is that he has forgotten even his own species." During this time, Berkeley continually prodded Curtis to publish his observations on Schweinitz's fungi that he had examined at Philadelphia. Unfortunately, Curtis never took his tutor's advice; much of what he noted during that Philadelphia visit remains today in manuscript form.

By 1851 both gentlemen had turned their attention to more positive studies. Berkeley proposed and Curtis agreed, at least in theory, to work on a North American mycology. At first, Curtis thought it would be a suitable addition to Gray's North American flora project; later, he changed his mind and sought to interest the Smithsonian in the work. The correspondence of that time tells the story of frustrated good intentions. Curtis was constantly thwarted in his attempts to work on a mycological flora. First was "this most horrible & unnecessary war," which did not leave him very well off financially. Second were the requests of various collectors for identifications of their fungal specimens. Charles Wright brought Curtis the fungi collected on his expedition in the northern Pacific; Augustus Fendler sent him specimens from Venezuela—"exotics" which he found difficult to pass up.

Other matters of interest in the Berkeley-Curtis correspondence include the problem of slavery, the work and sad post-bellum condition of the mycological collector Henry William Ravenel. Petersen also includes letters critical of Curtis written between Elliot Calvin Howe and Charles Horton Peck, both of whom succeeded Curtis in the study of American fungi.

This account of the Berkeley-Curtis association merits reading by those interested in the mid-nineteenth century development of the

natural sciences in the United States and, of course, by mycologists. Biographies of both Curtis and Berkeley are now in preparation and should give more details about their early and personal lives, but enough personal information is contained in the correspondence selected by Petersen to provide the reader with some feeling for the personalities of both gentlemen. Although the book lacks an index, this did not prevent me from enjoying and profiting from it; serious students of fungi might regret the oversight, but they should be encouraged to read this account for its hitherto recondite information about these two pioneer mycologists and their work.

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