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A Selection of the Correspondence of Linnaeus, and Other Naturalists

After the death of the younger Carl Linnaeus in 1783, the entirety of the Linnean collections, including the letters received by the elder Linnaeus from naturalists all over Europe, was purchased by the English botanist James Edward Smith (1759–1828), later co-founder and first president of the Linnean Society of London. In 1821, Smith published this two-volume selection of the letters exchanged by Linnaeus *père et fils* and many of the leading figures in the study of natural history, revealing some of the close ties of shared knowledge and affection that bound the European scientific community at that time. Where necessary, Smith translates the letters into English, with the exception of those written in French, which are presented in the original. Volume 1 illuminates the epistolary relationships of Linnaeus senior with Peter Collinson, John Ellis and Alexander Garden, providing a very brief biography of each. Garden's letters to Ellis also feature prominently.

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From the Original Manuscripts

VOLUME 1

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A
SELECTION
OF THE
CORRESPONDENCE
OF
LINNÆUS,
AND
OTHER NATURALISTS,
FROM THE
Original Manuscripts.

BY SIR JAMES EDWARD SMITH,
M.D. F.R.S. &c. &c.
PRESIDENT OF THE LINNÆAN SOCIETY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London :

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

1821.

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LONDON: Printed by JOHN NICHOLS and SON, 25, Parliament Street.

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TO
THE LINNÆAN SOCIETY
OF LONDON,

THESE VOLUMES,
THE REPOSITORY OF MUCH INFORMATION,
NOT ELSEWHERE TO BE FOUND,
AND OF MANY INTERESTING MEMORIALS OF PERSONS
WHO HAVE CULTIVATED,
AND EMINENTLY PROMOTED, THE STUDY OF NATURE,
ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,
BY THE INSTITUTOR AND PRESIDENT
OF THIS DISTINGUISHED SOCIETY,

JAMES EDWARD SMITH.

Norwich, March 25,
1821.

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P R E F A C E.

THE epistolary correspondence of eminent characters is generally an object of curiosity. This may arise from an opinion that the writers are there likely to appear with less disguise, and under a more easy and familiar aspect, than in studied compositions intended for the publick eye. Hence the letters of professed authors have always been perused with avidity; though possibly not invariably written without a latent expectation of their being one day seen and admired beyond the limits of confidential privacy.

The letters here presented to the publick were probably not written with any such expectation; or, if they were, it was an expectation of their being consulted as registers of plain facts and scientific remarks. The effusions of the heart, which they not unfrequently contain, were certainly not poured out in ostentation, or to display brilliant sentiments, rather than warm affections. These effusions will principally be found in the correspondence

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of genuine disinterested lovers of Nature : while the letters of academical dignitaries, of such at least as were little inspired by any of this pure and elevated taste, too often display that irritability which is characteristic of rivals, whether in fame, interest, or any other personal object.

The ample stores, from whence the following collection has been selected, are, in the first place, the epistolary correspondence of the great Linnæus and his son, which came into the hands of the editor, by purchase of every thing that belonged to those eminent men relating to Natural History or Medicine, in the year 1784. As Linnæus was fixed, for the greater part of his life, in the remote University of Upsal, all the particular communications which he received, on the objects of his studies, were by the letters of his friends, amongst whom we find almost every man of scientific rank in Europe, and every traveller of eminence, for half a century. It appears that Linnæus preserved all the letters he received. We have only to regret that he kept copies of but few of those he wrote. This deficiency is, indeed, partly supplied by the publication of all his letters to Haller, and of a few here and there to other persons ; as well

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as by transcripts handed about in literary circles, and preserved by curious collectors. But the following collection is especially enriched by means of the correspondence of Mr. Ellis, the celebrated writer on Corals and Corallines, which was given to the editor by the worthy daughter of that excellent man. In this are a number of peculiarly interesting letters of the great Swedish Naturalist, which render the correspondence between him and Ellis, as nearly as possible, complete. Such is likewise the case with the epistolary intercourse of Mr. Ellis with Dr. Alexander Garden, and other friends. The collection of letters written to Dr. Richardson of North Bierley, in Yorkshire, the personal friend and learned botanical correspondent of Sherard, Dillenius, Petiver, and almost all the Botanists of their time, has been most obligingly communicated by Miss Curren, the great-grand-daughter and heiress of that learned man. Part of this, especially the letters of Sir Hans Sloane, and those of the illustrious Sherard, of whom the world had previously known little or nothing as a writer, have already appeared in Mr. Nichols's "Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century;" to which the present volumes are to be considered as supplementary.

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Finally, the manuscript correspondence of the late Mr. Emanuel Mendes Da Costa, communicated to the editor by Mr. Nichols, has supplied some valuable materials, especially several unpublished letters of Linnæus, to himself and others.

Of all these collections, a great proportion still remains behind, much of it not less valuable or entertaining than what is here given. It may hereafter see the light, if the publick curiosity should be excited by the present specimen.

In the selection now offered to the English reader, the editor has given a preference to the letters of British Naturalists, and to subjects connected with England. In the next place he has chosen whatever might throw any new light on the history or character of Linnæus, or of his son. The originals are mostly written in English, and have received necessary corrections only, with some slight abridgments. The translations are distinguished by mention of their original language. The very few French letters it has not been thought requisite to translate. The editor has supplied such notes as appeared necessary, with the established Linnæan names of the various subjects of natural history; a work of some diffi-

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culty in the letters of Haller, who usually speaks of plants by vague phrases, from memory only, and often very imperfectly. These Linnæan names are either given in the notes, or placed, like some other remarks, between brackets.

Biographical Memoirs of some of the chief contributors to this collection are prefixed to their letters. These are principally those of Collinson, Ellis, and Garden, in the first volume; and of Solander, Dillenius, and Mutis, in the second.

Since the eighth page of this volume was printed, the editor has met with an additional proof of the specific identity of the peach and the nectarine, in the following account, communicated by the late Dr. Richard Pulteney to A. B. Lambert, Esq.

“ Dr. Hancock purchased a tree of a gardener near Blandford, about the year 1750, which he understood to be a nectarine tree. Not finding it to bear for a year or two, he changed its situation twice. The year after its last removal, it began to blossom, and, to his astonishment, produced nothing but peaches. He supposed the gardener had deceived him, in sending a peach-tree instead of a nectarine. The next year he perceived nectarines on the

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tree, which surprised him not a little; but his surprise was considerably increased when he perceived peaches also growing on the same tree. Many persons came to examine and *detect* it, as they said, supposing that buds of these two kinds of fruit had been grafted on the same stock. To their great wonder, however, they saw this could not be the case, because from one large bough bearing peaches, small branches were derived which produced nothing but nectarines. Thus the tree continued twenty years, bearing at the same time, and on the same boughs, both peaches and nectarines. The fame of it extended so far, that many people came from the distance of 80 or 100 miles to see this curiosity, and, as they thought, to discover the trick. But they always went away satisfied that it was the most extraordinary *lusus naturæ* they had ever seen. The curiosity of the publick, and the consequent numerous applications to see this remarkable tree, became at last so troublesome, that the Doctor was induced to give it to his friend Lord Harborough. It died in consequence of the removal.”

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