

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

The Origin of the Annals of Botany

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The origin of the Annals of Botany has for many years seemed to have been very sparsely documented. Now, however, in the 90th year of the Journal, there has come to light a contemporary record of its origin and early years; a record, moreover, which, in the intervening period, has apparently been lost and found and lost again. It is worthy of wider notice.

In the course of a perusal of the minutes of the Annals of Botany Company I was surprised to find that in 1943 the Company had considered the matter of 'a proper repository of the first Minute Book . . . which includes a full history of the inception of the Journal'. It was offered to the Library of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and accepted. That, of course, was during the war years, so that I was not altogether surprised when the Librarian (Mr V. T. H. Parry) told me that there was now no record of it. However, he instituted a search, and the book was found—in the dislocations of the time it had eluded cataloguing.

It spans the period 1885 to 1897, but the greater part of it is not a minute book: more interestingly it is a collection of letters from among those botanists of the day who were consulted or concerned with the origin of the Annals. Only after the journal made its first appearance does the record take the form of scantily written minutes of the apparently informal committee which at that time determined the editorial policy of the Annals and advised the Clarendon Press about its publication (the Annals of Botany Company was not formed until 1903). Thus, the collection comprises a variety of documents which the Kew Library has numbered, mounted and bound, and which do indeed reveal, in personal rather than in formal terms, the history of the inception of the Journal.

As Sir John Farmer (1937) has reminded us it was to Isaac Bayley Balfour that the inception of the enterprise was largely due, and as the letters are nearly all addressed to him it seems likely that the collection came from his files. It would seem also that in 1943 the Company cannot long have been aware of it. In 1936 Sir Arthur Hill (then Director of Kew Gardens and a member of the Company) had organized a search in the Kew Archives

* Karl Wilson was invited to membership of the Annals of Botany Company following the Annual General Meeting of 1960, with the intention of his taking over the Treasurership from A. S. Watt, which he did in March, 1961. At that time W. H. Pearsall combined the offices of Editor and Secretary, as was then the established custom. When he died in the autumn of 1964, and J. Heslop-Harrison became Editor-in-Chief, Wilson undertook the Secretaryship, initially as a stop-gap measure. He continued to serve as both Secretary and Treasurer from then on until his retirement in 1977, except for one short period in 1965-6 when the company reverted briefly to its earlier practice and the Editor became Secretary.

The Annals of Botany Company welcomes this opportunity of recording its sincere thanks to Karl for the efficiency and wisdom with which he has handled its affairs during a difficult period in which the Journal has gone from strength to strength, and hopes that now he will enjoy a well-earned retirement.

for information bearing on the origin of the *Annals* (it was not very rewarding), and it is clear that Farmer wrote in ignorance of the collection.

Its nature leaves the reader to infer the sense of Balfour's outgoing letters from the replies to them. However, there is also preserved at Kew, in another collection of his letters, one from him to W. T. Thiselton-Dyer, dated 14 July 1885, which shows how he was thinking, even at that early date. He wrote, *inter alia*, 'is it not about time an independent botanical journal were started?' and indicated that he had already discussed this question with Sir Joseph Hooker and S. H. Vines (this letter was overlooked in Hill's search). Dyer replied the following day, agreeing with the proposal and adding 'I don't see why the Clarendon should not print it'. Balfour consulted others, presumably in similar terms, including Asa Gray (Harvard), who replied in January 1886, suggesting, even at that early stage, the appointment of W. G. Farlow as an American sub-editor. The value of American interest was early appreciated; as W. Hillhouse (Mason Science College, Birmingham) put it: '... endeavour to make it a journal not merely for we English, but for all English-speaking people . . . I hope the adhesion of American botanists may be secured, and that before the Journal is started'.

In February 1886 Balfour and Vines sent out a circular to other botanists: replies from J. G. Baker, F. O. Bower, D. H. Scott, Hooker and others indicate its general tenor. It was visualized that the proposed journal would print not only good original papers, but also progress reports and review articles in different branches of botany and a running bibliography of botanical publications. The proposal elicited general support in principle, together with doubts about its practicability, especially from Hooker, who was very discouraging. He not only thought that the proposed journal wouldn't pay its way (others too were concerned on this account), but he also had serious doubts about who would write for it: '... the reviews must not be mere resumé's of the content of books or researches . . . and who is to write them?' he asked; '... what practice have the few young men you rely upon in such work? . . . your young men will marry and be off and there will be an end of their work . . .' Hooker also had a poor opinion of contemporary English botanists, asserting that the class of contributor whom Balfour would look to '... do not wander far from the stages of their microscopes . . . are hardly known in the general world of science—they have no catholicity in them . . .' and more in similar vein. He suggested that one number of the new journal would probably take in all the botany done in England in the previous 10 years.

Nevertheless, Balfour and Vines went on to circulate a printed notice of a meeting to discuss their proposals, to be held at the London office of Chatto and Windus (appropriately perhaps, the publishers of another journal called '*Science Gossip*'), on 21 October 1886.

This circular drew wider interest and support, though again coupled with doubts about the viability of a new journal. There was more discouraging advice from Hooker too: 'People must say why on earth does Balfour occupy his time with editing when he has such a heap of good material to work out . . . it would be such a pity to start a new journal to be defunct in a year or two'. The financial uncertainties were widely felt, and it was advocated by some as an alternative that an attempt should be made to effect a merger with the *Journal of Botany*, and so to widen its scope to include papers on plant physiology and anatomy.

Not surprisingly, there were also varied views on the role of the new journal. F. W. Burbridge (Dublin) thought it should be a weekly, adding '... if it is to be a paying concern it must be botany made popular and readable'. Another well-wisher, in contrast, immediately offered a 40-page paper, with 4–5 plates, on pitcher plants. Baker offered his best wishes, advising that '... the pièce-de-resistance of the new venture will have to be anatomy and physiology . . . the Linnean I think should be the place for long papers on systematic botany which hardly anyone cares to read . . . do not look to the systematic botanists for the help you are not likely to get'. A third correspondent, whose signature

defeats me, wrote succinctly 'journals are like hypotheses, not to be multiplied without necessity'.

Vines chaired the meeting, with Balfour, Scott, H. Marshall Ward, F. Darwin, W. Gardiner, G. Murray and M. C. Potter. Dyer couldn't be present, but assured Balfour of his support. It was this group, together with Bower, who eventually got the *Annals* under way. They were very conscious of the financial pitfalls in starting a new journal, and appointed a sub-committee to consider alternatives: to assess what facilities the Journal of the Linnean Society might be able to offer for rapid publication and to explore the possibility of extending the scope of the Journal of Botany.

They were apparently not satisfied by what the Linnean Society could offer, and their consultations with the Editor of the Journal of Botany proved abortive. The next meeting of the Committee in November resolved that 'a new botanical journal should be established in addition to existing means of publication', and appointed Balfour and Vines to ascertain what its prospects of support might be. Meanwhile, Farlow wrote from Cambridge, Massachusetts, welcoming the new journal, which he thought 'would prove a stimulus to American botanists'. He gave a considered estimate of its circulation in the U.S.A. as nearer 20 than 100, and said he would be glad to assist in editing it (he did so for 18 years).

The Committee met again on 20 January 1887 to put its intentions in the form of detailed resolutions. These proposed that the new journal should be called 'The Journal of Botanical Science', a volume to comprise 480 pages with about 24 plates. It was to contain original papers, reviews and progress reports, historical notices, short notes, letters and an index of current literature. They thought it could be produced to sell for a guinea (£1.05). They appointed Balfour, Vines and A. Dickson (who died within a year) as editors, and mindful of possible difficulties in its early days they did not specify regular intervals of publication, but left it to the editors to decide when contributions justified an issue. This later drew adverse comment from Gray—'if it is to be a journal it should be periodical, not peristaltic'.

It was remitted to Balfour and Vines to transmit these proposals to the Delegates of the Press and to enquire on what terms they would undertake the publication: their letter is reproduced by Bower (1938). The Delegates were prepared to publish: the cost for an edition of 500 was estimated as £420. They asked for a guarantee fund to give reasonable security against loss, but otherwise were willing to support the undertaking without prospect of profit.

Thus assured, in February Vines drafted a prospectus for the new Journal, outlining the proposals and naming the many botanists who had promised support. It was circulated for comment and revised, but was not entirely well received. C. P. Babington refused to let his name appear as a supporter of the new Journal because he thought it must be 'injurious, if not deadly to the Journal of Botany . . . if the new Journal ruins the Journal of Botany it will have done great injury to botany in England'. Nevertheless he added 'I must subscribe for a copy for the Herbarium Library'.

Hooker was very severely critical of the prospectus generally. In a letter which he had amended and added to, and which I find only partially legible, he objected to the wording, and particularly to the proposed title for the new Journal. He suggested that this would lay the promoters open to an accusation of a desire to cut out the Journal of Botany, and would in any case lead to endless trouble in citation. He suggested they should call it an *Annals* and went on ". . . or better still perhaps announce it as a revival of König and Sims' 'Annals of Botany' and call it 'Annals of Botanical Science' or 'Universities Annals of Botany'; the 'Camford Annals of Botany' would probably be too fanciful." Hooker returned his copy of the prospectus, much amended, to Balfour, and in three more letters in the course of a week, also not very legible, offered still more advice. The earlier 'Annals of Botany', to which he had referred, ran only for two years in 1804–06, (Greene, 1958).

Balfour was 'paralysed by Hooker's letter' but he recognized that 'Annals sounds better than our proposal and gets over difficulty with the Journal of Botany'. Vines, similarly was '... depressed by Hooker's wholesale condemnation' but at another meeting on 30 April the Committee adopted the title 'Annals of Botany'. The following day, as Hill (1936) discovered, Vines wrote to Dyer (who had been unable to attend the meeting) '... we feel we must stick to our guns and do our best... I am especially anxious to make this journal a good general record of English botanical work, so that this work may be brought to the ken of our continental friends, who won't take the trouble to seek out our scattered pearls'.

Meanwhile Vines had been seeking support for the guarantee fund, and reported promises from members of the Committee totalling £210. He wrote again to Balfour to say '... I have tried to get Babington to help us... he is so hopelessly stupid about things that it is no use discussing the matter with him further'.

Vines also undertook the bibliographical record, seeking assistance in this from Farlow, who promised a list of recent American work, but added '... there is scarcely anything of importance'. The Press also took a hand, in circulating local scientific societies for early information of their publications.

Vines chaired another meeting on 19 May, at which the amended prospectus, much as Hooker had re-written it, was formally approved, and it was reported that the Clarendon would publish the journal on the basis of a guarantee fund of £200 (they had earlier asked for £400). Thus the way forward seemed clear, and the contents of Vol. I, No. 1 were finally re-arranged. The Press issued the prospectus shortly afterwards.

Thereafter the correspondence is mainly concerned with the details of publication: matters of contributions, proofs, plates, specimen pages and so on. It includes a note from Vines, referring to a list of periodical literature, with the comment '... it has been a considerable grind'. One can sympathize with him; the literature list in Vol. I runs to 108 pages.

In July the Clarendon reported that there were 41 subscribers, and the Essex Field Club wrote to ask, before taking out a subscription, whether the Annals was '... to be a short serial or to run on indefinitely'.

No. 1 appeared in August and drew congratulations from the Harvard Botanic Garden. The record then becomes essentially a series of rather scrappy minutes of annual meetings of the Committee. In 1889 the final costs of Vol. I were recorded as £397-0-8, and the proceeds of sales as £272-18-0; thus there was a deficit of nearly £125 which the guarantee fund had to meet. At the meeting of 1890, however, it was reported that '... the Delegates of the Press could not see any further necessity to call on the guarantors; they are disposed to give the enterprise ample time to establish itself and are content to go on for the present without imposing any further liability'. This meeting also resolved to discontinue the bibliography (which made up a quarter of the journal) after the end of Vol. IV.

For 1895 costs were reported as £416-10-9½, and receipts as £526-15-3½, thus showing a surplus of £110-4-6½, and by 1897 the accumulated surpluses had made good the earlier losses.

Thus, after 10 years, the Annals of Botany was firmly established and financially solvent, and at this point the record at Kew comes to an end. In giving us an insight into the origin of the Annals and its early progress, it also answers the question raised by Farmer, but ignored by Bower, as to how it came about that 'Journal of Botanical Science' proposed to the Press in January 1887, became 'Annals of Botany' when it first appeared in August the same year. The change was urged by Hooker, who was not one of the group who brought the Annals into being, but who nevertheless persuaded them of the unsuitability of the title they had proposed, to which they had been strangely blind.

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