

Josephina Nov 6th 1859

Dear Dr:

I have written to you of La Perla, near Monte Verde. Its owner - Mr. Duverger - owns this, about three leagues (by way of the road) eastward from Nouvelle Sophie. It is a large Hacienda: old, but still productive; & extending over new lands, as portions of it become exhausted. I have been here about two weeks. In front of the house, are two series of secaderas - stone-coal terraces - like ~~land~~ flights of ^{wood} steps, for drying coffee: between them, a passage, and above them, near the house, is what was once designed for two very small plots of ornamental flowers: & probably served as such. Next the mansion (!!!) is a narrow, (now) muddy passage, the resort of all manner of 4-ru pedes, 2-peds, fledged, clothed & nude. The front of the house contains one long apartment, which serves as hall, reception room, sitting room, dining hall, duckhouse, dog kennel, - nursery (of little nips): in fact, the resort of every body & every thing, & where almost every kind of work goes on, except picking, cherrying, peeling, & drying coffee. The estate is under the management of a nephew of the owner. I was most kindly received and told, "es in su casa": (You are at home. It is a genuine expression for French hospitality. My first impressions were, certainly, not very agreeable. There was, at least, one dog under each of the 3-4 tables in the room; and a particularly ugly, black, long-haired cur generally curls himself up under one of the chairs - just fitting between the legs & braces. (they are very stiffashioned home-made affairs) From nightfall till bedtime, a numerous family of Muscovy ducklings were chasing flies all about the apartments. The duckery, for that family, at least, is a storeroom at one end of the hall, into which they are driven, earlier or later, just as happens: but there is a hole

which gives access to the ducklings whenever they are inclined to indulge their insatiable voracity. In the night, a gang of rats attempted to play some sort of a game across my pillow, just above my head. I made a pass at them, & one, turning in some sort, alighted in my face. They have not since returned. This bedroom serves for four or five more persons, according to circumstances, — and, often, for one or more dogs, for it is a gateway to divers negroes, who are passing to and from apartments, the harem? at all hours of the day & night. Some nights it serves, also, as a heaven for I, occasionally, overhear the conversation of a mother & her progeny, within a few feet of my head. In the daytime, it is often used as a laundry, or something of the sort. Some half-a-dozen women are, much of the time, its occupants: some ironing, some sewing, others lounging on the beds & doing nothing, so far as I can see. In rear of the bedroom, which is, at one end, the hall above described, is the room of the Magond, & there or thereabouts, appears to be the apartment of the house servants, as it certainly is of the Magond — an oldish woman of advanced manner proportions. Back of these, again, is my workshop, which, when I came, was strewn with beans, corn, dirt, & various sacks of coffee or other products of the estate. In the course of the two weeks, it has become partially cleared of the beans, corn, part of the dirt, & has had an accession of a number of sacks of coffee. At first, it was swarming with coleoptera, bred in the bean — now they are but few. It is not an elegant apartment, but, better than the open prison, with its winds. In one corner of the hall, adjoining the store-room, is the — (water-closet would be the proper term, but ^{that} has been applied to a very different apartment) — well, the place where we go to drink, when we are thirsty. It contains a large earthen jar, partly sunk in the floor, & filled, every morning, with fresh water, which keeps cool all day. To the legs of

this, are tethered two tortoises, fattening on nothing for a future feast. One day, I saw a dog lying on his back in the bread tray, with his feet in the air. I have put a? there, for it is not always easy for a stranger to distinguish between that animal and a washbowl. There it might have been, which, thrust under a table — the dog-kennel — the brute naturally selected it as a resting place. The mansion? serves as storeroom for the coffee, & in fact for fanning, assorting, weighing, &c. &c. & the dust from the fanning-mill, sometimes flies about thick enough to become troublesome to wear things. Any rejectamenta are thrown on the floor, unless the agent in the case be at the door, when there is almost an even chance that they will be cast outside. Little negroes, using their upper story as a locomotive engine, "Angher sugar mill", drop the heaps, like that machine, just where they are. If one is cleansing his mouth after eating or smoking, though that act here precedes the two latter!! If, as before, he happens to be near the door, the water may be ejected outside — if not, the floor swallows it all. Agua-cato (Persea gratissima) come on the table with other comestibles; and very nice fruit they are — hardly however deserving the specific name. The great seed is thrown on the floor. Whatever of these things are eatable by beast or fowl, speedily disappears. As to the food, it looks pretty nice & tastes well enough. And, you know, it is a true observation, that one not familiar with the kitchen, seldom knows exactly what he is eating, or something to this effect. There are numerous plates for hitching horses in front & rear of the house, & within a few feet of the harem — horses, & oxen & mules are tied & fed mostly in the rear. But if a neighbor rides up, he hitch his horse to the door-handle, if there be one, or to the next nearest object he can find, & when passing in & out, you hear

to dodge round his head or his heels. This is Cuban custom, or rather Spanish custom; for it's the same in Mexico.

It is almost impossible to feel vexed at these annoyances: all-dirt included-is offered with such hearty good will. I am urged to stay a few days longer. Horses are offered me to ride when I want to go ^{to} a distance. I have had but two good days in the woods. The first day, the Mayoral insisted on sending a negro with me, to carry lunch &c. The second, I stole a march on him - went before he was up. It has been a very rainy spell. A younger brother of the overseer, interests himself much in bringing me plants; & has furnished me with some that I have not met with myself. You will, naturally, wonder that men, in some respects, certainly, gentlemen, can be satisfied to live in this sort of half-civilized condition. But they have grown up with it, and are blunted against it as a greivable feature. And almost every body lives in the same manner. And, yet, it would seem natural, that, with such ample means, they would endeavor to copy examples of greater neatness which they must, occasionally, see at genteel houses or good hotels in the cities. Such is "niggerdom! I shall take an emetic, ^{or cathartic} after leaving, or frequent baths while I stay or both?

I have got, here, a good many nice things - blankets of mosses - several new ferns and many lichens & a few fungi.

In one ~~one~~ of my rainy-day resorts for occupation, I was examining *Muntingia*; & find it so very different from the description in *Endl.* that I must give you the result of my examination of the ovary. The ovules are attached, on all sides, to two collateral, pendants, rather short & thick-clavate placentae; & not at all to the walls of the cells, nor to the central angle. Look in your picture books & see if I examined an exceptional specimen, or if other observers have been deceived by the change-
*Which, master or servant, is most an object of commiseration?

state of the dried ovary, or by other causes. After writing the above, to satisfy myself that I had made no mistake, I went & collected several more specimens & examined three ovaries, & find them nearly as above described. The placentae, covered with ovules, are, perhaps, nearer lanceolate, flattened laterally. There is no trace of an ovule on the parietes of the cells.

7th I weigh today only 119 pounds — growing pretty light-aim'd I? Yet I feel perfectly well; in fact, better than I have ^{felt} at any time before for a long ~~period~~ ^{period}; in freedom from rheumatism and other light ailments, of which I have heretofore written, be any indication of good health. Judging from my present feelings, I don't know but I might calculate on 30 years or more of subhuman existence.

I find another species of *Lunania* here, very distinct from the other, and from that of Hooker — judging from the description. Some of the specialities in his character, as the acuteness of the teeth of the ^{must be omitted} disk, for, in this they are broad, distinct nearly to the base, obtuse & three-toothed or lobed. They are also variable in number 5-6, if I have rightly observed.

I find here 6 or 7 new sp. of ferns, at least; perhaps more; for I have collected others, very like some from N. Verde, lest I should neglect, by trusting to my memory, some really distinct ones.

Oranges are so nearly ripe as to be quite good eating, & loads of sugar-cane are brought me to grind. If I don't grow sweet & good natured, it would be for lack of the saccharine fluid.

What a nose Linnaeus must have had, or whoever suggested the name *Cedrela odorata*. It is redolent of one of the worst stinkes I am acquainted with.

I have collected a good many wads here, for want of something better to do between showers, & which, being near at hand, I could collect when I could not venture to a distance for better things. I have made of

them handsome specimens, which at least may
benefit you in the way of exchange. As I have written
before, I must be liberal of them to those who will
value them a nuisance.

5th Last night was a great fanning of coffee, & so around
the dusk, the table was removed into ~~one~~ bedroom. On the
fence, a little nig took lodgings, under the head of my bed.
During the night, in the process of his cooling & fanning, he
continued some how or somehow else, to drag my pants on to
the floor, where they served as a snip for one of his excretions.
Another beauty of Higgenbottom! Felix! Upful country! But it?
After "La envile" - I must, I should for a final ramble in "El
monte" - but did it make much of it. The rain came on me

before I got out of the capital, & I had to return. In this
descent, I witnessed an interesting phenomenon - a rainbow
the highest part of whose arc was some 20 or more degrees
below my horizon, & was cast on the plain below.

In the process of cherishing the coffee, water is passed through
it; & this water, as well as that for domestic use, is brought
in stone-cut canals a distance of some hundred yds. In
the lower part of this canal, I have witnessed a phenomenon
reminding me of a subject that was under discussion at
one of the meetings of the Academy which I attended in your
company. This was, the flow of fluid, in pipes, in jets. This
canal is about six inches broad, & the water, about an inch
deep, in the lower portion of the canal, always flows in jets;
or rather waves, of unequal length. Why it does not in
the higher parts, I have been unable to discover. At the
same time, in the whole length of the canal, the currents are
crossing from end to end, forming rhombs & triangles; thus:

Novelle Ephie, Nov. 17th. I returned here some five or
six days ago, & have made two excursions to the Parallones,
climbing from the base upward. Tomorrow I mean to go to

the top & collect downward as far as I can. I picked up
some nice things, but scant (some of them) in number.
I don't think I shall stay here more than about a week
longer. Then, a short time at Aimagina, & I will be
ready to adopt some plan of an inland trip, or a voyage
round to the north side. I lost two knives at Josephina,
one of which I prize very much. It had a magnificent lens
in the end of the handle. I got it, if I remember right
at your favorite cutler on Washington St. If you
will get me half a dozen of the same kind & send
on from New York (don't wait for Boston parcel)
you will oblige me much. I don't know but I ought
to send for more paper. I don't know now what better
to do than have it sent to Santiago de Cuba, "care
of Brooks & Co." If I go to the north side, I can order
it sent round. I have got left enough to work upon
for some time. You might send me a dozen or fifteen
dreams more. I have had no letters since I was in
the city, but hope to get some on the return of the mes-
senger who will come, this, tomorrow, I hope. I am
however, to hear something more of those lagging books,
that have been, now, nearly a year waiting a passage
from Boston. Pray, don't fill up your letters & waste
your valuable time in giving me advice as to what it
is best for me to do. If you were here & knew as much
as I do about the weather, the roads, the state of vegetation,
&c. &c. I would receive, very thankfully, any counsel you
might offer. But, you may rest assured that I shall do
the best I can, while I stay, & if my health continues
as good as at present, I shall remain to make a good
business of it. I would much rather you would answer
my queries: - & I can recall a good many on which
you have not given me (or I have not received) your opinion.
I find, hereabouts, a delicate Apocynaceum, some, rough &

sticky with unipinate hairs. The ovaries are 4-ovulate, only; in this respect resembling *Rauwolfia*, somewhat, but it must belong to *Quaprocynaceae*. I have but a scanty supply of fruit (immature). The follicles are long & rather slender, & seem to perfect but one seed. I examined one, but not very thoroughly. It looked as if it might be plump at maturity. I think the radicle is superior, the cotyledons long & narrow. All the genera in *Endlicher* are said to have "ovulis plurimis".

Since I returned from Josephina I have been at the house of the father of the Mayoral & can better understand how he can tolerate so much dirt. He was evidently inured to it early under the paternal roof. The old man was taken prisoner in the Napoleonic wars & can speak some english. He is within three miles of this house - has been there 25⁺ years & has never been here! He & wife go to Cuba once a year to buy their few necessaries & nowhere else as it would seem. He isn't one of the go-ahead sort - just into his own - grows neither richer nor poorer - has a small force of slaves which one of his sons manages & makes just enough to live from hand to mouth.

I enclose a specimen of creole French. It is from an old book on St Domingo; but it is essentially the same here. The well informed speak french to one another but a great deal of the conversation is in the creole dialect.

Well I have made a talk of considerable length not very botanical however.

Kind regards to Mrs G. - also to Mrs & Miss Clarence when you meet them.

Ever yours
Chas Wright



Wright, Charles. 1859. "Wright, Charles Nov. 6, 1859." *Charles Wright correspondence with Asa Gray*

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