

The
Botanical Gazette.

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My dear Dr.Watson:--

I have delayed answering your inquiries in regard to the Manual in order that I might consider the matter, and have been further delayed by press of other things.

I think I may say that I know the good qualities and the defects of the Manual thoroughly. I have scrutinized every description and every note in the book in the course of daily use for five years and particularly in the preparation of the keys which I sent you. The more I use it the more I am irritated by its defects. I use the word "irritated" because so many of its defects could have been avoided by the exercise of ordinary clerical care on the part of the authors. Of course I know what a struggle it was to get the book put out at all, and how often it seemed to be completely blocked; but the "extenuating circumstances do not change the unfortunate facts. I cannot take the time to enumerate all or a tenth part of these defects. They make themselves evident on the first use of the book in the contradictions between the generic and specific characters in many places. I have already had a good many letters from amateurs of mosses brought out by the first key that I published and by this last one. I have never heard a favorable opinion of the book expressed by any one who has used it. The other defects are more radical. Take an instance of one

only. It is almost a matter of common knowledge that Mr. Lesquereux finally ruined his eyesight by work on the Orthotricha. Yet in the treatment of this genus in the Manual he neglects to use the most important distinction (as to the character of the stomata--whether superficial or deep-seated-) that has been proposed. The use of this character dates from 1866 and it certainly ought to have gotten into the Manual in 1884. Further: the sequence of the genera is not in accord with present knowledge of relationship; and finally as I say in the preface to the "Keys"---"Of many species in the Manual neither the present names nor the autonomy can be maintained". (Please note that I am NOT of the neo-American school on the nomenclature question).

I have tried to express above legitimate criticism only and not carping such as your revision of the Gray's Manual has met in some quarters, and you will see from what I have said that I do not think it would be possible to better the Manual except in a completely new book. Or perhaps I ought to say, it is not possible to make the Manual what it ought to be except by making it over. Of course it could be bettered by some corrections on the plates, but the result would not be worth either the expense or the trouble.. You know that the typographical form is not good---it is distinctly Cassinesque, to coin a ~~new~~ word that we almost need. I should like to see the next Manual put up in more compact form, with revised nomenclature and descriptions, diagnostic characters in Italics, some species reduced, and the sequence altered. I should be sorry to have you advise the slight revision of this book that is possible on the plates.

Very sincerely yours, CR Barnes



Barnes, Charles Reid. 1890. "Barnes, Charles R. June 11, 1890 [to S. Watson]."
Asa Gray correspondence

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