

A DIGRESSION UPON JAMES TAPLIN, *NEPENTHES* HYBRIDIZER (NEPENTHACEAE)

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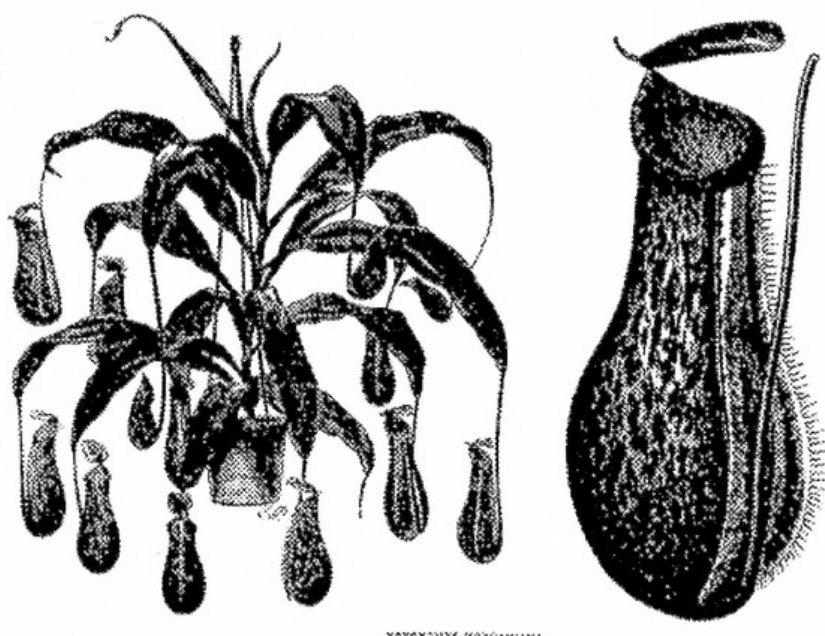
Queen Victoria (1819—1901) presided over an era of unprecedented geographical exploration, resulting in a treasury of newly discovered biota from the far corners of the globe. The tropical plant novelties were destined for elaborate Wardian cases, greenhouses and conservatories. A feel for the kaleidoscopic activities of the late Victorian Age is given by Lynn Barber (1980), who noted that “almost every year produced a new sensation—new orchids, hummingbirds, pitcher plants, toucans, bird-eating spiders, giant tortoises, moon moths from Java, the *Victoria regia* water lily.” The “pitcher plants” referred to in the quotation are the *Nepenthes*, which served as raw material for several dedicated hybridizers of the late 1800’s, including the subject of this article, Mr. James P. Taplin. Coincidentally, he worked for a time at Chatsworth in England, where the royal water lily from British Guiana, the *Victoria amazonica* (“*V. regia*”) mentioned in the quotation, was first brought into flower by Sir Joseph Paxton (Heeps, 1968). I became curious about James Taplin after noticing an assortment of dried specimens of cultivated *Nepenthes* which had been collected by A.L. Schott and deposited in the U.S.

National Herbarium, all but two of which were collected on January 7, 1887 at the United States Botanic Garden in Washington, D.C. The label-names on the specimens are *Nepenthes albomarginata*, *N. dominiana*, *N. hookeri* (collected September 20, 1886), *N. laevis*, *N. masteriana*, *N. phyllamphora*, *N. × morganiana*, *N. pattersonii*, *N. rafflesiana* and *N. × sedenii*. One unidentified specimen collected by the same person in 1885, with the locality stated only as “District of Columbia,” is also present. While looking for information about these species, it was soon learned that *Nepenthes × morganiana* was a hybrid made by a certain Mr. James Taplin, a Briton who had emigrated to the United States, but further data about him was exceedingly hard to trace.

Before continuing with a consideration of the hybridist Taplin, it is interesting to note that virtually nothing seems to be known about the aforementioned Schott’s organizational affiliation or personal history. His general collections were made in the



Figure 1: *N. × henryana* photographed by B. Bednar.



NEPENTHES MORGANIANA.

Figure 2: *Nepenthes* \times *morganiana* from a Siebrecht and Wadley catalogue.

eastern United States and total about 200—500 sheets deposited in the U.S. National Herbarium, and it is often debatable whether any given specimen is from wild, or cultivated, material. The living *Nepenthes* specimens from which Schott's collections were made are, of course, long gone from the conservatories of the Botanic Garden. Today the garden, located within sight of the U.S. Capitol building, attracts many visitors from all parts of the world, who are intrigued by the impressive controlled-environment growth chamber displaying vigorous specimens of *Nepenthes burkei*, *N. gracilis*, *N. macfarlanei*, *N. \times mixta* 'Superba', *N. reinwardtiana*, *N. ventricosa* \times *alata*, *N. rafflesiana*, and others.

It seems a gratifying coincidence that one of the popular species which was being grown at the botanic garden and collected by Schott over one hundred years ago, *N. rafflesiana*, is still represented in its living exhibits, though the plant assuredly is not a descendant of the earlier 1887 germplasm. Incidentally, a specimen of *Nepenthes rafflesiana* (originally identified as *N. ampullaria*), collected on the historic Wilkes Expedition (U.S. South Seas Exploring Expedition of 1838—1842), is filed in the U.S. National Herbarium. It is one of the 50,000 herbarium specimens collected on the expedition, and they became the core of the nascent U.S. National Herbarium, now located in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (Eyde, 1985, 1986). Living plants of various other kinds were brought back from the expedition, to become the foundation display material for the fledgling U.S. Botanic Garden. Also historically significant is the fact that the California pitcher plant or cobra lily, *Darlingtonia californica*, which was eventually named by John Torrey in Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge 6: 5 (1854), was first discovered by W.D. Brackenridge on the Pacific Coast leg of the epic Wilkes voyage.

During his tenure as gardener at Chatsworth, Mr. Taplin would have had access to living *Nepenthes* and built up an experience in growing them, for seedlings were being raised there as early as the era of 1830—1860 (Macfarlane, 1916). In fact, when the 14-year old Princess Victoria (later Queen Victoria) visited Chatsworth in 1832, she remarked in her daily diary that the pitcher plants in the conservatory were beautiful (Markham, 1935). A vigorous, 20-foot tall, 50-pitched, and literally "caged" specimen of *Nepenthes distillatoria* at Chatsworth was, as early as 1838, proclaimed by gardener Joseph Paxton to be "without doubt...the finest grown specimen in Britain."

Paxton, who had a brilliant career in horticulture and public service, left Chatsworth in 1858, and his letter of resignation, dated January 27, 1858, said that he would help find a successor to manage the property (Markham, 1935). Several positions in property and business management, and presumably gardening, became vacant as a result of his leaving (also, numerous workmen had to be dismissed). James Taplin, an experienced gardener who had worked on some of the finest gardens in England, was duly appointed head gardener to His Grace the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, to succeed Sir Joseph Paxton on an estate which employed around 130 gardeners (Anon., 1892; Heeps, 1968). Paxton occupied himself with other matters after leaving Chatsworth, and died in 1865; Taplin himself left Chatsworth in 1864 and emigrated to the United States.

In America, Taplin took a position in charge of the florist business of Mr. George Such in South Amboy, New Jersey, where he created numerous hybrids of *Nepenthes*. The Taplin hybrid *N. × morganiana* evidently reached the national botanic garden in Washington, D.C. from the Such nursery by 1886, only about five or six years after the progeny of the cross were available for distribution, judging by the January 1887 date of Schott's collection.

Filed with the century-old Schott herbarium specimen of *N. × morganiana* is a drawing (Figure 2) which decades ago had been cut-and-pasted from an old nursery trade catalog. The origin of this picture can only be conjectured from a partial heading on a strip at the top of the image, showing it to be page "50" of a Siebrecht and Wadley trade catalog. More information becomes evident from the printing on the butchered-and-glued reverse of the page by holding it up to a light and reading through the back of the nearly opaque herbarium sheet. The reverse of the sheet bears an undated list of *Nepenthes* for sale by the Siebrecht & Sons nursery, and also has a woodcut drawing of *N. × hookeriana*. Neither the *N. × morganiana* nor *N. × hookeriana* drawings are cited in the venerable Index Londinensis guide to illustrations. Later it was ascertained, through research in the Horticulture Library of the Smithsonian Institution, that the plants were being sold by Siebrecht & Son at Rose Hill Nurseries, located in New Rochelle, New York. The source of that data was extrapolated from Siebrecht & Son (1897), a publication which is not, however, one of the annual descriptive trade catalogs which they produced over many years, and in which the catalog-illustration in question was published; that date remains unknown. The general list of stove and greenhouse plants from the 1897 publication reveals that Siebrecht & Son (established 1867) stocked 36 species, varieties and hybrids of *Nepenthes*, offering *N. × morganiana* for \$3.50 to \$5.00 each. The Siebrecht name is commemorated in the hybrid *Nepenthes × siebrechtiana* Siebrecht & Wadley [Cat.: 51. 1889] ex Miller, Cycl. Amer. Hort. 3: 1074 (1901), a plant with the parentage of *N. mirabilis* × (*N. gracilis* × *N. khasiana*). Siebrecht & Son (1897) noted it was "one of the grandest new hybrids yet introduced, a free and vigorous grower, producing its immense pitchers freely."

As previously noted, in 1864 Taplin relinquished his position at Chatsworth, and emigrated to the United States and the Such establishment. There, he produced numerous tropical plants and often exhibited them at Madison Square Garden in New York City when the New York Horticultural Society was holding its shows there. While employed by Such, he made many *Nepenthes* hybrids (Such, 1881), and most of these new entities were brought into the British nursery trade through sales of seedlings to Mr. Alfred Outram (1847—1899), a traveling representative for the Benjamin S. Williams firm of Upper Holloway, London. With the exception of *N. × morganiana* (see Appendix below), the only Taplin hybrid not given a Williams launching for overseas sales would appear to have been *N. × atrosanguinea*, which was, like Mrs. Morgan's *Nepenthes*, also brought into London com-



Figure 3: *N. x morganiana*, grown by P. D'Amato, photographed by B. Meyers-Rice.

merce by the Veitch company.

By a curious twist of fate, the only *Nepenthes* named in honor of Mr. Taplin, the hybrid *N. x taplinii* Hort. ex Miller, Cycl. Amer. Hort. 3: 1074 (1901), is or was a hybrid of unknown parentage. James Taplin published several articles on plants other than *Nepenthes*, including the two listed below from 1891. A relative of his, W.H. Taplin residing in Holmesburg, Pennsylvania, perhaps his son, was also a gardener and horticulturist but a much more prolific writer, among whose numerous articles is one on *Sarracenia* (Taplin, W.H., 1890).

James Taplin died at age 61 on January 9, 1892 at his home in Maywood, New Jersey, of bronchial pneumonia brought on by an attack of influenza (Anonymous, 1892). In addition to an obituary in American Florist (not seen) and the two cited below as Anonymous (1892), his passing was remarked in a *Nepenthes* article by W.H. Taplin (1892), who stated that "many of the first and finest hybrids on this side of the water were originated by the

late James Taplin, who crossed several species 16 or 18 years ago."

Taplin's destiny had carried him a long way from the village of Overton in Hampshire where he was born, going through a series of increasingly important gardening positions on fine English estates which would culminate at Chatsworth as Paxton's successor, and leading across the Atlantic to New Jersey where he created the *Nepenthes* hybrids. After Mr. Such went out of business and disposed of his plant stock in 1879, Taplin purchased a farm in Maywood, New Jersey and resided there with his family until his death, where he worked until the end as a wholesale plant grower for the New York market, specializing in hardy flowering shrubs.

Appendix

Nepenthes Hybrids made by J. Taplin at the Such Firm

(Extracted mostly from Macfarlane, 1908)

- N. x atrosanguinea* Masters, Gard. Chron. 17: 826 (1882). (Probably *N. distillatoria* x *N. x sedenii*)
- N. x coccinea* Hort. ex Masters, Gard. Chron. 18: 169 (1882). (*N. hookeriana* x *N. phyllamphora*)
- N. x compacta* Hort. ex Baines, Garden 27: 496 (1885). (*N. hookeriana* ? x *N. phyllamphora*)
- N. x dormanniana* Williams ex Masters, Gard. Chron. 17: 525 (1882). (Probably *N. mirabilis* x *N. x sedenii*)
- N. x excelsior* Williams, Garden 28: 463 (1885). (*N. rafflesiana* x *N. hookeriana*)
- N. x findlayana* Hort. ex Nicholson, Dict. Gard. Suppl. 572 (1888). (Advertised in Williams Cat. 23 (1886), and therefore possibly a Taplin hybrid; parentage unrecorded)
- N. x henryana* Williams, Ill. Hort. 29: 125 (1882). (*N. hookeriana* x *N. x sedenii*)

- N. × hibberdii* Nicholson, Dict. Gard. Suppl. 572 (1888). (*N. × hookeriana* × *N. × sedenii*)
- N. × hookerae* Hort. ex G. Beck, Wien. Ill. Gartenztg. 20:222 (1895). (*N. rafflesiana* × *N. mirabilis*)
- N. × lawrenciana* Masters, Gard. Chron. 14: 40 (1880). (Probably *N. phyllamphora* × *N. hookeriana*)
- N. × morganiana* Hort. Veitch ex Masters, Gard. Chron. 16: 381 (1881). (Probably *N. phyllamphora* × *N. hookeriana*. It was originally given the trade name *morganiana* by G. Such (1881) in honor of Mrs. Morgan of New York, to who he sold a plant, and she in turn gave the specimen to a visiting sales representative of Messrs. Veitch & Sons, whereupon it was displayed by the Veitch nursery in Chelsea, London in 1881; a leaf with pitcher is depicted in The Garden 23(602): pl. 390, opp. p. 492 (1883). Cuttings from the original plant were being sold through the Such (New Jersey) catalogue in 1881.)
- N. × outramiana* Williams, Gard. Chron. 12: 505 (1879). (Probably *N. × sedenii* × *N. hookeriana*)
- N. × paradisae* Hort. ex Nicholson, Dict. Gard. Suppl. 573 (1888). (*N. hookeriana* ? × *N. phyllamphora*. Named for the Benjamin Williams firm, known as Victoria and Paradise Nurseries, in Upper Holloway, London, and displayed there in 1883)
- N. × robusta* Hort. ex Masters, Gard. Chron. 17: 40 (1880). (*N. phyllamphora* × *N. hookeriana*)
- N. × superba* Williams, Garden 18: 624 (1880). (*N. gracilis* × *N. sedenii*) × *N. hookeriana*)
- N. × williamsii* Masters, Gard. Chron. 14: 40 (1880). (Probably *N. × sedenii* × *N. hookeriana*)

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A note from the editors: Modern nomenclature for *Nepenthes* has changed since Taplin's day. The following is a list of the plant names used by Taplin, followed by the correct modern or hybrid names in parentheses: *N. dominiana* (*N. × dominiana*), *N. hookeri* (*N. × hookeriana*), *N. hookeriana* (*N. × hookeriana*), *N. laevis* (*N. gracilis*), *N. mastersiana* (*N. × mastersiana*), *N. pattersonii* (*N. × pattersonii*), *N. phyllamphora* (*N. mirabilis*).

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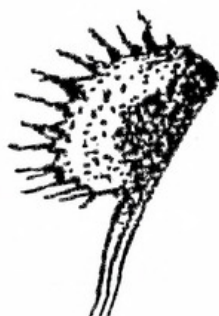
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