

ECHOES IN PLANT AND FLOWER LIFE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649567874

Echoes in Plant and Flower Life by Leo H. Grindon

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LEO H. GRINDON

**ECHOES IN PLANT
AND FLOWER LIFE**

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IN
PLANT AND FLOWER LIFE.

BY
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LONDON:
F. PITMAN, 20, PATERNOSTER BOW, E.C.
MDCCLXXIX.

191. k. 48.

F. PITMAN,
20, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

PREFACE.

THE following pages do not profess to consist of anything more than memoranda and observations, from a poet's point of view, respecting a certain class of botanical facts. These facts, which, unable to think of a better name, I call echoes, "Science" may some day find it worth while to detach; then, marshalling them with others of similar nature, elaborate from the whole a technical treatise. To be a *philosophical* treatise, the treatment must be æsthetic.

No collection of this class of facts has hitherto been made, so far, that is, as I am aware; nor does the idea which they illustrate appear to have suggested itself to men of science, except as something for the occupation of students yet to arise. To poetical minds (in function the precursors of "scientific" ones) the idea has of course been long familiar.

That by the "scientific" the idea is thought not unworthy of attention, may be judged from the following remarks of one of our most distinguished living botanists—Dr. Berthold Seeman :—

“About the term ‘mimicry’ there should be a clear understanding. It is, so far, a thoroughly objectionable one, as by employing it either in zoology or botany the whole question is prejudged; indeed it is assumed—1. That organisms have the power to mimic other organisms; and 2. That they have come in contact with those organisms which they are supposed to mimic. Employ the terms ‘outer resemblance’ instead of mimicry, and we are on neutral, undisputed ground. The subject of these external resemblances of species and whole genera to others having an entirely different organic structure, is a wide and complicated one; and I think that the best way to approach it is to go through the whole vegetable kingdom, and take note of every case where the outer features of one species or genus are reflected in any other. Some years ago, my late friend, Dr. Schultz-Bipontinus, read a paper on his favourite order, the Composites, in which he pointed out that in this the largest of all Phanerogamous orders, the habit of almost every other order of the vegetable kingdom cropped up again. In Euphorbiaceæ and other large orders, similar instances are noted. Sometimes this outer resemblance is perfectly startling. I remember finding a Sandwich Island plant, which looked for all the world like *Thomasia solanacea* of New Holland, a well-known *Buettneria* of our gardens, but which on closer examination turned out to be a variety of *Solanum Nelsoni*; the resemblance between these two widely separated plants being quite as striking as that pointed out in Bates’ ‘Travels on the Amazons,’ between a certain moth and a humming bird. This outer resemblance between plants of different genera and orders has played us botanists many a trick, and is one of the many causes of the existence of some almost incomprehensible synonyms in our systematic works. Wendland, in his monograph on *Acacia*, described many good

species, and thought he knew an Acacia when he saw one; yet one of his new ones (*A. dolabriformis*) which he referred to the genus from habit alone, turned out to be a *Daviesia*. Few men had a better knowledge of Ferns than Kunze, yet 'mimicry,' Puck-like, played him a trick when, relying on the nature of the leaf and venation, he referred *Stangeria paradoxa*, a Cycad, to true ferns; and Sir W. J. Hooker, good botanist as he was, would never have figured a *Veronica* as a Conifer, if 'mimicry'—using the term for the last time, had not been at play. At present I have no theory to propose on this subject, but whoever has, ought to both bear in mind that it must apply with equal force to the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and that to say that these resemblances are merely accidental, counts for nothing until it shall have been proved that there are such things as 'Accidents in Nature.'—*Gardeners' Chronicle*, June 27th, 1868.

Like Dr. Seeman, I have no scientific theory to propose. Content to observe and register facts, and to weave them together in my own spontaneous way, thereby perhaps pleasing a reader here and there, I leave it to others to deal technically with the materials I lay before them.

It may be well to add that the whole of this essay was written before the appearance of Dr. Seeman's letter above quoted.

LEO H. GRINDON.

MANCHESTER, *January*, 1869.

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