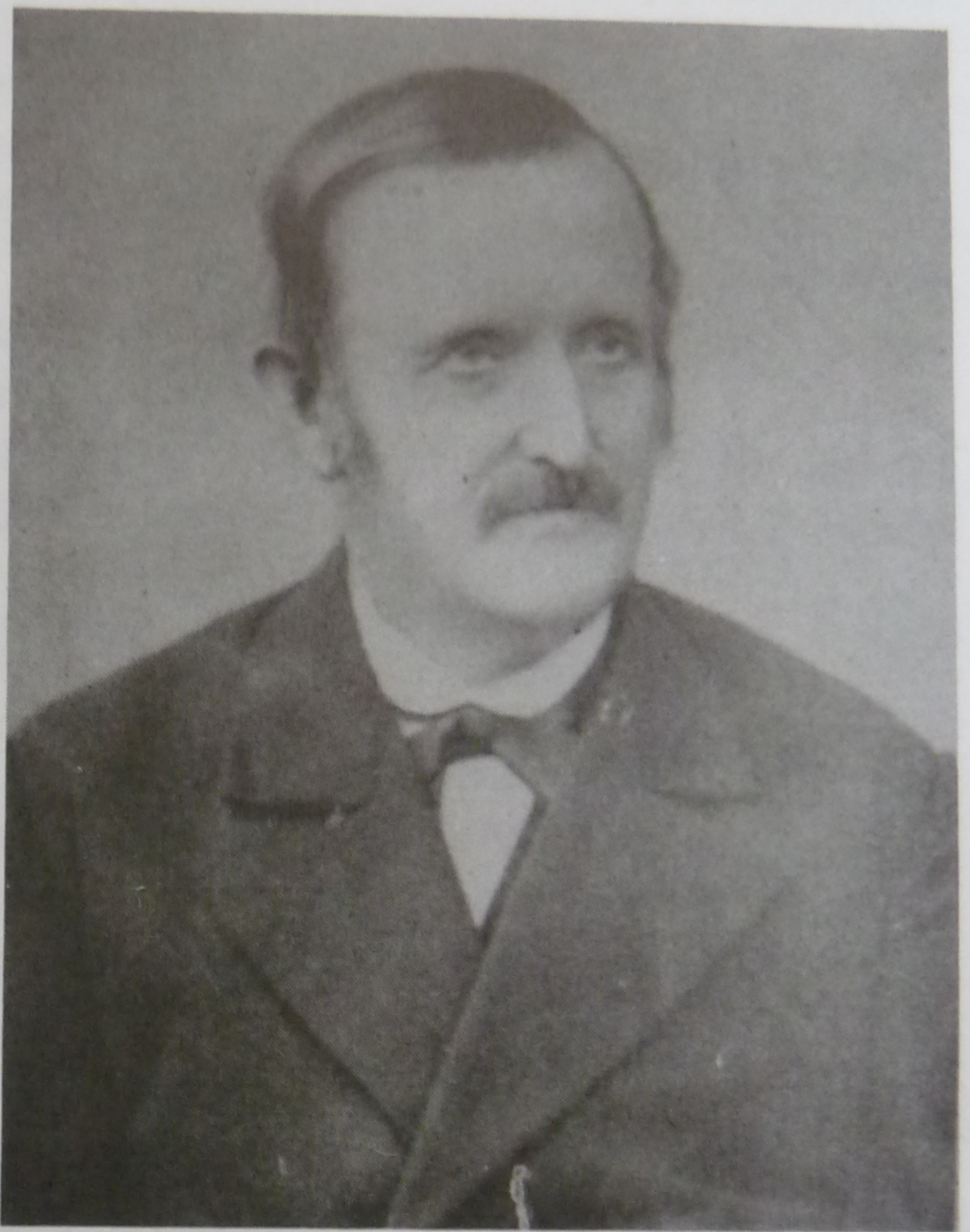


Heinrich Gustav Reichenbach (1823-1889)



AFTER JOHN LINDLEY'S DEATH IN 1865, HEINRICH GUSTAV REICHENBACH became the "Orchid King." Orchid specimens from all over the world were sent to him for identification, and these, together with his copious notes and drawings, formed an immense herbarium which rivaled that of Lindley's at Kew.

Heinrich Gustav Reichenbach was born at Leipzig, Germany, on 3 January 1823, the son of H. G. L. Reichenbach, author of the *Icones Florae Germanicae et Helveticae*. From the age of eighteen young Reichenbach took a great interest in orchids, often in association with John Lindley.

Though best known as an orchidologist, botanists in general owe him a debt of gratitude for his collaboration in his father's *Icones*. He edited and illustrated the latter volumes of this great work, contributing at least 1500 drawings of his own. The first volume of this extensive publication was, naturally enough, devoted to the orchids of Europe. It

bears the title *Tentatem Orchidographiae Europaeae* and is dated 1851.

His graduation essay, published in 1852, was on the origin and structure of orchid pollen. Separate publications included *Xenia Orchidaceae*, which appeared in occasional volumes from 1851, with about 900 of Reichenbach's pencil drawings, *Observations on the Orchids of Central America*, and the synopsis of orchid lore contained in the sixth volume of Walper's *Annales*.

In 1863 Reichenbach was appointed to the posts of professor of botany and director of the Botanic Gardens at Hamburg University. The duties connected with these posts occupied much of his time, as did the correspondence he carried on with orchid growers both amateur and professional.

Into the university herbarium were deposited all the clippings, notes, drawings, and scraps of information that reached his hand. Many of the herbarium sheets seemed messy and haphazardly done, without semblance of order. As they were later used in solving problems, however, the scrawly sketches used to clarify the accompanying dried sheets—many made with a few strokes of the pen—demonstrated a particular genius for catching the salient characteristics of the species in a botanically artful shorthand.

Though friendly and helpful, Reichenbach's letters were often tinged with wit and sarcasm. It was frequently inferred that he resented the intrusion of others into what he considered his domain. His herbarium was jealously guarded against too great familiarity on the part of his colleagues, and an aura of mystery surrounded its existence. Reichenbach himself, according to an obituary in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* for 18 May 1899,

... was possessed of remarkably distinct individuality, which was as remarkable as his curiously crabbed handwriting which few could decipher. Short and massive in stature till his recent illness, with a keen penetrating glance and aquiline nose, his features revealed something of the impetuous temper of the man, and his occasional biting sarcasms. His devotion to Orchids amounted to a consuming passion; not a scrap, nor a note, nor a sketch, however rough, came amiss to him if it related to an Orchid. To him meals and clothes were necessary evils, but his herbarium was a prime necessity of existence. The amount of his work was prodigious. Of its quality the botanists of the future will judge better than we.

He was a constant contributor to the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, sending that publication a weekly article on orchids from 1865 until the end of his life. He worked out the Orchidaceae for Seeman's two works, *Flora Vitiensis* and *Botany of the Voyage of H.M.S. Herald*. He also contributed descriptions of plants of the Orchid Family for the *Refugium Botanicum* from 1869 to 1872. One of his most excellent works, both

from a descriptive and esthetic standpoint, was his *Reichenbachia*, a series of watercolor paintings of orchids issued from 1888 to 1894. The work was undertaken by Sanders' of St. Albans, illustrated largely by H. G. Moon, with plant descriptions by Reichenbach, after whom it was named.

Reichenbach's nearest approach to a synopsis of the Orchid Family was the sixth volume (1861–1864) of Walper's *Annales*, where he brought together on nearly 800 pages the species described between 1851 and 1855, with the addition of several new ones.

Reichenbach was emphatic about the correct identification of orchid species. He thus pronounced:

Authors should do more than secure to themselves the right of priority . . . by such incomplete diagnoses. Not only should a careful description be taken, but great care should be taken to help posterity in discriminating the species. Therefore the specimen, or those specimens, which furnished the evidence for the establishment of the species should be distinctly marked as "the type of my species!" I now always do this in my collection. I regard this as a *fidei commissum* for my lifetime that they will have to be distinctly kept within reach of the men of science after my death.

Reichenbach had occasionally spoken of having his herbarium deposited at Kew after his death, and when that tragic event occurred on 6 May 1889, at Hamburg, Germany, it was anticipated that the Kew Herbarium would soon thereafter be enriched with the Reichenbach collections. "It is greatly to be hoped," stated the *Gardeners' Chronicle* of 18 May 1889, "that his immense collections and notes will fall into competent hands (at Kew if possible), for collation and revision—a task that will, however, require years of concentration, for his publications are not only extremely numerous, but scattered through a wide range of publications in almost all European languages." It was enigmatic, therefore, that his will stated:

My herbarium and my botanical library, my instruments, collections of seeds, etc., accrue to the imperial Hof Museum in Vienna under the condition that the preserved Orchids and drawings of Orchids shall not be exhibited before twenty-five years from the date of my death have elapsed. Until this time my collection shall be preserved in sealed cases. In the event of the Vienna Institute declining to observe these conditions, the collection falls under the same conditions to the Botanical Garden of Upsala. Should the last-mentioned Institute decline the legacy, then to the Grayean Herbarium in Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. If declined by that Institute, then to the Jardin des Plantes at Paris, but always under the same conditions, viz., of being sealed up for twenty-five years, in order that the inevitable destruction of the costly collection, resulting from the present craze for Orchids, may be avoided.

Great consternation followed, for there seemed to be no reason to deprive the botanical world of his valuable type specimens for a quarter of a century. The terms of the will were respected, however, and the Hof Museum accepted the Reichenbach herbarium and library.

Professor Reichenbach was accorded great international recognition. He was elected a foreign member of the Linnean Society in 1879; was an honorary fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society; was awarded the Veitchian Medal in 1885 on occasion of the First Orchid Conference; and received a special medal struck in his honor at Ghent, presented by the king of the Belgians in 1888. Moreover, his merits were recognized by numerous orders and distinctions conferred on him by various other governments. He is additionally memorialized in the orchid genus *Reichenbachanthus*, as well as *Chondrorhyncha reichenbachiana*, *Kefersteinia reichenbachiana*, and *Sievekingia reichenbachiana*. Still, the practicality of the man is apparent in his statement alluding to these distinctions: "I cannot eat the honor."

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Moon first visited St. Albans in 1884, going to H. F. C. Sander's orchid nurseries to make drawings for Mr. Robinson, then publisher of *The English Flower Garden*. In 1885 Mr. Sander asked him to illustrate the *Reichenbachia*, a magnificent work on orchids that came out in 1886 and continued until 1890. Concerning the artist and his work, Sander's grandson David stated years later:

In the studio at St. Albans, . . . there would stand painting many days in the year a man, Harry Moon, who had, as with most artists, great individuality. He would be given some subject, usually a newly imported species flowering for the first time, and asked to paint it. One can readily imagine the resulting painting which would, whether good or bad, represent the plant *as seen by the artist*. What is much more interesting, however, is the thought that the man who paid for the painting would criticise it and demand that it reproduce a plant grown to perfection. This Harry Moon was rarely willing to do.

Harry Moon spent four years painting these glorious pictures for the *Reichenbachia* and supervised the printing of this magnificent work. The printing was all done by hand in our own printing shops in the Camp Road, St. Albans. Mr. Moon made the woodcut etchings and our expert printer and engraver Mr. Moffat, with the help of one or two boys, effected the printing.

In the fall of 1892 Moon decided to settle permanently at St. Albans with his mother and sister, making frequent excursions to the Hertfordshire lanes and woods, painting direct from nature, and discovering fresh beauty in sky, leaf, and glen as the knowledge of his art developed. Commentaries years later attest to his skill. From Mr. R. E. Arnold:

H. G. Moon was very close to nature, and primarily, for this reason he stands out as, perhaps, the greatest of all British flower painters. . . . His plants live, there is an atmosphere of reality about them, and instantly, when viewing one of his pictures, is the plant's natural surroundings, its natural environment, cast vividly upon one's mind. . . . Moon, from his studies, envisaged his plants in their natural surroundings, and he put his mind, his very soul, to the task of producing a living thing; his imagination was of the keenest and, moreover, was a specialized gift. He was always striving to produce something essentially natural, he was rarely guilty of overcolouring, he bestowed equal care upon the minutiae and the salient characters. His backgrounds lent not a little to the beauty of his pictures; his perfect relationship of background to subject is little short of marvellous; and from this, perhaps instructive gift, his pictures gain immeasurably . . .

William Robinson, of course, had been interested in Moon's work from the beginning—particularly the landscapes. "I often thought," he mused, "that if less of his work had been given to plant drawing, how much better it would have been for landscape art." Orchidists would probably disagree, however, because the outstanding *Reichenbachia* re-