

***Flora Hibernica* (1836): Its publication, and aftermath as viewed by Dr. Thomas Taylor**

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Summary

Nelson, E. C. & Parnell, J.: *Flora Hibernica* (1836): Its publication, and aftermath as viewed by Dr. Thomas Taylor. – *Taxon* 41: 35-42. 1992. – ISSN 0040-0262.

Flora Hibernica by J. T. Mackay, T. Taylor and W. H. Harvey was published on 15 June 1836 in Dublin. Although well received by botanists, the number of copies sold was small. Taylor was critical of the book, especially of Harvey's treatment of the algae, and he tried unsuccessfully to persuade Mackay to publish a revised, less bulky edition which could be sold at a lower price.

Flora Hibernica (Mackay, 1836) is a complex book describing the composition and distribution of the Irish flora (angiosperms, gymnosperms, pteridophytes, bryophytes, lichens and algae) as comprehended in the mid-1830s, and providing accounts of species distributions, botanical descriptions, synonymy, references to published illustrations, and notes on uses and taxonomic status. In short, *Flora Hibernica* was the first comprehensive publication about the Irish flora, and in its scope it has not been equalled because no subsequent author has attempted to include the phanerogams and cryptogams of the entire island in a single work.

The title-page of *Flora Hibernica* bears only James Townsend Mackay's name, but he was not the sole author and in the introduction he acknowledged that "The second . . . part contains . . . Musci, Hepaticae, and Lichenes, by Doctor Taylor, (the well-known coadjutor of Sir W. J. Hooker) . . .", and that "W. H. Harvey, Esq. the well-known Algologist . . . kindly undertook to describe the Algae?"

Thomas Taylor's letters

In 1984 a considerable selection of correspondence was found in the School of Botany, Trinity College, Dublin, in some boxes which contained an herbarium connected with *Flora Hibernica* (Parnell & Webb, 1991); the letters included a series from Taylor (cf. Sayre, 1987) to Mackay who was Curator of the Trinity College Botanic Garden, at Ballsbridge, Dublin (cf. Jackson, 1987; Nelson, 1987, 1989, 1990). The letters reveal details of the publication of *Flora Hibernica* and its aftermath, as well as Taylor's opinions about botanical matters. Taylor had a network of correspondents, including David Moore, Curator (later Director) of the Glasnevin Botanic Gardens and one-time assistant to Mackay in the College Botanic Garden (Nelson & McCracken, 1987). Taylor's correspondence with Moore also survives. In preparing the following account both sets of letters have been used (see Table 1).

The history of the boxes referred to above is not straightforward. For a time (perhaps a number of years) they were not in Trinity College, Dublin. This is confirmed by a letter written by Miss Frances More on 1 May 1895 (after her brother's (A.

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Table 1. Calendar of letters from Thomas Taylor (TT) to James Townsend Mackay (JTM) (Ms. in School of Botany, Trinity College, Dublin), and to David Moore (DM) (Ms. in private possession; xerox in National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin).

TT to JTM	30 September 1831	TT to DM	3 April 1840
TT to JTM	10 April 1836	TT to DM	26 August 1840
TT to JTM	22 December 1836	TT to DM	14 September 1840
TT to DM	13 April 1837	TT to DM	25 October 1840
TT to JTM	26 February 1838	TT to JTM	15 January 1841
TT to JTM	17 September 1838	TT to JTM	30 April 1841
TT to DM	22 January 1839	TT to DM	6 June 1841
TT to DM	25 March 1839	TT to JTM	17 February 1842
TT to DM	17 June 1839	TT to DM	4 December 1842
TT to DM	21 August 1839		

G. More) death) to Dr. E. P. Wright, Professor of Botany at Trinity College, Dublin, informing him that “. . . I am just beginning to go out again and the first time I drive into town will take the four boxes containing Mackay’s Herbarium to you at Trinity College myself” [Ms. in National Library of Ireland, Dublin; miscellaneous correspondence to E. P. Wright bound into a copy of Britten & Boulger, 1893 (call-number 580942 b 2)]. Thus A. G. More had the boxes in his possession, perhaps for several years, while he was preparing a revised edition of *Cybele Hibernica* (Moore & More, 1866).

Publication of Flora Hibernica

Flora Hibernica was the result of many years of work by the three authors and their numerous collaborators, and its production lasted many months from late in 1835. On 16 January 1836, Taylor wrote to William Hooker saying that he had been in Dublin “. . . for the last two months, where amidst other employments, my principal business has been to correct the proofs of the department of *Flora Hibernica* which fell to my share. It is with feeling of great distrust that for the first time I am laying before the public my own observations; unfortunately unaided by any other person” (Ms. in Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew: English Letters 8 (1835-1836), n. 141. [Sayre (1983: 463, and 1987: 420) misread the date on this letter but the month is distinctly “Jan” – i.e. January – and not June; her conclusion that *Flora Hibernica* was published “at least late in [June] or more likely in July” arose from this misreading. Furthermore in a letter to Mackay dated 10 April 1836, Taylor noted that his paper ‘De Marchantieis’ was “already printed”; thus Sayre’s date (1983: 463) of “probably June 1836” for it should be revised to April 1836.]

Thus at least the second part of *Flora Hibernica* was set in type by January 1836. It is probable that the third part, on algae, was also at this stage because it is continuously paginated with Taylor’s section and, moreover, Harvey had left Europe in the autumn of 1835 and was then residing at the Cape of Good Hope (Nelson, 1992; Ducker, 1988). As well as Taylor’s statement about proofs, there is internal evidence that *Flora Hibernica* was in press early in 1836, and was printed in two sections, the parts by Taylor and Harvey being already printed by mid-May 1836.

Taylor's "Addenda to part second" (Mackay, 1836: 257-260) included three additional lichens collected in 1836 (*Endocarpon macrocarpon*, *E. rugosum* in April – according to Hawksworth & al., 1980, these names are of uncertain application – and *Verrucaria lucens* in May). That these entries were not placed within the main body of the text indicates that this section was already set in type and fully corrected by that time. Taylor sent the additions to Mackay in late April or early May. In his letter of 10 April 1836, he only referred to the species in general terms: "You may be sure I am all anxiety to hear of the Flora Hibernica; please let me know all about it . . . Besides one species of Lichen from the Dargle, I have since my return met with two other new species in this vicinity but all these are too late for the present edition of Flora Hibernica . . ." The lichen from the Dargle River valley was included in "Addenda" (Mackay, 1836: 259) without a date of collection: "Lecidea latens . . . On stone, in dark recesses of a bank facing the north, in the wood at the Dargle, County Wicklow . . ."

A statement about numbering, printed at the end of the "Table of the Natural Orders" (Mackay, 1836: xxxvii) also indicates that the book was printed in two sections: "OBS. – The Orders, Musci, Hepaticae, and Lichenes, having been printed off before the other parts of the work, were inadvertently numbered 2, 3, 4, according to the respective Orders in the Class Cryptogamia, instead of the above arrangement; viz. 96, 97, 98?" In Mackay's own addendum (Mackay, 1836: 255-256) he included *Myosotis collina*, gathered on 22 April 1836 by David Moore, so it may be argued that the first part was already at proof stage by this time, and almost certainly corrected. Mackay's introduction is dated "Dublin, 10th May, 1836", and publication took place a little over one month later on 15 June 1836 – this date is derived from an advertisement in *Supplement to Saunder's Newsletter and Daily Advertiser*, 14 June 1836 (copy in National Library of Ireland, Dublin), stating that "Mackey's Flora Hibernica, will be published to-morrow . . ."

Flora Hibernica was issued as a single, bulky (4.5 cm thick) volume of almost seven hundred pages (22.2 × 14.3 cm), spaciouly set with broad margins and distinct paragraphs, certainly not designed for carrying into the field; David Moore's interleaved copy (National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin) is bound in three volumes. Copies cost sixteen shillings each, and this price was printed on spine-tickets, examples of which survive on some copies (e.g. ex libris E. C. Nelson).

The bibliographic details are as follows:

FLORA HIBERNICA | COMPRISING THE | FLOWERING PLANTS FERNS
CHARACEAE | MUSCI HEPATICAEE LICHENES | AND ALGAE | OF | IRELAND |
ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THE NATURAL SYSTEM | WITH A | SYNOPSIS OF THE
GENERA | ACCORDING TO THE LINNAEAN SYSTEM | BY | JAMES TOWNSEND
MACKAY M.R.I.A. | ASSOCIATE TO THE LINNAEAN SOCIETY &c &c | [verse] | DUB-
LIN | WILLIAM CURRY JUN AND COMPANY | SIMPKIN MARSHALL AND CO LON-
DON | FRASER AND CO EDINBURGH | MDCCCXXXVI.

[verso of title-page] Dublin: Printed by P. Dixon Hardy, Cecilia-street.

[i] - [xxxviii], [1] - 354, [1] - [280].

Contents

Introduction ([v]-x)

Table of Linnaean artificial classes and orders (xi)

Synopsis of genera, (in part first) according to the Linnaean System (xii-xxxiv)

Table of the Natural Orders ([xxxv]-[xxxvii])

blank ([xxxviii])

FLORA HIBERNICA. | PART FIRST, | COMPRISING THE | FLOWERING PLANTS
AND FERNS | OF IRELAND, | ARRANGED ACCORDING TO | THE NATURAL
SYSTEM. ([1]-354) FLORA HIBERNICA. | PART SECOND, | COMPRISING | THE
MUSCI, HEPATICAЕ, | AND | LICHENES. ([1]-156)

FLORA HIBERNICA. | PART THIRD. | ALGAE. ([157]-254)

Additions and corrections in part first. ([255]-256) Addenda to part second.

([257]-260) Index to the orders, genera, and species in part first. ([261]-268) English

index to the genera and the most popular specific names in part first. ([269]-271)

blank ([272]) Index to the genera and species in part second ([273]-276) Index to the

genera and species in part third ([277]-279) [imprint] ([280])

Aftermath

Taylor's letters indicate that he, at least, expected that *Flora Hibernica* should be revised and augmented as botanical exploration of Ireland continued, and re-issued once the first edition was out of print. The omission of fungi concerned Taylor who promised to investigate this group and to prepare an account for a revised edition. These plans depended on substantial and rapid sales.

The aftermath of publication was not according to Taylor's expectation; manifestly he was never content with *Flora Hibernica*. Writing from his home near Kenmare, County Kerry, on 22 December 1836, he expressed some of his uneasiness in a long letter to Mackay: "As January approaches I begin to feel great anxiety as to what account the Booksellers will give of *Flora Hib.* especially as to the number of copies sold — if this number should not be very considerable it will be for consideration what line I should adopt of future Botanical Study — If with the present materials the Flora is so bulky that patrons complain of the price, the addition of the *Fungi* would so materially increase the expense that the future selling price should be considerably raised. If the price were raised I do not think that such botanists who are supplied with the first Edition would be in a hurry to purchase a Second Edition. Then our expense as to editing would also be likewise increased without any rational hope of such material assistance as we were fortunate enough to receive in the present instance. Under these views I own I have not sincerely taken up the *Fungi* yet and unless the Report from the Booksellers is more cheering than I anticipate I think I am more successfully employed in continuing my investigations of the *Lichens* . . . And even with respect to the Lichens if the Report of the Booksellers be not so encouraging that we may be called upon within a twelve month for a second Edition I would be strongly inclined to publish immediately in Latin the Lichens of Ireland as a separate work — Such a proceeding I conceive could not by any prohibition interfere with the sale of a Second Edition into which all the new matter and perhaps some additional would be to be added?"

The book was well received by the botanical fraternity. There is an undated fragment of the draft of a letter from Mackay clearly written in the late summer of 1836 after the Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Bristol (Ms. in National Botanic Gardens, Dublin). It refers to reviews. "I met several Botanical friends in Bristol but they had all been supplied with copies of the Flora in London where however the sale has not yet been good. There is a favourable review lately published in the *Athenaeum* I believe by Dr Lindley. Loudon has also given a favourable review of it in the *Gardeners Magazine*. Another review has just appeared

in the 3d. number of the Mag. of Zoology & Botany conducted by Sir Wm Jardine, P. J. Selby Esq & Dr Johnston it is said by Dr Greville which is also favourable but I believe we must look chiefly to Ireland for the sale of the work which with the booksellers is going steadily although not very rapidly. I have owing to my absence sold but few copies since I last wrote to you but I must now do what I can to procure customers. Many complain of the highness of the price." Later comments about lichens ("I am glad you continue to add to them"), remarks about Killarney and Kerry ("It appears that Kerry has almost no friends in that intricate [illegible]"), strongly suggest that this draft was addressed to Taylor.

Published reviews include those in the *Irish Farmer's and Gardener's Magazine* (Anonymous, 1836), *The Magazine of Natural History* ([Loudon], 1836), Jardine's and Selby's *Magazine of Zoology and Botany* ([Greville], 1836), and *The Dublin Journal of Medical Science* (Aldridge, 1836). The latter two, in particular, irritated Taylor; in his letter of 22 December 1836 he expressed annoyance about the reviewers' remarks. Greville had complained that Taylor had not adopted some recently established genera of lichens, while Aldridge so infuriated Taylor that he considered "it would be giving an importance to the opinion of such men as Mr Aldridge to answer him in print." At considerable length Taylor irascibly countered Aldridge's "sweeping assertions of the most ignorant kind . . . [Aldridge] says that it is a "great error to found the classification of the Lichens especially on the nature of the apothecia" and that he is more disposed to rely on a character taken from the thallus!! What ignorance of Acharius's classification is this!" Taylor concluded by lamenting that Aldridge's review should have been published in a Dublin periodical and repeated to Mackay that "to take notice of it in print would be to suppose those opinions expressed on Botany worth noticing. His attack upon your department appears to be equally shallow"

Whether these unfavourable comments affected sales in any way is not known. However, sales of *Flora Hibernica* were relatively small. In the earliest extant letter to Moore (13 April 1837), Taylor noted that Mackay had furnished him with these details from the booksellers; of a printing run of 750 copies, only 300 had been sold, nine months after publication. "The rest . . . I do not think will be cleared away in our life time", wrote Taylor (26 February 1838), and he held to that opinion. He badgered Mackay for details of sales: on 26 February 1838, "How goes the sale of Fl. Hib.?"; on 17 September 1838, "I am very anxious to hear how the sale of *Flora Hibernica* proceeds"; on 15 January 1841, "Any news of the *Flora Hibernica*". Mackay perhaps responded with figures but no later account is known and it must be assumed that *Flora Hibernica* was not a popular, fast-selling book.

Frustrated by the lack of progress in preparing a new edition, Taylor was to become as acerbic as Aldridge in his criticisms of the contents of *Flora Hibernica*, especially of Harvey's contribution on algae. Writing to Mackay on 26 February 1838, Taylor expressed fear that ". . . adding of the algae completely dished the work. It added to the expense & retarded the sale and gave little credit; for any one who compares it with Hooker's Eng[lish] Flora must see that it is chiefly compiled from that work and copied so servily [sic.] that the very blunders and errors in the figures cited are faithfully given!!" Taylor felt that the authors would have to "make the best of it – but we can now never expect to see the First Edition sold off"

In correspondence with Moore, Taylor also lambasted the part on algae and criticised Hooker; in a letter dated 22 January 1839, he remarked that "I am ready to publish some new species and several important corrections in Lichenology but I know not how, as I do not like to go to any expense and I fear no publisher would

undertake it on his own account. Never shall I live to see a Second edition of *Flora Hibernica*! The adding the Algae damned that work. It made it too expensive – it brought no credit to any one – that part is wretchedly executed being merely a copy of Hooker, even of his typographical errors! Hooker is a very bad authority on the algae and he magnified the sources of those who compiled from him for very obvious reasons.”

Taylor had begun rehearsing his criticism of Hooker in his earliest extant letter to Moore dated 13 April 1837. He cautioned Moore, then working as a botanist for the Irish Ordnance Survey (Nelson & McCracken, 1987), about Hooker’s *English Flora*: “You will be much perplexed if you take Eng. Flora for your guide. The merits and talents of Hooker are undoubted but not omnipotent and it must be confessed he has not paid equal attention to Lichens as other subjects – witness his copying nearly all the specific characters our of Eng. Bot. even the blunders when they occur. His is not an original authority for any Lichens . . . ”

Taylor’s censure of Hooker, albeit privately expressed, should be countered by noting that at the same period, the late 1830s, he was busy examining three large collection of bryophytes, one from Tasmania and two from Brazil, for Hooker, and that the two men had a long, usually friendly correspondence until Taylor’s death in 1848, and that they had collaborated on *Muscologia Britannica* (cf. Sayre, 1987). Taylor’s criticisms must also be viewed as part-and-parcel of an extraordinary botanical triangle, for Hooker was equally critical of Taylor’s work, and so was William Wilson (see Sayre, 1987: 421-422).

Taylor’s personal financial circumstances appear to have become straitened after 1830 consequent on the decline of the Royal Cork Institution to which he was Professor of Natural History. During 1843, he enquired of Hooker whether Messrs. Longman owed him royalties for their joint publication *Muscologia Britannica*: “You will easily conceive how reduced I must be when I beg you will do it, and if there is any balance in my favour that you will have the goodness to transmit it to me” (Sayre, 1987). Before that, on 30 April 1841, Taylor had written to Mackay about transmitting royalties from *Flora Hibernica*, although his request contains no explicit hint of financial problems.

Taylor’s dissatisfaction about tardiness in bringing forward a revised edition continued unabated. On 6 June 1841 he begged that Moore “. . . will impress on Mr Mackay, the necessity and expediency, in a second edition of *Flora Hib* of excluding all unnecessary matter, as for instance synonyms that are but little used; giving localities only to the very rare plants; and making as few separate paragraphs as possible; in short to do all in his power to cause the book to be sold as the very cheapest rate. I believe he has consented to publish as it were, in the first instance, a first volume, leaving the *Algae* to make a second with the *Fungi*. If so, I think a sensible book may be produced to sell as about 6/ or 8/ [shillings] at most. I possess a great multitude of corrections and additions for my part of the work and yet I think I can continue by giving *marrow* without *bone* to occupy as few pages as ever”

Comparison of the cost of contemporary botanical books does not bear out Taylor’s apprehension about the selling price of *Flora Hibernica*. Lindley’s *Introduction to botany*, 557 pp., cost 18 shillings, Watson’s two-volume, 674 pp., *The new botanist’s guide to localities of the rare plants of Britain* was 16 shillings & 6 pence, whereas Irvine’s *The London Flora*, 340 pp., cost 10 shillings, Babington’s flora cost 10 shillings & 6 pence, Hooker’s *British Flora* (part 1 Cryptogams), 432 pp., cost 12 shillings, and so did Bentham’s. On the other hand the second issue of Miss Katherine

Baily's *The Irish flora* ([Baily], 1845), which was a direct competitor of *Flora Hibernica*, retailed at only 5 shillings (figures derived from Pritzel, 1871-1877).

On the whole Taylor's advice was sensible, but no matter how much he nagged Mackay, he was unable to precipitate any progress. On 17 February 1843, the same ideas were reiterated in a letter, the last of those extant, to Mackay: "I have just received yours of the 16th inst. and hasten to correct what I fear was a wrong impression in your mind when you wrote. My recommendation was then that the 2nd Edition of the *Flora Hibernica* should contain in one small volume that former 1st and 2nd Parts; and to state in the Preface that it was intended to edit the former 3rd Part and the 4th containing the Fungi if circumstances should warrant it." Taylor was determined that the bulk of the book had to be reduced, and also proposed that generic characters should not be repeated, and that any observations available elsewhere, particularly in Hooker's *British Flora* should likewise be excluded. Conscious of costs, he added that care should be taken "that there shall be as little of blank space as possible". By attending to these points, "the book may be contracted to a small size, and sell for 8/-."

Remarkably, Taylor commented in the same letter (17 February 1843) that in a new edition the plants should be arranged according to the Linnaean artificial system, and not by families ("Natural method"), as this was counter to the trend of the period: "I am satisfied [this] is the most useful and most required". Taylor concluded his letter by urging Mackay to think about this "... and soon, and let me know whether the Booksellers would undertake it on the terms I before mentioned". He repeated that he had a good deal of new information which might be published elsewhere if the second edition of *Flora Hibernica* was not to be issued and, furthermore, warned Mackay that if progress was not rapid "... I am satisfied some of the Grinders will do so for their own benefit."

Conclusion

Flora Hibernica was first issued on 15 June 1836; no second edition appeared and while sales figures cannot be computed the first issue does not appear to have sold well. On the other hand there must have been a demand for an Irish flora, because in 1845, three years after Taylor's warning about "the Grinders", Miss Katherine Baily's flora were re-issued – it was originally published anonymously in 1833 and the 1845 issue does not differ from the original ([Baily], 1833, 1845).

Taylor's concern to see a cheaper, more concise book arose for two reasons. Firstly, he disapproved strongly of Harvey's treatment of algae on the grounds of its imperfection and repetition of Hooker's "blunders"; secondly, he himself had additional information that he considered worth publishing on bryophytes and fungi. It is also possible that Taylor's personal circumstances were so straitened that he needed a more substantial additional income, and he fondly believed a "best-selling" Irish flora would yield useful profits.

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