Huntia is published one volume per year, in two or more numbers issued irregularly and totaling approximately 300 pages, by the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh PA 15213.

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Subscription rate is $25.00 per volume. Associates of the Hunt Institute may elect to receive Huntia as a benefit of membership.

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Orders for subscriptions and back issues should be sent to the Institute from North America; from elsewhere, to Wheldon & Wesley, Ltd., Lytton Lodge, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts. SG4 8TE England.

Design by Thomas C. Pears III
Typography and printing by Davis & Warde, Inc., Pittsburgh

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ISSN 0073-4071
TWO LETTERS of Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911), eminent botanist, explorer, plant geographer, close friend and colleague of Charles Darwin, and second Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (succeeding his father Sir William Jackson Hooker), have recently come into my possession. These refer to a portrait of Sir Joseph commissioned by King Edward VII for an album of the members of the Order of Merit for Windsor Castle, and drawn in crayon by Countess Feodora von Gleichen (1861-1922) in 1908. Sir Joseph, who was in his early nineties at the time, wrote from his home “The Camp” in Sunningdale, Berkshire to the Honourable John W. Fortescue, Royal Librarian at Windsor Castle, concerning the portrait, one letter written before the sitting and the other afterward.

Hooker wrote as follows:

Jan 22 1908.
The Camp,
Sunningdale.

Dear Sir,

I am very proud of your informing me of his Most Gracious Majesty’s wish that I should sit for my portrait by the Countess Theodora [sic] Gleichen. There is nothing that I would not do consistently with my medical advisor’s orders to meet my sovereign’s [sic] wishes & Lady Theodora’s convenience.

It is right however that Lady Theodora should be informed, that though otherwise in good health, my age & its concomitants confine me to the house in winter & will, I fear, to its immediate surroundings in milder weather: — should she be able to do me the honor of coming here I shall always be at her service.

Allow me to add, that having had the privilege of a rather long personal acquaintance with your predecessor at Windsor, it is with no little pleasure that I address you.

Believe me
faithfully yrs
Jos. D. Hooker

The Hrnbl
J Fortescue M.V.O.

The Camp,
Sunningdale.
July 3, 1908

My dear Sir

I have the pleasure of informing you of the receipt of the photograph of the drawing executed by the Countess Feodora Gleichen by command of His Majesty. I think it is considered by my family to be in every way satisfactory as a likeness & as a work of art.

I gladly accept the offer of two more copies, one of which would be placed in the gallery of Portraits of Botanists in the Museum of the Royal Gardens Kew. To all three I will attach the prohibition of any reproduction being attempted without His Majesty’s permission & of which I give my approval.

Believe me
vy faithfully yrs
Jos. D. Hooker

The Hrnbl
J. I [sic] Fortescue, M.V.O.

Windsor Castle
In a third letter, dated July 12, 1908 and reported by Huxley (1918), Hooker told his friend Mrs. Sabina Paisley:

I must exhaust my vanity. I have just received a photograph of a drawing of my head made by command of the King by the Countess Feodora Gleichen for his collection of portraits of members of the Order of Merit at Windsor. It is a charming drawing but ‘reproduction is prohibited by command,’ so I cannot have it repeated and send you a copy.

![Figure 1. Crayon drawing of Joseph D. Hooker by Feodora Gleichen, 1908](image)

In relation to other late portraits, the drawing (in crayon heightened with white, on grey paper, 18\(\frac{7}{8}\) x 14\(\frac{3}{8}\)" signed "F.G. 1908") seems to be a good likeness of Hooker. As a conventionalized portrait appropriate to the official character of the commission, there is little emphasis on individual characteristics such as the famous eyebrows, with which Hooker amused his children and grandchildren (Allan, 1967). Reproduced here (Fig. 1) by permission of The Royal Library, Windsor Castle, this is possibly the last portrait of Hooker done from life and is apparently previously unpublished.

The artist, primarily a sculptress, studied drawing under Alphonse Legros at the Slade School of Art in London. An honorary member of the Royal Society of Painters and Etchers, she exhibited in London at the Royal Academy, New Water-Colour Society, Grosvenor Gallery, and New Gallery. Two of her portrait busts are of Queen Victoria, whose half-sister was the artist’s paternal grandmother. In 1900 Gleichen was awarded a bronze medal at the Paris Exhibition.

REFERENCES


