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A portrait and some related letters of Sir Joseph Hooker

James J. White

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.



Courtesy Royal Library, Windsor Castle.
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Figure 1. Crayon drawing of Joseph D. Hooker by Feodora Gleichen, 1908

In relation to other late portraits, the drawing (in crayon heightened with white, on grey paper, $18\frac{7}{8} \times 14\frac{3}{8}$ ", 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.

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