

SECTION 111

Miss Ellen Hutchins

In the next section I will deal with the plants, trees and shrubs in the garden itself. Next 'though, it is important to mention Miss Ellen Hutchins who grew up here and from my findings I think her contribution to Irish Botany is insurpassable:-

Miss Ellen Hutchins, a daughter of Thomas Hutchins, was born in 1785 at Ballylickey - between Ardnagashel and Bantry. While Ellen was still young she was placed in a school between Dublin and Donnybrook. As she grew up she became delicate and when her school days ended her health was found to be unsatisfactory. Dr. Whitley Stokes, a friend of the family, was consulted and it was decided that Ellen was to be left in his care.

She soon recovered but before leaving Dr. Stokes, who was a lecturer in Natural History in Trinity College Dublin and a keen bryologist, he advised her to live in the open air as much as possible. Thus, through his help, she took up the study of natural history. He personally recommended Botany as this would encourage her to spend much time in the open air and also give her a quiet and interesting occupation at home. She became an enthusiastic worker on mosses, hepatics, lichens and algae and was the discoverer of many rare species in the district around Ardnagashel.

It is probable that it was through Dr. Stokes that Ellen became acquainted with Mr. Mackay, the Curator of the College Botanical Gardens, then held in Trinity College, Dublin. It was through Mr. Mackay that Ellen met Dawson Turner of Yarmouth, to whom, by 1807, she was supplying specimens and drawings of sea plants for his "Historia Fucorum". Most of her collection of plants, together with a large number of drawings numbering over two hundred, passed into the hands of Dawson Turner and are now in safe-keeping in the Herbarium in Kew. A trait in her character was her natural modesty, so much so that for some time she objected to her name being published as the collector of the rare plants she discovered.

...../

/.....

Thus she had to return home to Ballylickey to care for her elderly mother who was in feeble health, and her invalid brother. A field at Ballylickey is still called "Miss Ellen's Garden", where she tended her plants and those sent to her by Mr. Mackay. In a letter of 1805 from Dawson Turner he instructs her on how to prepare a bed for planting some shrubs he had sent her. Mackay visited Ballylickey in 1805 as he was preparing papers for publication on the plants in Ireland, thus Bantry, being still undiscovered botanically, was left to the dedication and keen eye of Ellen Hutchins. This she accomplished to a great degree, as Sir James Smith wrote of her - "she could find anything".

In March 1814 Ellen's mother died and Ellen, on returning home, went to Ardnagashel where her brother Arthur and his family lived. She died there on the 10th February 1815. She was buried in the Churchyard in Bantry.

HER WORK

It is very difficult to know where to start as regards her work. She herself never published anything, so all her discoveries are in other famous botanists publications.

As regards flowering plants, the genus Hutchinsia consisting mainly of Alpine plants was dedicated to her memory by Mr. R. Brown, 'The Prince of Botanists' according to W.H. Harvey in "Phycologia Britannica", Vol. 2. pl. 124-1849. Hutchinsia is a member of the family Cruciferae, now called the Brassicaceae.

Her records are found in Mackay's "Flora Hibernica" as 'Stellaria cerastoides on a high mountain near Bantry, rare, Miss Hutchins'. In the Hepatice section we have "Jungermania hutchinsiae - on wet faces of rocks especially of water falls in woods near Bantry, Miss Hutchins". In the Musci section "Hynum Micans , woods at Glengarriff, Miss Hutchins", and yet again in the Algae section, "Fucus Tuberculatus (seaweed species), Bantry Bay, Miss Hutchins".

The lichens; Lecania hutchinsiae, Pertusaria hutchinsiae, Enterographa hutchinsiae, Jubula hutchinsiae, Leicolea bantriensis, as well as a rare species

...../

/.....

found near Bantry, Plagiochila atlantica, and also the moss Ulota hutchinsiae were all discovered by her, to mention but a few.

According to H.W. Lett in the Census report on Mosses of Ireland p.71 "Taylor in Mackay's "*Flora Hibernica*" gives Miss Hutchins as the collector of eleven rare mosses in Ireland". But Miss Hutchins is associated more with Cryptogams (chiefly mosses and algae) than with the higher plants.

When Mackay published his "*Flora Hibernica*" in 1836, the algae section was undertaken by Dr. W.H. Harvey the famous Irish algologist. Mackay states, "he (Harvey) achieved this from the examination of a full collection in my possession, chiefly formed by the late amiable and accomplished Miss Hutchins, a lady who for many years was unremitting in her investigations of the Botany of the South of Ireland".

In a quote from a letter of Mackay's to Miss Hutchins, a copy of which I have seen, Professor Mackay writes "Aleyonicum digitatum (now called *Laminaria digitata*) was named right by you", also he goes on to say - "you are getting on famously in this branch. I am proud of having set you to work in it, being persuaded that from your discriminating powers and great attention you will in time make some important discoveries in this branch of natural history".

Dawson Turner the noted algologist in his letters to her, praised her for her "exquisitely preserved" specimens, which she sent him and ~~her~~ ^{of} finding rarities. This seems to be remarkable for the time, that specimens of plants, especially delicate packages of algae, mosses etc. could be in such good condition on arrival in England from South West Cork. The following is a quote from a letter of Dawson Turner's to her, dated 2nd March 1808;- "At the adding of *Fucus cristatus* (seaweed) to the British catalogue recently, I was delighted, but this beautiful plant was published in the history (*Fucorum*) three months ago from an imperfect specimen. But with your leave I shall send a specimen of yours to Sowerty to be engraved for English Botany".

...../

/.....

What is also amazing is that all these botanists and algologists to whom she sent specimens wrote to her asking her could they name them after her. To this request she repeatedly replied 'no'. The following quotes from letters show this point:

From a letter of Dawson Turner's in April 1808 - he names a specimen No. 7. - "*is a new and most beautiful species of the tribe of Jungermania platyphylla. There is a young fruit upon it so that it may probably be now in perfection*". Then he writes - "*I beg your permission to name this Jungermania hutchinsiae*".

Yet again in another letter about packet No. 21 he writes - "*one of the most beautiful plants I ever saw, either this or No. 5 or No. 7 must be called Conferva hutchinsiae - choose which you please*".

In the H.W. Lett report referred to earlier, speaking of Miss Hutchins, Lett writes - "*to form some idea of her great success amongst the Hepaticae we have only to consult the pages of Hookers "Jungermaniae" where her name is more or less connected with nearly every rare species contained in that grand work*".

She also discovered the marine green alga Cladophora hutchinsiae and W.H. Harvey in his Phycologia Britannica vol 2. pl 124 - 1894 writes - "*A very beautiful and strong growing species discovered about the year 1808 by the late Miss Hutchins of Ballylickey near Bantry, whose explorations of her neighbourhood were as unremitting as they were successful and whose name is deservedly held in grateful remembrance by botanists in all parts of the world. To her the botany of Ireland is under many obligations, particularly the Cryptogamic branch, in which field, until her time little explored, she was particularly fortunate in detecting new and beautiful objects, several of which remain among the rarest species to the present day*".

Miss Hutchins algae specimens are to be found in the Herbarium of Trinity College Dublin, National Botanic Gardens Glasnevin, University College Cork, Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, to mention a few in the British Isles, but specimens can be located in herbaria abroad.

...../

/.....

This is by no means a complete account of her work but as Praeger described her as a "botanist of great promise who died at the age of thirty", even this was a tremendous achievement for one person and to me it is certainly amazing in such a short lifetime. Therefore, to conclude on Miss Ellen Hutchins, I can find no better words than those of Mr. Turner, which are taken from the last page of his "Historia Fucorum";

*"In every season of the beauteous year
Her eye was open, and with studious love
Read the Divine Creator in his works
Chiefly in thee sweet Spring, when every nook
Some latent beauty to her wakeful search
Presented, some sweet flower, some virtual plant
In every native of the hill and vale
She found attraction; and where beauty failed,
Applauded odour or commended use".*

References

- (1) H.W.. Lett, Census report on Mosses in Ireland -
Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy
p 32 1915.
- (2) W.H. Harvey, Phycologia Britannica,
vol. 2, pl. 124 - 1849.
- (3) Mackay's 'Flora Hibernica'.
- (4) Copies of various letters written by Miss
Hutchins to Mackay, Turner and others.