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NEW DIFFICULTIES FACING PLANT TAXONOMISTS
Proposal no. 44 submitted to the Paris Congress

by

M. B. RAIZADA (Dehra Dun)*

Synonymous plant names have been a source of trouble and confusion ever since plant names were given. The confusion has harassed botanists and cultivators alike, but botanists have been the more sorely tried, inasmuch as they concern themselves with all kinds of plant life whereas cultivators’ interests are limited.

Too many and too frequent changes in plant names, both generic and specific, made during recent years have caused widespread confusion, annoyance and legitimate dissatisfaction among botanists, foresters and others interested in the study of plants and has given rise to the common but erroneous idea that systematists have as their main object the upsetting of well established names. It is indeed disheartening to find that the old familiar names by which a particular plant may have been known for years is suddenly shifted to another genus or undergoes change of specific name.

The reaction of many botanists and foresters to such endless changes in plant names has been to demand that an International Botanical Congress publish a list of Nomina Specifica Conservanda along the same lines as the one already in existence for Nomina Generica Conservanda. All International Botanical Congresses have, however, so far refused to accede to this demand, and in the opinion of the writer correctly so; such a step is incompatible with scientific taxonomy and would interfere with the progress of botanical science, as has already been pointed out by him in Indian Forester 74: 303-306, 1948.

In the new International Code of Botanical Nomenclature adopted by the Seventh International Botanical Congress, Stockholm, July 1950, there has appeared a new rule which in the opinion of the present writer is bound to create new complications and cause considerable difficulty to workers in plant taxonomy. This relates to paragraph 3 of Article 42 of the new Code, which reads as follows: "No combination is validly published unless the author definitely indicates that the epithet or epithets concerned are to be combined with the generic name in a particular way". By way of explanation the compilers of the Code add a few examples, from which the following are taken:

"Examples of combinations definitely indicated: In Linnaeus’ Species Plantarum the placing of the epithet in the margins opposite the name of the genus clearly indicates the combination intended. The same result is attained in Miller’s Gardeners’ Dictionary, ed. 8, by the inclusion of the epithet in parentheses immediately after the name of the genus... Examples of combinations not definitely indicated: ... The combination Eulophus peucedanoides must not be ascribed to Bentham and Hooker f. on the basis of the listing of Cnidium peucedanoides H.B.K. under Eulophus in the Genera Plantarum”.

Unfortunately the practice followed up to the present, or at any rate, up to the publication of the new International Code is to ascribe the combination to an author, like Bentham and Hooker f., when the author definitely states that the particular plant known previously

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under a given name should be placed under a new genus. If an author clearly states this to be his intention, and names the species of the previous genus to be transferred, it seems to be sufficiently clear that the author makes the new combination.

In this respect there is a double practice among authors, and their standing in view of the new Article is not, or ought not be, the same. In Hooker f. Flora of British India, (1: 62-67), a number of species of Polyalthia are ascribed to Benth. & Hooker f. on the strength of a doubtful reference to Genera Plantarum; in the latter work (1: 25) these authors write: “Species genuinae biovulatae 5, in Asia tropica crescentes ... His tamen addendas, eti in sectionem alteram colligendae, Guatteriae gerontogae fere 25, quarum una Australasica, ceterae Asiaticae ...” Here the species to be transferred are not named, the authors merely indicate that about 25 species of Guatteria are to be placed under Polyalthia; they have not made the combination, nor have they stated explicitly which species of Guatteria ought to be transferred; it would then appear that all the species of Guatteria known at that time ought to go to the genus Polyalthia. This type of transferring a species from one genus to another leaves subsequent authors in some doubt as to the exact species concerned.

On the other hand, the same authors in Genera Plantarum 1: 885, under Eulophus, write: “Species 3, una Arkan soana ... altera Andium Americae australis tropicae et Mexici incola (Smyrnium lineare, Benth. Pl. Hartw. 83; Cnidium peucedanoides, H.B. et K. Nov. Gen. et Sp. v. 15), utraque foliorum segmentis linearibus, tertia Texana (Tauschia texana A. Gray, Pl. Lindl. in Bost. Journ. Nat. Hist. vi. 211), humilior, foliorum segmentis cuneatis incisis et involucellis insignis ...”

Robert Brown in his paper on the Asclepiadaceae and Apocynaceae in Mem. Wern. Soc. 1: 12-78, 1809-11, speaking of his new genus Gymnema lists four species that he wishes to make the combination in the sense that typographically he joins the new genus with the old specific name, he merely states that a given plant belongs to the new genus. On p. 33 he writes: “Of this genus (i.e. Gymnema) I have examined four species. Two of these are unpublished plants; the third is Asclepias lactifera Linn. ... The fourth is Periploca sylvestris Willd. sp. pl. 1. p. 1252”. And again under Parsonsia on page 65 he writes: “The American species of this genus, viz. Echites corymbosa Jacq. floribunda Sw. and spicata Jacq. differ considerably from the rest ... Among these the only published species is Periploca capsularis Forst. Prod. n. 126 ...” At least in the species actually named by Brown, there is no possibility of doubt that he intended them to be transferred to the genera created by him.

I have cited Bentham & Hooker f. under Eulophus and Robert Brown because this method of making transfers from one genus to another seems to be far from rare in botanical literature; if the species are nominally listed, this should be considered a sufficient indication that the transfers are clearly made, at least as far as the post goes. The two types of listing transfers from older genera are not quite the same, since the second method names the plants to be transferred and clearly states that they belong to the new genus; the former type merely indicates that a certain number of species of a given genus ought to go to the new genus.

According to the new regulation now being introduced by Art. 42 of the International Code, many of the old familiar authorities for the names of plants in India and elsewhere will have to be changed, and this will entail considerable amount of research into the literature in order to find out the name of the person who first made the combination typographically. It is bad enough to have the specific names changing so often; from now on we shall have an endless number of changes in the authorities for the various names. This is bound to result in even greater confusion and dissatisfaction among botanists than merely changing the specific epithets, or rather the two sets of changes may produce a sort of despair among Indian and other botanists, who may not have access to the relevant literature on the subject.

After much consideration on this point and to avoid undue hardship to fellow workers in this country and elsewhere I venture to make a suggestion for the consideration of the next International Botanical Congress that is due to assemble in Paris in the near future. Article 44 of the new International Code states that “on and from 1 Jan. 1935, names of new taxa of recent plants, the Bacteria excepted are considered as validly published only when they are accompanied by a Latin diagnosis”. Similarly Article 45 states: “On and from
1 Jan. 1912, names of new taxa of fossil plants are not considered as validly published unless ...” And article 41: “On and after 1 Jan. 1953, the distribution of an exsiccatum relative to any new taxon, ...”. In other words, such regulations, in the mind of their makers, did not have retroactive effect, but came into force only for names published after a given date; names published in the past contrary to such regulations are to be considered as validly published if they conform with the regulations in force at the time they were published; future names, however, will have to conform to the new regulations.

Proposal

In order to avoid confusion and to save much trouble for a number of years to come, I propose the following amendments to the new regulation under paragraph 3 of Article 42:

a. Names published by mentioning the older species to be transferred to a new genus, should be considered valid; such is the case with Eulophus peucedanoides of Bentham and Hooker f., or with Gymnema syloestris of R. Brown.

b. Names published by the same method as Polyclathia of the Genera Plantarum, where the older names have not been mentioned, to be considered as not validly published at all.

c. On and after a certain date to be fixed by the next botanical congress, only combinations actually made, i.e. typographically expressed, to be considered as valid for the future without retroactive effect.

If, however, the present new rule is allowed to remain as it stands in the new Code, then one only has to wish good luck and patience to the compilers of Index Kewensis and to wish them all speed in the publication of subsequent supplements of this monumental work. Meanwhile for many years to come we shall remain in the dark about the real authorities for the names of our Indian plants and those of us, like the present writer, who are working in plant taxonomy will have either to wait for long or to publish their papers with the depressing uncertainty that many of their names are ascribed to the wrong authors.

Bemerkungen zur Liste der Nomina Generica Conservanda

von

R. Mansfeld (Berlin)


Ich möchte dazu auf einige Unstimmigkeiten hinweisen, die nicht nur formale sondern auch sachliche Bedeutung haben. Ich beschränke mich dabei auf Gattungsnamen der Spermatophyta.

I. Namen, bei denen eine von ursprünglichen Schreibung abweichende Schreibweise beibehalten werden soll, werden in der Liste in verschiedener Form zitiert. Es lassen sich danach vier Gruppen unterscheiden:

1. Neben der beizubehaltenden veränderten Schreibung wird die ursprüngliche Schreibung in Klammern zitiert, z.B.:

374. Lamarckia („Lamarkia“) Moench, Meth. 201. 1794.