

COMMUNICATIONS.

A CHAPTER IN THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE GLOXINIA.

BY W. D. BRACKENRIDGE.

The discovery of *Gloxinia rubra*, and its subsequent history, may possess some little interest to horticulturists, about which there has long hung a mystery.

During the latter part of the year 1838, while acting as one of the naturalists attached to the United States South Sea Exploring Expedition, we visited Brazil, and during one of our botanical excursions in the vicinity of Rio Janeiro, and right at the base of the Corcovado Mountain, I detected, growing on wet rocks, a solitary plant of this *Gloxinia* in company with vast numbers of *G. caulescens*—of which then—and even now, I consider it only a mere sport or variety; for all that Doctor Lindley described it as a distinct species. Furthermore, that prince of horticulturists, Monsieur Louis Van Houtte, doubted its nativity, as he had a special collector in that country, who had met nothing like it; neither did I, during many extensive rambles in that paradise

or headquarters of the vegetable kingdom. The color of the flower was what took my eye, and, as a practical horticulturist, who had frequently been manipulating varied species, so as to produce intermediate varieties, it occurred to me, that a cross between this and the few purple and white flowered kinds then in cultivation, that something good would be the result. That I was right in my conjectures, witness the numerous beautiful and delicately-marked hybrids that now adorn our conservatories.

The foregoing is the pleasant part of its history. This and what is to follow ought to have been given to the public long ago, but at the time of the discovery—and long afterwards—we were acting under a gag law, as to the disposition of material collected during that expedition. I had carefully estimated what it was worth, and could not think of throwing it away. Thereby my scruples about disobeying orders were overcome. So, after having a drawing made of the whole plant, I dried the flowers and foliage; then packed the root in a box, and dispatched it by the first ship which left for the United States, directed to my friend, Robert Buist, Philadelphia, who multiplied it, and sold the whole stock, without reserve, to

Mr. Hugh Low, nurseryman, Clapton, London, for the sum of forty pounds, sterling.

During the time Buist was getting up the stock referred to, a person stole leaves from the original plant, and handed them over to another plant firm in Philadelphia, who also got up a stock, and sold it to the Messrs. Young, nurserymen, Epsom, England, who advertised it extensively. Then began a war of crimination and recrimination, Low accusing Buist of having deceived him in not letting him have the whole stock; while Buist was accusing the party who supplied the Youngs with the article. To end the matter, Buist had to refund a part of the original amount paid by Mr. Low; not a cent of which—in money or any other consideration—was ever received by me. I have reaped all I desire, in being the medium through which it reached the horticultural world.

[It may be as well to state, for the benefit of those who may not know, that the *Gloxinia* is propagated from leaves. A leaf planted will make a bulb from the end of the leaf stalk, and the bulb makes a plant next year. The leaves in this case were cut from a plant sent for exhibition at one of the meetings of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, as we were informed by the late Robert Buist.—Ed. G. M.]

