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STAPELIÆ NOVÆ:

OR,

A COLLECTION

OF SEVERAL

NEW SPECIES OF THAT GENUS;

DISCOVERED IN THE

INTERIOR PARTS OF AFRICA.

BY

FRANCIS MASSON.



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1796.

TO

THE KING.

SIRE,

COMPELLED to leave the Cape of Good Hope, lest I should lose, in an expected invasion, the Collection of living Plants that I had made, during ten years residence there, I returned to England; and was indulged, on my return, with your Majesty's gracious permission to remain a year at home. Unwilling to waste so much time in idleness, I resolved to render this vacation somewhat profitable to the science of Botany, by publishing observations made on that subject, in the interior deserts of Africa.

Twenty-four years I have enjoyed the honour of being, by your Majesty's command, attached to the Royal Gardens at Kew, as a collector of exotic plants. I have had the satisfaction of seeing several hundreds of those, collected by me in various climates, flourishing there, more beautifully, in some instances, than in their native soils. And I have observed, with the exultation I hope of honest pride, my name frequently repeated in the Hortus Kewensis, published by my deceased patron and friend William Aiton.

Let these circumstances, GRACIOUS SIRE, plead some excuse for the ambition that induced me to solicit the honour of laying my little work at your Majesty's feet.

Penetrated with gratitude for the uniform protection I have unceasingly received from your Majesty's bounty—anxious to recom-

DEDICATION.

mence my employment as a collector, and still enjoying, though in the afternoon of life, a reasonable share of health and vigour, I am now ready to proceed to any part of the globe, to which your Majesty's commands shall direct me. Many are the portions of it that have not yet been fully explored by Botanists—all of them are equal to my choice.—To extend the science of Botany, to enrich the Royal Gardens at Kew, and to obey your Majesty's gracious commands, are the only objects of ambition that actuate the breast of

Your MAJESTY's

most humble,

most dutiful,

and most grateful Servant,

FRANCIS MASSON.

P R E F A C E.

THE tract of land, which forms the Cape of Good Hope, widens gradually as it recedes from the sea ; the western coast consists of extensive sandy deserts, incapable of cultivation, and the interior part exhibits ridges of high mountains ; between them are other deserts, the soil of which is a reddish earth, intermixed with rotten schistus, impregnated with salt.

These deserts, called Karro, are furnished with great variety of succulent plants, endowed by nature, as the camel is, with the power of retaining within them water, sufficient to enable them to survive the long periods of drought which prevail in those regions. The climate differs very much from that near the Cape, where the vegetable productions approach more to the nature of Alpine plants.

This tract of country has afforded more riches for the naturalist than perhaps any other part of the globe. When the Europeans first settled there, the whole might have been compared to a great park, furnished with a wonderful variety of animals, such as the elephant, the rhinoceros, the hippopotamus, the camelopardalis, numerous species of the genus antelope, the lion, panther, hyæna, and many other ferocious animals ; but since the country has been inhabited by Europeans, most of these have been destroyed or driven away.

The ornithology of the Cape is very interesting ; incredible numbers of strange sorts of birds, quite unknown to the inhabitants, often migrate from the interior country, and visit the European settlements.

The vegetable kingdom seems almost inexhaustible, and most of the genera at the Cape are peculiar to the southern

parts of Africa ; the variety of climates and local situations afforded by the nature of the country, produce such a diversity of species, that the age of man would scarce be sufficient to complete a Flora of it, accompanied with exact figures and scientific descriptions.

The Dutch, although celebrated as lovers of Natural History and Botany, had possessed the Cape near 130 years before any considerable number of plants from thence were introduced into their European gardens, a few geraniums and succulent plants excepted. Even the zoology of this interesting spot seems to have been very little studied by them.

The curious productions of the Cape had been too much neglected until the year 1771, when Captain Cook returned from his first voyage round the globe, and landed the Naturalists who accompanied him at the Cape Town ; they were much gratified by the treasures they met with, and in consequence of the observations they then made, Sir Joseph Banks, on his return to England, suggested to his Majesty the idea of sending a person, professionally a gardener, to the Cape, to collect seeds and plants for the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew : his Majesty was graciously pleased to adopt the plan, though at that time so little approved by the public, that no one but myself chose to undertake the execution of it. I sailed for the Cape in the beginning of 1772, and remained there two years and a half ; during which time I succeeded so well, that my mission has been the cause of several other botanical expeditions of the same kind being undertaken, by order of the Emperor, of the late King of France, and of the King of Spain.

In the year 1786 I was sent out a second time to the Cape, and remained there near ten years, in which time I had opportunities more minutely to search that great tract of country ; the various collections I have sent from thence to Kew Gardens

have been cultivated with so much success, that all praise of the cultivators is useless, for the garden itself sufficiently demonstrates the care and skill with which Cape plants have been treated in that excellent school of horticulture.

Some Cape genera consist of numerous species, viz. *Geranium* *Erica* and *Mesembryanthemum*: very elegant works have been published giving account of the *Gerania*; but the history of the *Mesembryanthema* is yet deficient, and the deserts contain still many species unknown to Botanists.

Two species only of *Stapelia* were heretofore described by Botanists; the genus now promises a numerous harvest of species. In my various journeys through the deserts I have collected about forty, and these I humbly present to the lovers of Botany. The figures were drawn in their native climate, and though they have little to boast in point of art, they possibly exhibit the natural appearance of the plants they represent, better than figures made from subjects growing in exotic houses can do.

The genus of *Stapelia* seems peculiar to deserts. All the new species I have seen inhabit the desert parts of the Cape countries. The particular places where they are found are annexed to the specific descriptions of each.

Several authors have written on this genus. Among the first are *Hermannus*, *Bradley*, &c. who wrote early in this century.

Forskål, in his journey in *Arabia Felix*, discovered five new species, and has given good figures of two of them.

Thunberg, in his *Prodromus*, mentions five species, three of them I cannot determine, viz. *S. mammillaris*, *S. fasciculata*, *S. caudata*, because his descriptions are so short; probably in his *Flora Capensis* they will be more fully defined. I shall be glad to quote them as soon as it is in my power to ascertain them.

Colonel Gordon and Captain Paterson discovered some very remarkable species ; but these are very obscure, for want of complete figures and descriptions.

In the splendid work on East India plants, now publishing at the expence of the Honourable East India Company, one new species is given.

As so many species of this genus have been found in the southern parts of Africa, in Arabia Felix, and in India, presumptive proof may be drawn that many remain yet undiscovered ; I am certain that the Cape countries contain several that I have not had an opportunity of procuring.

As no one but myself possesses the figures contained in this little work, I have thought it my duty to present them to the public, in hopes that they may prove acceptable, both to the Botanist and cultivator of plants. Generic and specific descriptions are given, and some useful hints annexed to the description of each species.