

The Booth - Lehmann incident

The whole story

Ever since I learned about the grave dispute between Prof. Lehmann and the brothers Booth, I wanted to write about it. As it happens, I've never found a reasonable entree to the texts, one which would let me tell about it comprehensively. Study of old German botanical periodicals and luck put me on the trail of an article, written by Nees van Esenbeck, a prominent botanist in "Flora, oder allgemeine botanische Zeitung, 1834", where he had anticipated and made quite superfluous my planned writing by about 180 years.

To the best of my knowledge, this dispute is unparalleled in rose history. Many of the most prominent rosarians of the time, even Vibert, had a minor or major role in this quarrel, serving as witness on one side or the other.

What makes this dispute so unique is the fact that it soon left the botanical scene and became well known among the public due to the fact that the battle was pursued either in newspapers or in special booklets that were issued for free and so found a wide distribution.

The opponents--and this is important to understand the repercussions--were both prominent horticultural experts:

Prof. Johann Georg Christian Lehmann (1792-1860) had published nearly a dozen horticultural books. He was the founder and first director of the Botanical Garden in Hamburg.

The brothers James and George Booth, sons of John Booth, were owners at the time in question of Hamburg's greatest and most prominent nursery and were the preferred providers of the great estate gardens in and around Hamburg. At that time, they held the most diversified horticultural program for sale -- at least in Germany.

So no lightweight fighting-- the heavyweights of their businesses were going at each other.

Content in square brackets by the translator.

Here now is the article:

Harald Enders (translating) and Brent C. Dickerson (editing)

Nees van Esenbeck

THE ROSE QUARREL

From: "Flora, oder allgemeine botanische Zeitung, 1834, II. Band", p. 385-396, 401-410

What do I think about this rose-quarrel at Hamburg, you ask me? Well, you certainly won't be able to extract a judgment from me in this case to end this quarrel behind the backs of the opponents. But nevertheless I honestly thank you for the question, which led me to make the course of events clearer to myself and to ponder what I think about this conflict.

How many nice, joyful and amiable things have been said and written about the rose! It must be deep in the nature of our views and feelings about the rose that we all experience soft, gentle, and benevolent emotions towards this flower. It seems an absurdity to think about the rose in terms of animosity and dispute. In the wide-ranging manuscript of my young friend Döring about the natural and cultural history of the rose, there is nothing to be found like "The Rose as apple of discord."

Therefore this example of a brawl, in which the rose just serves as a spark in a larger conflagration, is very lamentable because it is unnatural. Just as, in the presence of dignitaries and aristocrats, people keep discipline, just so, in that same way should the Booth brothers defend the amiable child of their horticultural skills which they found worthy to bear such an illustrious name—they should honor it with a worthy choice of weapons as well as a dignified attitude in their defence of the pursued. So you see, in one specific part – not touching on the actual matter in dispute – I am totally against the Booth brothers, insofar as I have to regard them as authors of articles which would embarrass the most eager defender of Freedom of the Press.

Here I will give a short overview about this dispute.

Just like every story, the story of the rose-quarrel has its preliminary events which are a silent but influential part of the story.

In 1816 for the first time in the Flottbeck Garden (the premises of Booth) there flowered a wonderful rose, bred from seed of 'Maidens Blush'. It was propagated, and in the years 1820 and 1821 a very few specimens were sold abroad and in the home country. Finally, after intensified efforts at propagation, it entered the "Hauptverzeichnis der Flottbecker Baumschulen" [*Main catalogue of the Flottbeck nursery*], with its parent being specified and with its name 'Königin von Dänemark'—and so was introduced to commerce.

In 1828 Prof. Lehmann wrote in the "Verzeichnis des Hamburger botanischen Gartens" [*Inventory of the Botanical Garden of Hamburg*] about one of the rose varieties listed there with the name 'La Belle Courtisane': „In a French rose inventory of 1806 there is a remark, that this rose arose from the 'Great Dutch Centifolia' and 'Maidens Blush', and owed its name to that pairing. In some catalogs of current nurseries this cultivar is newly listed as 'Königin von Dänemark'.”

When Prof. Lehmann wrote this, he made a fundamental mistake. But this mistake does not result in a botanical error, but rather in the error of how his words would be understood,

because there is no reason to doubt that his descriptions were literally correct, just as nobody will doubt that the story of the Booth brothers concerning the origin of their rose is correct. Everybody who knows Prof. Lehmann as man and scientist will absolutely believe him; and the ones who don't know him must not doubt him, because in such a case no one could ever believe anything told him by a stranger.

No, Prof. Lehmann's mistake was of another kind. Prof. Lehmann apparently spoke about this synonymy in the way done everyday in word and in print among *botanists*. Isn't it the usual case that, when walking through gardens or visiting herbaria, occasionally plants are found there under other names; that goes for literature too. We, the ones dealing with the so called botanic herbs, encounter this, as you know, nearly every day. We sometimes like it and we sometimes don't, sometimes we are a little bit annoyed, particularly if we just have a somehow differently named cultivar published as new; we argue a bit, or let it be, because dear God has let this plant grow for others too—they would see who is right—and how it is generally: sometimes we are right and sometimes we are wrong. But things very seldom escalate to a level so demanding and documentary, as if reputation, honor, and revenues were at stake (which luckily is not the case), because, in the final analysis, evidence is not as easily found as the not-so-educated would like it to be. So, Prof. Lehmann declared his synonym in the manner he would use when talking as a botanist to other botanists, who, even if they were certain of the contrary, would anyway just regard this as a mistake [*of Prof. Lehmann's*]. But the ones taking the greatest interest in this were not botanists; they were a commercial enterprise which read the text passage erroneously—not that the writer was a botanist, writing in a botanist's way, but rather that he was an antagonistic commercial enterprise which had hostile intentions in this. If Prof. Lehmann would have been so wise to tone down his words when he wrote this passage, the Booths would have been capable of understanding this passage correctly, even if they misunderstood it when first reading it, and they could have extracted the correct sense.

But they did not [*understand it*], because their answer, which showed up quickly, talks about “malevolence” as a possible motive of such an “unjustified statement,” and pleaded with their rose friends for testimony as to the origin of this rose. Furthermore it seems that the Booth's did expect from their opponent – in response to this – a detailed line of argument as if it were to be used in litigating a case in a court of justice.

We do not know if Prof. Lehmann came to realize his mistake at this point, due to this response from the Booths. But we are very certain that he would have not continued this quarrel without the personal invectives.

In the catalogue of 1829, Prof. Lehmann repeated his statement, “that the ‘Königin von Dänemark’ rose is a synonym of his ‘Belle Courtisane’,” and claimed his right to correct synonyms. He did not say more nor less than he had done before—he does not add one single offensive word; his answer shows that the only reason why he answered was that he was right in this case. The fact that the Booths expected a formal refutation, he wouldn't have guessed.

Without any delay, the Flottbeck catalogue answered, repeated his former reply, and added the remark that it seems odd to believe that the sold-as-new rose was already known, because none of the previous buyers of this rose had said so. At this point the expectation of either proof or silence was shown clearly.

Because of the fact that the next catalogue from Lehmann said nothing, in the next catalogue of Flottbeck this challenge was repeated.

Now the next catalogue of the botanical garden from the year 1831 answered: “He [*Prof. Lehmann*] will keep the name ‘Belle Courtisanne’, because this rose is generally known under that name in France and the Netherlands, if not elsewhere, and was already painted by Redouté, before it got the name ‘Königin von Dänemark’.

The impartial at this point will not judge wrong that Prof. Lehmann had [*finally*] sensed that he—without knowing what had happened to him—had stepped onto grounds far from his scientific world. Proof was demanded as if it were evidence in court. About [*botanic*] synonymy, the professional literature decides. But *this* [*horticultural*] sphere does not have any fixed literature: catalogs wander about and vanish like leaves blowing in the wind, some copper plate books lack taxonomy, the taxonomic systems of flowers themselves without any exception lack nomenclatural certainty, which could bring reliability and conclusiveness. The reasons are many: the nomenclature changes with the change of times and nobody can say with certainty, what already has once been there, what ceased to exist, or what has just changed its name. Old memories of former journeys and the visit of foreign gardens were all that Prof. Lehmann had as a witness; the catalogue of 1806 had vanished together with other useless papers, as Prof. Lehmann later declared. So he had made enquiries and it was indicated to him that the ‘Belle Courtisanne’ was known, *generally* known, and he was referred to Redouté’s picture of it.

This information was snatched up by the Flottbeck institution with lawyerly eagerness and pursued further. The quarrel, until now held in notices in the opponents’ catalogs, led to a demand in a letter to cite the Redouté plate; and, as nothing of that nature followed, and as in 1832 the synonymy was repeated in the catalog of the botanical garden, the Booths thought it appropriate to publish their own polemic pamphlet “James Booth et Söhne gegen Professor Lehmann, als Direktor des Hamburger botanischen Gartens, in Betreff der Pracht-Rose Königin von Dänemark. Von John Booth. Zum Besten der Armen. Altona gedruckt bei Hammerich und Lesser” to defend their name and the name of the rose—or, more like it, the name giver of the rose.

The clinching argument that nobody found when Prof. Lehmann wrote must have been surprising—and it is what had surprised the Booths too when they were scrutinizing Redouté’s work—is this: the name ‘Rose la Belle Courtisanne’ is not to be found in Redouté. Additionally – and quite superfluously – this fact is highlighted by a letter by Redouté,

printed in this pamphlet where he attests the obvious; from that point on, a sort of cross-examination is inaugurated. At this point the style of speech in this pamphlet, as in the succeeding ones by the Booths, changes to contumely, dealing now with an enemy “who

wanted to embarrass the character of the Booths and harm their belongings.” Against such an enemy now the most hostile weapons are used, ruthless and with every deed and every word the most disreputable motivations implied.

But scrutinizing what Prof. Lehmann had written in his catalog of 1831, it is questionable what he had to prove at all. It is obvious that what is at stake is not the name whose existence was to be proved, but *the former existence of one totally identical rose* which circulated in gardens before the distribution of the Flottbeck rose. Precisely in this point, this quarrel differs from a synonymy-dispute of the botanical world, where a product of nature is presumed, and just the kind, how it is identified, and how named is disputable. In *this* case it is a question of whether the rose is a product of cunning or of coincidence and of the later use or naming. The Booths would have been refuted substantially if it had been shown that the *name* of the rose was wrong, but that *this rose* had been painted by Redouté under any name other than the one given to it by the Booths or one being otherwise generally known.

But this “generally” is in fact a mistake, as the pamphlet by the Booths with a number of letters of French and Dutch gardeners demonstrates. On the other hand, no one had previously addressed the degree and volume of propagation [of this rose]. So it is obvious how in a dispute one word calls forth the next.

Prof. Lehmann found it appropriate to declare again in the “Staats- und Gelehrten-Zeitung des Hamburger unpartheiischen Correspondenten No. 286,” dated 3. Dec. 1833, that his correction in the catalog of his garden was not to be understood as a pamphlet against the Booths. At the same time, he disputes the interpretation of his comment in regard to Redouté that it was to be understood in the way that the rose was painted by Redouté *under this name*; rather, what he had claimed was [*simply*] that it was painted there [*under whatever name*], and that *this* is the truth. Incidentally he could not indicate the plate number at the moment (because, as was revealed later, he did not possess it.)

Following this statement, the second publication, „James Booth et Söhne in Erwiederung auf Prof. Lehmanns öffentliche Erklärung vom 2. und 3. December, von John Booth. Wird unentgeltlich ausgegeben, Altona 1833“ comes out.

It analyses Prof. Lehmann’s declaration, getting all the more bitter and abusive, and finally declares that Prof. Lehmann had said that Redouté had painted this rose as ‘Belle Courtisanne’.

It seems that from this time on, Hamburg’s general public started to take part in this quarrel in the wake of this—more bitterness, anger, and even concern arose in some. Redouté’s works were produced by Prof. Lehmann, the plate showing the rose in question was found, and the

plates were displayed at the grounds of the botanical garden for assessment by professionals and amateurs.

It was determined that the picture was consonant with 'Königin von Dänemark'. It is a nice picture of *Rosa alba bifera*, or whatever it may be called; as could be guessed, the Booth brothers and their friends did not let this coincidence go through as if it were truth; the coincidence is not to be taken as an absolute certainty, because no plant gives exactly the same picture [*in other words, plants naturally varying, Redouté's plate constituted ambiguous evidence*]. Letters in the original writing, and as attested copies, were presented too, and were examined by the public. The most important among them was a letter from Thouin from the year 1824 which demonstrates the reason for Prof. Lehmann's confidence: it shows that 'Belle Courtisanne' under this name came into the botanical garden of Hamburg (from which it was in part sold to several other gardens, and in part sent for free with the intention to give material for comparisons with the rose from Flottbeck to complete the proofs that the Booth's had demanded repeatedly). An anonymous writer offers in the "Kritischen Blätter der Börse vom 3. Februar 1834, S.40" an article about how the case was. This article is free from any attack against any of the disputants.

Nearly at the same time, the study "Ueber zwei Schriften der Herren Booth et Söhne gegen Herrn Prof. Lehmann" [*About two readings by the M. Booth and Sons against Prof. Lehmann*] was published anonymously [... by X....r], in which all accusations and objections are considered, which leads to the satisfying result that the attacks of the Booth brothers are based on erroneous ideas about intentions and attitudes, and on a petulant misunderstanding of his [*Prof. Lehmann's*] words. Most impartial readers of this material will agree.

The apex of the heat in this controversy is reached in a second pamphlet of the Booths. To the publication "Sieg der Rose Königin von Dänemark durch Enthüllung der Anschläge des Prof. L.G.C. Lehmann von George Booth, Paris 1834, for free" [*Victory of the rose 'Königin von Dänemark' by revealing the attempts of Prof L.G.C. Lehmann, by George Booth, unentgeltlich*], a „Grave epilog" [*Gewichtiges Nachwort*] by [von] James Booth" is attached. Most of our readers will have seen the publication we are talking about. Its intention is to shift the dispute to the character of Prof. Lehmann: to accuse him of fraudulent deceit. He [*Prof. Lehmann*] had, as we've noted, sent this plant, which grew under the name 'Belle Courtisanne' at the Botanical Garden at Hamburg, to some rose experts to have this variety compared with 'Königin von Dänemark'. Among those who received Prof. Lehmann's rose was the Chevalier Hardy, director of the Royal Luxembourg Gardens at Paris. George Booth asks the same person about the rose 'Belle Courtisanne' and gets the following answer: "It was sent to me by Prof. Lehmann of Hamburg, from whom Mr. Booth could learn full particulars, he himself [*Hardy*] does not know a rose with this name." The written questions and answers are shown in the original and in a translation.

The result of this correspondence with one of the greatest rose experts is contrary to the argument of Prof. Lehmann that 'Belle Courtisanne' was widely known in France, at least it proves, that Mr. Hardy did not know it. But Mr. Booth draws from this the conclusion that Prof. Lehmann sent this rose called 'Belle Courtisanne' to Mr. Hardy to distribute it in France

and so act in a fraudulent way [...] We now draw another conclusion from those letters, which is: Mr. Hardy answered off the top of his head, and that he thought that Mr. Booth wanted to buy this plant and so pointed to the source from which he himself got this rose. With this, he thought to have done his best. This becomes clear from a second letter of Mr. Hardy, where he says that Prof. Lehmann had sent him this rose “en disant, qu’elle était nouvelle” [*who said, that it was a new one.*] But this Prof. Lehmann cannot have said: not fraudulently, because then he would not have cheated anybody, and not as an honest man, because he had declared his rose to be known for long and so would have been cheating Mr. Hardy. It’s a remarkable fact that some of the rose experts, there at the peak of rose development, couldn’t make anything of a name that Prof. Lehmann had gotten from an earlier period [*of rose development*]. This seems to be part and parcel of the nature of floriculture, which has no literature all its own, but which uses tradition to substantiate its data concerning names and living plants. If a variety vanishes today, or a name perishes, all too soon the memory lapses of its former existence.

Some time ago I did a bit of carnation growing and had noted later, at other locations, that more than half of my carnations were completely unknown to great carnation experts. I have however no reason to believe the friends from whom I obtained the greatest part of my carnation collection by way of exchange or as a gift had just invented the names or were just pulling my leg. If now I would want to write a synonymy derived from my old catalogues, I would have a hard time finding any evidence for many of the names. A few years suffice to let a name which has no object fall into oblivion; and it is mere chance if it is conserved.

Later Mr. G. Booth sees the rose ‘Belle Courtisane’ in the Luxembourg Gardens, recognizes it, even without foliage, as the ‘Königin von Dänemark’ and so proves the identity of both without doubt. So now he is literally forced to assert that Prof. Lehmann had grown his ‘Belle Courtisane’ from a cutting of ‘Königin von Dänemark’ and that all other declarations about other offspring are untrue too. Thus it is that one unproven allegation leads to the next, and sound and content change – even against the will of the writer – to abuse. We set aside at this point the rest of the reading as containing nothing more than allegations and objections, more on the level of a verbal dispute, mostly without a specified aim or valid conclusions. To this section belongs the allegation that in the Botanical Garden of Hamburg the presentation of Redouté’s complete work was announced, but that only one issue was presented, just what would be required for evidentiary value if you’d open all books of an encyclopaedia, if an article starting with “A” is to be shown.

Prompted by this treatment – and maybe even more so by other things – Prof. Lehmann wrote the “Entgegnung auf die letzte Schrift der Herren Gebrüder Booth” [*Answer to the newest writing of the brothers Booth*] and gave it away for free. It is written in a very factual way and offers a clear and simple review of the dispute.

From this we will highlight some of the main replies of Prof. Lehmann to the allegations of the Booths.

First and foremost is the fact that Prof. Lehmann got the rose named 'Belle Courtisanne' from Mr. Thouin in 1824. Mr. Thouin explicitly writes in his letter "that he will send, together with the seed that was asked for (the letter was written during the usual period of exchange among botanical gardens), some rootstocks of the rose 'Belle Courtisanne', of which Mr. Redouté has made such an excellent illustration."

What had been argued by the Booth brothers against the authenticity of Thouin's letter gets disproved by Prof. Lehmann. In a literary dispute, these arguments *a priori* have no value. The opponent must be regarded as acting in good faith, and able to take his opponent as acting in good faith as well, so we regard this letter from Thouin as genuine, whatever doubts the other party may have. The reason why in the beginning only a certified copy was presented, Prof. Lehmann treats sufficiently with the explanation that the original of this letter was sent by him to Prof. Richard in Paris, to testify the authenticity of Thouin's handwriting. The official certification of Thouin's handwriting is shown [*in Prof. Lehmann's answer*].

Against the written testimonies of several French and Dutch gardeners, who testify that a rose with the name 'Belle Courtisanne' does not exist, Prof. Lehmann produces several letters, which testify the contrary.

[During the quarrel the following witnesses were named, sometimes without knowing that their shorter or longer replies were to be used in the dispute: In alphabetical order:

Bertin et Lebrun, Camuzet, Cels, Gouillet, Grandidier, Hardy, Havard, Jacquin, Pepin, Noisette, Redouté, Richard, Soulange-Bodin, Thouin, Tollard, Tripet, Vibert, Vilmorin Andrieux]

But in the end such testimonies, unconcerned with how many or how few were produced, say nothing else, than that the witness does not know, does not possess and has not found such a name or such a rose (or just the opposite). For a decision [*in the dispute*], nothing can be learned from them, because of the non-existence of any official proven complete or at least comprehensive taxonomic book [*about the rose varieties*]. Noteworthy though is a letter from Prof. Richard from Paris containing the statement that Prof. Richard regards the rose 'Belle Courtisanne' as a species rose that he had already grown for more than 10 years at the Jardin de la Faculté de Médecine as well as on his manor in the Normandy, and that he had seen this rose in several other gardens, plus the fact that he had seen it with this name at the Jardin du Luxembourg.

By presenting the letter addressed to Mr. Hardy from the year 1831 that had accompanied the roses that he had sent to Mr. Hardy, Prof. Lehmann does away with the most spiteful allegation: that he [*Prof. Lehmann*] had described this rose as new in this letter.

Finally, one question remains: if the rose, which was illustrated (though not as the rose 'Belle Courtisanne') by Redouté (Prof. Lehmann does not attribute *this name* to Redouté's work) really is the 'Königin von Dänemark' of the Flottbeck Gardens. Prof. Lehmann says that experts have recognized it in this picture.

The truth seems to be this: Redouté's work shows a rose very similar to 'Maidens Blush', but filled richly, and with lush formation of the flowers. The rose from Flottbeck, a daughter of 'Maidens Blush', is very well-formed, very fine-colored rose--maybe the best 'Maidens Blush' rose possible. In it, blood relationships with the most beautiful roses of the past appear: wood, buds, thorns, foliage etc. do not stay unchanged, but, looking with the eye of an expert, such kinship can be recognized at a distance.

If ever the 'Königin von Dänemark' would be painted by another artist, and if ever another rose garden-artist would attempt the impossible--to create an even more beautiful 'Königin'--we would very much doubt, if the Booths would be able, with only the picture at hand, to prove the identity of both cultivars and so prove the priority of their rights. In such a way would every honest dispute about garden varieties end.

Just as Prof. Lehmann had never alleged that the Booths had sold 'Belle Courtisanne' under the name 'Königin von Dänemark', and just as surely as the Booths will not argue that Prof. Lehmann had taken a cutting of 'Königin von Dänemark' to show it as 'Belle Courtisanne', the next flowering season will verify that between them, and even more that between them and Redouté's painting, there will be differences. Nonetheless, Prof. Lehmann will be able to state that both forms are to be affiliated under the rubric of a *variety*, and so to be regarded as identical, because with the term "variety", a certain range of variation is meant -if he is not to be disregarded.

On the other hand Prof. Lehmann will not be shy about the Flottbecker rose going by another synonym, because floricultural name-giving cannot relinquish its character--it will never stop naming those lovely varieties variably.

What- and whoever else has interfered in the dispute we set aside here. Anyone who wants to be convinced how a mediator – even with the best intentions – can do damage if he tries to make concessions for the keeping of peace against the conviction and the facts, will see this in the publication where Mr. Siemers reports about this: "Verhandlungen mit Herrn John Booth, Altona, 1834". [*Negotiations with Mr. John Booth*] The Booths will not make one-sided use of what makes sense only mutually, knowing that a settlement all too often consists of a loss of one's own rights and of truth itself to appease the opponent, just to "calm the waters," both parties knowing that they have disavowed parts of their belief to live in peace."

The End

Nees van Esenbeck did not concern himself with commenting further on the settlement. I won't do so either. But as appendix to van Esenbeck's text, here are the original texts of the statements of the opponents, published in the "Hamburgischer Mercurius, dated March, 28th 1834:

Prof. Lehmann:

"With the help of continuing observation and analysis, I am now convinced that the rose cultivar 'Königin von Dänemark, owned by James Booth et Söhne, owners of the Flottbecker Baumschule, is no formerly-known rose, but a new product of theirs. So I declare that my previous attitude is solely the result of an error. I regret the hurt which I have inflicted on them."

John and George Booth:

"After Prof. Lehmann has declared the above, which we find fully sufficient, we publicly retract all slanderous remarks that we ever have made about Prof. Lehmann."

Epilog:

History sometimes has an ironic twinkle in the eye:

The Booth nursery did not outlive its owners; it was liquidated in the 1880s. At the same time, the government of Hamburg was searching for an additional location for Hamburg's Botanical Garden in the wake of a planned restructuring of the city and the planned enlargement of University of Hamburg.

Today this very part of the Botanical Garden is situated exactly where once the Booth nursery attracted so many customers.

