

## THE E. G. BAKER BEQUEST

By J. E. LOUSLEY.

Under the terms of the will of Mr Edmund Gilbert Baker the Society receives unconditionally the portrait of his father by Joseph W. Forster. This picture of John Gilbert Baker is one of the best known of any British botanist of the last century. It has been described by a contemporary writer as "an excellent and characteristic likeness" and was hung in the Royal Academy in 1893 (No. 524 in the catalogue of that year). It has been reproduced in botanical periodicals on several occasions (e.g., 1893, *J. Bot.*, **31**, 243; 1893, *Gardener's Chronicle*, ser. 3, **13**, 746; 1933, *Rep. Bot. Soc. and E.C.*, **10**, t. 45, 289). Many framed copies were distributed to botanists in 1893, and one was hung as far afield as the office of our member, Mr H. N. Ridley, in Singapore. A cartoon in which the ink-stand is replaced by a bottle of hair lotion with an apt caption appeared in the *Pall Mall Budget* for May 25, 1893, and is here reproduced.

An American "appreciation" of the portrait of J. G. Baker quoted from *Meehan's Monthly* for September 1893 (1893, *J. Bot.*, **31**, 350) seems to anticipate recent research on the important influence of posture on work. It was quoted as follows:—

"He is represented with some Onoclea-like fern on the table before him, about which he is penning notes. The pleasure it gives to see for the first time the facial outlines of one so much beloved is mingled with regret that his hard labours cannot be softened by the use of a fountain pen instead of an old steel one; and instead of having himself bent down to his work till his body is at right angles with his legs, and his nose but a few inches from his wrist, some better care for his vital organs have not been provided for. It is well worth some thought and a little expense in improved furniture to add ten or fifteen years to the life of such a useful man as J. G. Baker."

In spite of the fears of the American writer this "useful man" lived for another 27 years, and the lesson of comfort has still to be learned by many enthusiastic botanists!

An obituary notice of Edmund Baker will appear in *Watsonia*, but this seems a suitable place to recount his early connection with the affairs of our Society. His father, J. G. Baker, was President of the Thirsk Natural History Society which took over the Botanical Exchange Club section of the work of the Botanical Society of London when that body was disbanded in 1858. Managing a large general drapery and grocery business founded by his father in Market Square, Thirsk, J. G. Baker was, nevertheless, able to find time for botanical work which established him as one of the leading amateur botanists of his day. On May 9th, 1864, he met with a misfortune which changed the whole course of his future career.

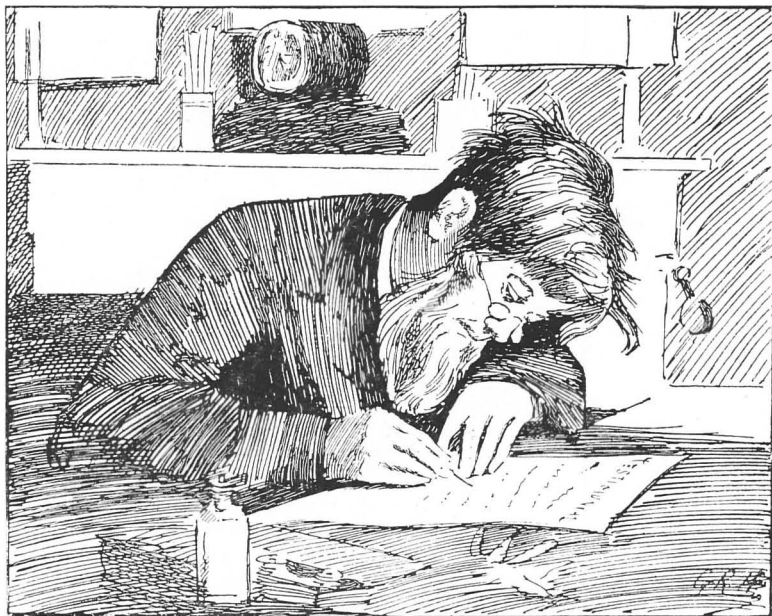
The fire which on that night destroyed J. G. Baker's house with almost all its contents—including his herbarium, botanical library and the stock of the first edition of his *Flora of North Yorkshire*—has been graphically described by T. J. Foggitt who witnessed it (1933, *Rep. Bot. Soc. and E.C.* 10, 296-297). Edmund Baker, then exactly three months old, saved his parents' lives with his cries. It is from the will of this infant of 85 years ago that the Society has now benefited.

His father's disastrous loss had a remarkable sequel. Various circumstances (which are described fully in 1921, *Proc. Roy. Soc. B*, 92, xxv) had paved the way for a new appointment at Kew, and Dr (afterwards Sir Joseph) Hooker invited J. G. Baker to accept the post of First Assistant. He took up this appointment in January, 1866. The letter conveying the invitation, together with connected correspondence, was found amongst Edmund Baker's papers and has been presented by Mrs Trent to the Royal Botanic Gardens, where it has been filed in the Herbarium Library. Gilbert Baker retained his interest in the Botanical Exchange Club which, following his removal, became known as the London Botanical Exchange Club in 1866. He will always be remembered for his work in continuing the activities of our Society at a time when his own troubles were enough to have overcome a lesser man.

It is, therefore, appropriate that his son should have bequeathed this fine portrait to the larger organisation which has descended from the modest Club for which his father did so much. The picture will be labelled with a plaque and housed on our behalf by the Linnean Society in their rooms. Of that Society both Bakers were Fellows for many years and it is appropriate as well as generous of their Council to undertake care of the portrait.



From a painting by Joseph W. Forster,  
JOHN GILBERT BAKER (1834-1920).



A Testimonial. "Two years ago I was induced to buy your lotion for the hair; since then I have been unable to wear a hat."

*From the Trower Fund.*