

HUNTLEYA VIOLACEA.

H. violacea; sepalis petalisque oblongis obtusis margine crispis, labello reniformi emarginato cristâ nudâ sulcatâ, columnâ maximâ carnosâ naviculari.

So beautiful a plant as this it is rare to find even among Orchidaceæ, not that its herbage is particularly rich, or its flowers very large, or their form particularly strange, but because of their soft yet intense violet, which varies from the depth of the richest sapphire to the mild iridescence of opal.

It is a native of Demerara, whence it was received by Mr. George Loddiges, who has remarked that the genus itself seems very near some of the *Zygopetala*, especially *Z. maxillare*. In fact there is nothing to distinguish *Huntleya* from them except the excessively enlarged column of that genus, and the union of its lateral sepals at their base, after the manner of *Maxillaria*; between which and *Zygopetalum*, *Huntleya* stands as it were intermediate, yet distinct.

The genus was originally established by Mr. Bateman upon a Demerara plant received from Mr. Schomburgk, and said to have sessile flowers, but of which I know nothing; except that in structure and habit it is said to resemble the *Huntleya Meleagris* of the Botanical Register, tab. 14, ann. 1839. The latter species has, at the base of the lip, a large transverse crest bordered with long yellow fringes, its column is widest at the point and slightly toothed, and its sepals and petals are stained with wine-purple veins and blotches upon a yellowish ground. It is therefore evidently very different from the present, and in fact not to be compared with it for beauty.

In this plant there are no visible PSEUDO-BULBS, but the plant consists of a tuft of LEAVES, embracing each other at the base, with which they are very distinctly articulated at from two to three inches above the base; their blade is eight or nine inches long, erect, acute, rather plaited, and between membranous and leathery in texture. From the axils of the lower leaves spring the PEDUNCLES, which are about six inches long, one-flowered, and pendulous; each has two oblong bracts at nearly equal distances, besides two others, of which one is very small, at the base of the ovary. The FLOWERS measure three inches in diameter, and are of a thick leathery texture. The SEPALS are oblong, a little curled inwards at the point, and very much crisped at the edges; the two lower are united by their bases into an inconspicuous pouch, as is shewn in the right hand figure; outside they are a pale soft violet fading to white at the edges, inside below the middle they are of a much deeper and richer violet, but even this fades to white at the points. The PETALS are formed like the back sepal, and are coloured nearly the same, only more deeply and brightly. The LIP is united to the pouch of the lateral sepals by a short narrow foot, which curves upwards and dilates into the lamina; the latter is deep rich violet, kidney-shaped, with a little notch at the end, and slightly toothed; towards the base the edge is irregularly sinuous; in the middle above the foot it is excavated into a hollow like the bowl of a tea-spoon, and there it is brown; between the excavation and the violet deep border there lies a brown ridge, fleshy, and deeply furrowed on the front side, which gradually slopes forwards till it ends in a crenelled boundary. The COLUMN is as large as the lip, fleshy, very deep violet, broadest at the base, curved forwards at the apex, and probably entire at the edge, so that it looks like a portion of the head of a boat turned bottom upwards. Below the apex of the column stands the ANTHER, containing four yellow pollen-masses, attached to a narrow caudicula, and triangular gland, which are of the same violet colour as the column itself.

Mr. Schomburgk, since his return to this country, has obligingly favoured me with the following interesting account of his discovery of this plant :—

“ I discovered the *Huntleya violacea* for the first time in October, 1837, then on my ascent of the river Essequibo. The large cataract Cumaka toto, or Silk Cotton fall, obliged us to unload our corials and to transport the luggage overland, in order to avoid the dangers which a mass of water at once so powerful and rapid, and bounded by numerous rocks, might offer to our ascent. While the Indians were thus occupied, I rambled about one of the small islands, which the diverging arms of the river formed in their descent, and the vegetation of which had that peculiar lively appearance which is so characteristic in the vicinity of cataracts, where a humid cloud, the effects of the spray, always hovers around them. Blocks of syenite were heaped together, and while their black shining surface contrasted strongly with the whitish foam of the torrent, and the curly waves beating against the rocky barriers, as if angry at the boundary which they attempted to set to the incensed element, their dome-shaped summits were adorned with a vegetation at once rich and interesting. Heliconias, Tillandsias, Bromelias, Ferns, Pothos, Cyrtopodiums, Epidendrums, Peperomias, all appeared to struggle for the place which so small a surface afforded to them. The lofty mountains Akaywanna, Comuti or Taquiari, and Twasinki, recede, and, forming an amphitheatre, afford a highly interesting scene ; no doubt the most picturesque of that part of the river Essequibo. I was attracted by a number of *Oncidium altissimum* which covered one of the rocky piles, and astonished me by their long stems and the bright colour of their flowers, when my attention was more powerfully attracted by a plant, the appearance of which, although different from the pseudo-bulbous tribe, proclaimed nevertheless that it belonged to that interesting family the orchideous. The specimens were numerous ; and clothed almost with their vivid green the rugged and dark trunks of the gigantic trees, which contributed to the majestic scene around me. It was not long before I discovered one of the plants in flower. It was as singular as it was new to me. The sepals and petals of a rich purple and velvet-like appearance ; the helmet, to which form the column bore the nearest resemblance, of the same colour ; the labellum striated with yellow.*

“ In the sequel of my expeditions I found it generally in the vicinity of cataracts, where a humid vapour is constantly suspended, and where the rays of the sun are scarcely admitted through the thick canopy of foliage. I traced the *Huntleya* from the sixth parallel of latitude to the shady mountains of the Acarai chain near the equator ; but in its fullest splendour it appeared at one of the small islands among the Christmas cataracts in the river Berbice ; and there is a melancholy circumstance connected with the plant, which its appearance never fails to recal to my memory. Their singular beauty at this spot induced my friend Mr. Reiss, who accompanied me as volunteer during the unfortunate expedition up the river Berbice, to draw and paint it on the spot. He was yet occupied with this task when the last of our canoes was to descend the dangerous cataract. He arose from his occupation, desirous to descend with the Indians in the canoe, although against my wish, but he persisted. The canoe approached the fall—it upset—and of thirteen persons who were in it at the time, he was the only one who paid the rash attempt with his life. He is now buried opposite that island, the richest vegetable productions of which it was his last occupation to imitate on paper and in colours.

“ It appears easy of cultivation, although the first plants which I sent to England to Messrs. Loddiges appear to have perished. I was more fortunate with former transports ; and I saw lately among the splendid collections of my kind friend, Mr. George Barker at Springfield, a *Huntleya* in blossom, the flower of which could boldly vie with any in their native country. A humid atmosphere and shade are the distinguishing features of their habitat.”

* For the first account of it, see *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, vol. vi. p. 232.