A couple of years ago, in reviewing the first re-release of this interesting series by an already acclaimed author, I noted that the human history of orchids is quite a neglected topic when compared to the amount of information available on the natural history of this fascinating group of plants (Pupulin 2015). No doubts, Rudolf Jenny is seriously committed in the effort to reduce this gap. This year he presented the second part of his multi-volume study “…of men and orchids…”, a work that – once completed – promises to be an encyclopedic essay on the preeminent and often forgotten figures, both on the scientific and the horticultural sides, who made it possible to discover and name the amazing diversity of the Orchidaceae.

The volume collects 36 chapters (plus an essential index of scientific and personal names), presenting a glimpse into the history of men and orchids from the Seventeenth century almost to our days, always accompanied and enriched by an exceptional iconographic apparatus. You will find stories of famous scientists of the past, like Olof Swartz, Carl Ludwig Blume, or Johan Jacob Smith, and more recent botanists like Sokichi Segawa, Arthur Francis George Kerr and François Pichon, renowned orchidologists like Heinrich Gustav Reichenbach and the De Candolle...
Orchids and Orchidology in the Antilles. An Encyclopedic History

This great and heavy book (it weights a few grams less than three kilograms!) is the logic continuation of the author’s ongoing project, which began in 2009 with the publication of Orchids and orchidology in Central America: 500 years of history (Ossenbach 2009; for a review of the recently released Spanish edition, see this issue, pp. 105–106). And, to be true, it is a superb continuation of the work.

As the title itself promises, the book is a real encyclopedic treatment (the “Table of contents” alone occupies 21 pages) of the workers — pioneers, scientists, explorers, gardeners, conservationists, growers and experimenters, as well as their institutions — who revealed the orchid diversity of the Antillean islands and presented it to the world. As the author claims in the introduction to the book, “this work has become a difficult hybrid between a traditional historical narration and an encyclopaedic dictionary of persons and biographies”. To which extent this hybrid succeeded in its ambitious scope is perhaps best visualized by a synoptical table of 42 pages, enlisting chronologically the main publications on Antillean flora by 622 persons in a temporal arch extending from 1640 to 2015. Another 44 pages of bibliography testify to the amplitude, depthness and completeness of Ossenbach’s effort as to the sources consulted and studied to shape the work.

The encyclopaedic character of the work does not detract from the fondness of the author in portraying the historical, cultural, and economic landscape of the West Indies and the Governments and scientific academies interested in their flora, as they changed and evolved through a five-centuries period. As Ossenbach previously did in his account on the orchid hunters in Central America, also in this book he organizes the facts relative to the discovery, use, commerce, study and conservation of orchids within the historical perspective not only of the Antilles, but of....

dynasty, and less known ones as Alexander Moritz and Albert Spear Hitchcock; gardeners like Robert Pantling or William Brass; plant hunters like John Henry Chesterton and Clarence Horich (the latter portrayed with an extraordinary photograph); collectors like Cristoph Ludwig Albrecht Keferstein (this is the first orchid book where Mr. Keferstein is identified with his personal names) and the Reichenheim family; orchid painters like Florence Helen Woodward, and also simply gentlemen like Count Luigi Maria d’Albertis, an Italian explorer who collected in New Guinea and Australia and gave speeches at the Royal Geographical Society, and who I met for the first time in Jenny’s pages.

Do all these names resound like somehow familiar? The simple reason is that there are orchids that honor and immortalize these names, orchids that we study and cultivate. Each of the chapters that compose the volume, in fact, tell the story of an orchid (or a few orchids) and a man (or a few men), providing not only complete biographical sketches of the protagonists, but often also discussing in depth the taxonomy of the concerned species. In a number of cases, the names of these persons, who are behind the discovery and scientific apprehension of orchids, receive for the first time ever, in Jenny’s book, a face.

Orchids are an excuse to bring to life, in historical images and modern photos, the efforts and courage, the ambitions and the extraordinary will, of the men who wrote the history of orchids, contributing to their knowledge and appreciation. And, to be just an excuse, I have to say that orchids are lavishly illustrated with hundreds of images, including ancient drawings, paintings, type specimens and engravings, watercolors and simple sketches, illustrations of the past in black and white and in color, and contemporary photographs often taken by the author himself. They are, without exceptions, perfectly reproduced.

Reviewing the first volume, I could only criticize the lack of a frontispiece; in this superb volume 2, the problem was fixed and I am left without any arguments to exercise my criticism. “...of men and orchids...” is both entertaining and instructive, thanks to the proven experience of the author as a researcher in both orchid taxonomy and botanical history. This work well deserves a place in any serious library.

Franco Pupulin

LITERATURE CITED
Jenny, R. 2015. ...of men and orchids... Part 1. Quito, Imprenta Mariscal, printed by the author.