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1810

12: 1810 September 18: W. Alex Wilson (Philadelphia) to William Dunbar (near Natchez)

W. Alex Wilson

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heightened by the grateful recollection of your hospitality to me a solitary stranger. I am making up some good drawings of the Carmine and Cinnamic Gallinules, for Eliza, of which I spoke, and which Mr. Vaughan will get conveyed to you. Your son and I had a long conversation the other day relative to my rambles in the Mississippi territory. He entertains a portion of his father's energy of mind, which I hope will expand hereafter to some thing eminent. I received a letter from Mr. Audubon yesterday who has already commenced the publication, at Paris, of his "American Sylva" or Forest trees, with coloured plates, I expect them here in a few months. Dr. Hosack of New York also informs me that he is making preparations to commence the publication of "The Botany of the United States" with coloured engravings. The Legislature of New York has passed a resolution to pay him $10,000 dollars for his Botanic Garden near N. York, and to establish it a public trust for the Students of Botany. The bargain, however is not finally closed and I have my doubts that the Dollars may still be suspended. I beg you to present my most respectfull compliments to Mrs. Dunbar, whose kindness and polite attention to me I remember with pleasure. You will probably see Dr. Leib and Dr. Brown, soon; to both of whom I beg you would be pleased to remember me; I am preparing to get the Volumes sent off for Natchez as soon as possible. I beg you will excuse every blot & erasure

Dear Sir Your obliged friend & Wilson

I had the unexpressible mortification to see the Swallow tailed Hawk several times on my way from your house to Baton rouge, but never could get within gun shot of it. Twice it was possible for you to prevent me of the sight of this elegant Bird. Dr. Brown promised to use his endeavours to procure from that gentleman every kindness and attention during the few days I staid with him. I left my favourite Parquet in the Lady of Mrs. It groaned a passage through its cage, and instantly flew overboard, about day break I was then asleep on deck, had the steamer awaked me at the moment I could have saved its life as there was little wind. I carried this bird with me more than 1200 miles and the greatest part of that distance in my pocket. I felt the whole of that and for several succeeding days, as if I had lost a relation. I have collected a great number of interesting facts relative to the Stormy Petrels, called by the sailors "Mother Carey's Chickens" having shot great numbers of them, and watched their manners. I examined them by Spectacles, during my 116 days passage to New York. I think I shall be able to remove some of those foolish and cruel prejudices that prevail against this innocent little Bird, and explain, satisfactorily, its reason for appearing in such numbers behind the vessel in blowing weather. I am indulging the hope that Eliza will enable me to embellish to the publick something new from her pencil, to perpetuate our acquaintance and mutual friendship. As for you My dear Sir I shall ever retain the highest respect for your abilities, as a Many Sincere

Philad.a Sept.r 20th 1810.

My dear Sir

By mail on the 4th I have completed my tour, and have reached home. In the meantime I most confidently hope that your health is again re-established, and that you are commencing preparations to begin your journey to the Arkansaw which, I have no doubt, you will make in Louisiana. I am progressing with my Third Volume, which will be published on the first of January next; it will contain a number of New Birds which I found in my journey, & among the rest the noble Hawk which I shot on your Plantation, and of which I can find no account in any Publication whatever; to conclude it altogether new. I am sorry that I know so little of its manners &c. These can only be collected from those who have made long in that part of the country & to whom it is habitual & have paid some attention to it. I know to belong to the same particular family of Hawks which the Swallow tailed Hawk with a white head, breast and belly, is so distinguished a species. The head of this is also of a mealy white, but the tail is slightly forked — It flies, or rather sails, in company with the Buzzards. I drew some curious notes respecting my Bird during my residence in N. Orleans, among the rest a species of Lice new to me. I found several new species also, on the islands of the point of Florida, where the U.S. was dealing