A New Edition of a British Flora*

The publication ten years ago of a new British Flora by Clapham, Tutin and Warburg was an event of outstanding importance, for no such work dealing with our native plants had appeared since the days of Bentham and Hooker. J. D. Hooker's *Students Flora* had not been revised since 1884. That the new Flora received a warm welcome is evident from the fact that within a few years of publication it was reprinted twice, and it certainly fulfilled its primary purpose. Now, after ten years the authors have found time to revise and to some extent rewrite the original work. In no small measure the second edition is the outcome of the stimulus given to the study of British plants by the appearance of the first edition and to quote from the Preface: "Perhaps the greatest advance in the last few years has been brought about by the combination of intensive experimental, field and herbarium studies of variable species and 'critical groups'. This has resulted in a considerable clarification of the taxonomy of certain genera, for example *Dactylorchis* and *Polypodium*."

It is inevitable that the second edition should invite comparison with the first. It appears in a new format with a larger page, which is an advantage in the setting out of keys to genera and to species. The general plan of the book, however, remains the same and there is no alteration in the sequence of families, but seven families 'new' to the British flora are added, chiefly for the sake of including references to several plants which are certainly not native. A noteworthy exception is Diapensiaceae.

The authors state that the book is intended primarily for students and amateur botanists who desire to gain an introduction to British plants. To my way of thinking it provides more than an introduction, but doubtless it will be used by beginners and one wonders why, in the description of some of the families, important distinguishing features are not printed in italics as in Ed. 1. Only in four families, three of them with but a single genus, has the method been continued. How many students, even beyond their first year, have confused Ranunculaceae and Rosaceae, Dipsacaceae and Compositae?

The descriptions of species have in a great number of cases been amended and extended, but always they remain comprehensive. Numerous species or subspecies, not hitherto recorded or recognised for Britain, make their appearance for the first time. Notable examples of the former are *Koenigia islandica*, *Diapensia lapponica* and *Artemisia norvegica*. The notes on habitats are here and there expanded, for example under *Minuartia rubella*, and data on distribution and other points of interest appear to have been revised. But not every student who uses the Flora will be quite certain that his identifications of plants are in all cases correct and the references to illustrations in E.B., F. & S., B. & S. and other sources was a useful feature of Ed. 1. Their omission from Ed. 2 has meant no saving of space. Can it be that the authors are awaiting the completion of their own set of illustrations, two volumes of which are already available?

The treatment of so-called critical genera remains somewhat uneven and this is readily understandable. *Alchemilla*, *Sorbus* and *Euphrasia*, where the determination of the species is not easy, are dealt with in detail, but in *Hieracium*, the most difficult genus in the British flora, a key is provided to sections only and some additional species are included. In *Rubus*, on the other hand, the number of names under the aggregate *fruticosus* is substantially reduced, and in

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Rosa only three species are recognised in the subsection Eucaninae, each of which could well be regarded as an aggregate. But to deal in detail with the large, critical and difficult genera is not the main purpose of a general descriptive Flora and the authors are wise in referring the student to existing monographs.

To come now to the vexed question of introduced species. In addition to native plants large numbers of introductions are included, "either because they are naturalized or because they are of frequent occurrence". It is not apparent, however, that these qualifications are regularly applied, and there is need for greater precision and consistency in the use of terms describing the status of non-native plants. In Cruciferae many species are described as casuals, too many in my opinion, and the 'garden escape' receives frequent mention. In Compositae the tribe Heliantheae alone embraces only two native species; the remaining 21 are either introduced or casual! To see *Pittosporum crassifolium* from New Zealand "naturalized" and *Oxalis megalorrhiza* from Chile "introduced", one would have to visit the Scilly Isles, and in a pinewood in W. Inverness there is "one patch" of the North American *Gaultheria procumbens*. Has the time not arrived when the whole question of the adventive plants of Britain should be reconsidered, their proper status determined, and a new *Alien Flora* produced to replace that of Dunn?

It is not surprising to find numerous changes in nomenclature, and those of us who were beginning to know old familiar plants by their new names will have to learn a great many of them all over again. The common mouse-ear chickweed is not *Cerastium vulgatum* of the first edition but *C. holosteoides*, the former name not even appearing in the index. The red and white campions are transferred from *Melandrium* to *Silene*, *Asperula odorata* becomes *Galium odoratum* and *Potamogeton densus* must now be called *Groenlandia densa*. There is no point in quoting innumerable examples. The reader must submit to the changes and while one recognises that these may well be necessary, one hopes that finality will some day be achieved.

In a volume extending to 1269 pages (1591 in Ed. 1) the number of typographical or other errors is remarkably small. On p. 1171, however, *Calamagrostis stricta* replaces *C. neglecta*, but the change in name has not been made in the account of *C. scotica* a little lower down on the same page.

The foregoing paragraphs draw attention to but a few of the differences between Ed. 1 and Ed. 2 of this valuable Flora, and any personal opinions which have been expressed are not necessarily a criticism of the book as a whole. Anyone who cares to compare the two volumes page by page will soon realise the large amount of work which has been overtaken by way of revision. Since the publication of Ed. 1 much has been added to our knowledge of British plants and much of this new knowledge is incorporated in the new edition. Serious students of our flora cannot afford to be without this book, and although the price is high at 70 s. they ought to buy it. It is produced on the high standard we are accustomed to associate with the Cambridge University Press.

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