Two of the earliest works on the British Flora. For most taxonomists, botanical history starts with the publication in 1753 of Linnaeus's *Species Plantarum*. In the two centuries since then the sequence of botanical progress is clear and the lives of most of the leading figures are at least tolerably well known. Before Linnaeus, however, the picture is very different. A few names come to mind—Tournefort, Ray, Caesalpinius, Turner, Gesner, Brunfels—but how many taxonomists, would claim to know much about their lives and careers? Of the two British pioneer naturalists mentioned, John Ray contributed much to taxonomy and our early knowledge of the British Flora. His name, at least, is familiar to all taxonomists. But what of Turner—the little known figure of the earliest days of British botany as distinct from herbalism? He has a strong claim to be called 'The Father of British Botany'—a claim based on his writing the first two printed works of original merit about British plants.* These were published in 1538 and 1548—a century before the time of Ray. Both are very rare works and the appearance of facsimiles together with much supplementary information is of special interest to anyone interested in botanical history.

William Turner was born almost exactly two hundred years before Linnaeus and lived in a time that witnessed a great revival of culture and learning after the centuries of the Dark Ages. It was an era of powerful monarchs, great men and historic events: Henry VIII, Charles V of Spain, Ivan the Terrible, Babur and the Mogul Empire, Suleiman the Magnificent, Magellan's circumnavigation of the world, Luther and the Diet of Worms, Copernicus and Michelangelo. In Britain, it was a time that saw the start of the Reformation. For Turner, outspoken Protestant that he was, it was a time of continual religious persecution. Two of his *confrères* at Cambridge—Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer—were later burned at the stake during the reign of 'Bloody Mary'. Turner had two spells of exile on the Continent as a result of his Reformist beliefs and all his books, theological and otherwise, were proscribed during the reigns of both Henry and Mary.

The contents of this volume are mixed. It contains a reprint of Daydon Jackson's short biography of Turner, a summation of Turner's botanical work and career by W. T. Stearn and facsimiles of the 'Libellus de Re Herbaria' and 'The Names of Herbes'. 'The Libellus' is an alphabetical list in Latin of some native and cultivated herbs. In some instances, the English equivalents are mentioned e.g. *Althea* is "Holy oke" and *Alliaria* is "Sauce alone" or "Jak of the hedge". Many of the common names either appear for the first time in print (e.g. Whin) or were coined by Turner (e.g. Loosestrife). The 'Names' is basically an enlarged version in English of the 'Libellus' which also includes information on some of the continental plants that Turner observed during his exile in Italy, the Rhineland and East Friesland. A facsimile of the original (fewer than 10 of which are known to be extant) and a version in modern print are given. The 'Names' lists a large number of British Plants, many for the first time, gives vernacular names and often habitat and locality details. The background influence of herbalism on botanical work in the 16th century is shown by the frequent classification of the herbs according to their supposed 'degrees' e.g. *Satureia* is "hote and drye in the thyrde degree". *Marrubium* is "hote in the seconde degree and dry in the thyrde". Turner in his introduction says "I have tolde also the degrees of so many herbes as Galene the chief Doctour of al phisicians hath written of" but nowhere is there mention of how these fascinating 'degrees' were arrived at.

Everyone interested in pre-Linnean botany and the history and study of the British flora will find this an interesting, informative and entertaining volume. It is beautifully produced and printed; to the Ray Society and to all the specialists, particularly Dr. Stearn, who contributed towards its publication, we owe a special debt of gratitude.

I. C. HEDGE.

* Libellus de Re Herbaria, 1538 and The Names of Herbes, 1548, by William Turner: facsimiles with introductory matter by James Britten *and others*. London, The Ray Society, 1965. ix, 275 p. (Ray Society Publication No. 145). Price: Three pounds.