A Selection of Mediterranean Plants.* Everybody interested in the Mediterranean countries will welcome the appearance of this book and admire the enterprise of the authors. Although it covers an enormous area—from Gibraltar in the west to Palestine in the east—the vegetation throughout is fairly homogeneous and many species are 'omni-Mediterranean' in their distribution. In all, there are seventeen countries with shores on the Mediterranean; in some, the flora is well known, in others, it is not. No all-embracing flora has ever been attempted or even contemplated. Numerous problems of species delimitation, distribution and nomenclature are still unsolved. Floras do exist, of course, for many of the countries in the area and others are in the course of preparation but none are suitable for the tourist on a short visit. The situation is perfectly summed up by the authors who, in their introduction, say "the authoritative floras, where they exist at all, are either out of print, extremely expensive, in Latin, or unillustrated if not all of these at once." The only work to attempt an overall picture of Mediterranean vegetation, in contrast to the regional floras, is M. Rikli's *Das Pflanzenkleid der Mittelmeerländer* which comprises 3 volumes and 1400 pages—a mine of information but scarcely portable!

A popular well-illustrated guide to the vegetation and its constituent members clearly has its inherent defects. Countries, families or genera that the authors are more interested in are bound to get preferential treatment; by describing 700 species, when well over 10 times that number occur, only the surface can be skimmed, and the chances of a botanist with this guide being able to name a plant to specific level in any particular spot in such a huge area are fairly small. By and large, however, the coverage of countries and species is not noticeably uneven and the selection of the plants has been carefully made to cover those that are most likely to catch the eye of the wandering plantsman.

After a most useful, lucid guide to the types of vegetation one is likely to encounter in the Mediterranean countries, there are 311 colour photographs and 128 line drawings followed by descriptions of the families, genera and species. The standard of the colour photographs (and their reproduction) is high: many, especially the orchids, are very beautiful, almost all give a good idea of the plant or flower and only a few would have been better omitted. The line drawings by Barbara Everard (often made from herbarium specimens) are excellent and although as many as eight habit drawings may occur on one page, the great majority give the correct impression of the plant. Many people will use the illustrations as the first step in identifying their unknown plant and, if it is represented, success should eventually be assured, but the absence of a reference to the text beside the illustration will doubtless irritate the impatient user.

The absence of keys to families, genera and species is largely offset by the abundance of illustrations which means that at least the family can be identified. The short generic descriptions listed together are sometimes not sufficiently contrasted with each other to enable a quick run down to genus and occasionally the description is only referable to the species dealt with and not to the genus throughout its Mediterranean distribution. In contrast, there is little fault to find with the species descriptions. They are concise, lively, stress the important diagnostic characters and often are spiced with delightful information of a non-botanical nature—such as "Larkspurs were used to garland mummies"!

In a book of such wide scope, it would be most surprising if no sins of omission, identification or nomenclature could be found by an assiduous sleuth. For the most part, they are not serious and can easily be rectified in the second edition. For example, in Plate 5 the numbers 337 and 338 have been transposed; in fig. IIIa the fruit drawn is not *Sinapis arvensis* but probably *S. alba;* the generic description of *Jasminum* says "leaves opposite" but the only Mediterranean species, *J. fruticans*, has alternate leaves; in *Ferula* no mention is made of sexual dimorphism in the umbels.

Within its limits, this is a refreshing and excellent book. It seems certain to become an essential piece of luggage for all enquiring travellers in the region.

I. C. HEDGE.

* Flowers of the Mediterranean by Oleg Polunin and Anthony Huxley, London, Chatto and Windus, 1965. xii, 257 p., 311 col. illus., 128 line drawings. 8 × 5¼ in. Price: 42s.

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