The Introduction to the Flora of Iraq

With the recent appearances of the first volume of the *Flora of Turkey*, several parts of *Flora Iranica* and now the introductory volume to the *Flora of Iraq**, Boissier's *Flora Orientalis* is slowly being replaced as the only major S.W. Asiatic reference work by floras of its constituent countries. A revised edition of Boissier's great work would perhaps be its ideal replacement but as this would involve consideration of anything up to 20,000 species, it is scarcely surprising that the magnitude of the task has deterred anyone from considering the job and as a result, floras of individual countries or regions are taking precedence.

Iraq with an estimated 3,000 species of flowering plants is not nearly as rich in species or endemics as its neighbours Turkey and Persia. Roughly half of the country is in the Irano-Turanian and half in the Saharo-Sindian region. It is botanically, after Israel, probably the best known country in S. W. Asia and only a few areas such as the Kurdish mountains are still relatively under-collected. The compiler of a standard flora of Iraq therefore starts with considerable advantages over workers on the flora of Turkey, Persia or Afghanistan. In addition, the interest, collaboration and financial support of the Iraq government, the resources of the Kew herbarium and Mr. Evan Guest's wide knowledge of the country have all combined to get the project off to a good start. The first volume, of a planned total of nine, is devoted to introductory matter. It contains accounts of the geology, soils, climate, phytogeography, phytosociology, lists of localities and collectors, a glossary of terms and an extensive bibliography. Much of this is covered in considerably more detail than one would expect in an introduction to a flora. For example, fifty pages are devoted to general discussions of the country's vegetation, plant communities and ecology. It all reads very well but one is left with a lurking suspicion that if it had been written in the last and not the first volume, the account would have been rather different. Much of the information on the vegetation is based on Guest's own observations and it is interesting to note that his phytogeographical conclusions are similar to those of Eig and Zohary. For convenience of reference, the country is divided into four physiographic regions each subdivided into four or five districts.

The volume is clearly presented, has a liberal sprinkling of maps, charts and photographs (of a disappointingly low standard), has clearly been subjected to most careful proof reading and is unusually cheap. It contains a great deal of information useful not only to those interested in the Iraq flora but in all the S. W. Asiatic countries.

One can only hope that this long term project, like the other S. W. Asiatic floras in the course of preparation, will continue successfully on its way after such a solid start and that not too long a time will elapse before the second volume appears.

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* Flora of Iraq by Evan Guest with assistance from Ali Al-Rawi. Volume 1, introduction to the Flora. (Baghdad), Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Iraq, 1966. xvi, 213 pp., 51 figures inc. photographs and maps. Price: thirty shillings. (D.I. 250 fils). Agents in Great Britain: Robert Maclehose & Co. Ltd., Glasgow.