Book Review

Form in Plants. Both courage and judgement are needed to reprint in collected form essays published over a period of 25 years: essays that were, at the best, summaries or sidelines of one's main research. Professor Wardlaw has had the courage and has brought together a series of 30 essays, not research papers, dating from the years 1940–1966 during which he held in succession the chairs of Cryptogamic Botany and of Botany in the University of Manchester. In a sense this book* is his thanksgiving to the University, to which it is dedicated.

Viewed dispassionately as reading matter for 1968, however, the collection cannot be considered wholly successful. Some few of the papers, for instance those dealing with Turing's diffusion-reaction theory which influenced Professor Wardlaw so deeply, are perhaps fundamental to an understanding of his views, and it will be useful to have them on the shelf alongside his books. Nevertheless many others were merely topical when written. It will for a long time be worthwhile offering a contemporary review of Arber's book "The natural philosophy of plant form", but Wardlaw's rather superficial review of it in 1950 is no longer of interest. Similarly with his review of Bonner's abridged edition of D'Arcy Thompson's classic "On growth and form".

When Wardlaw delivered the Wright Smith Memorial Lecture to the Botanical Society of Edinburgh in 1962, he gave an acceptable evening discourse which the society subsequently published. But the omissions which one accepted cheerfully enough in a lecture cannot be allowed to pass unnoticed when the author sees fit to reprint it 6 years later. Wardlaw would turn from traditional taxonomy, whose "surfeit of species" gave him his title, to a new taxonomy which would be a classification of evolutionary processes. The implications were at the time vague: now their deliberate repetition without reference to, say, Camp & Gilly's classification of species according to their mode of origin (see Brittonia, 4: 323–385. 1943), is merely irritating. If Wardlaw's idea is to lead anywhere it needs more than bare repetition half a dozen years later.

There is another criticism that cannot with honesty be withheld. In an individual essay emphasis on the integration of botany and on scholarship may be well enough; but when a number of essays embodying the same themes are brought together in close proximity the repetition in abstract terms becomes mortally wearisome and one longs for concrete examples of what the author really has in mind.

All these criticisms sadly add up to the conclusion that Professor Wardlaw has had the courage but not the judgement that the reprinting of essays requires. The volume, however, is well-produced; printing is clear and misprints few, and the paper is good without being unduly weighty. Read in small doses it will give a useful background to Wardlaw's thought and will help in the understanding of his more important books.

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* Essays on form in plants. By C. W. Wardlaw. Manchester University Press; Barnes & Noble Inc., New York. 1968. 8½ in. Pp. xiv + 399, with figs. in text. Price 55 shillings.