Herbaceous plants of Malawi. Most, perhaps all, Checklists are bred in the same stable, by Courage out of Desperation. The urgent need to have some idea of the plants of a country (especially one where a new university has been established) overrules the knowledge that the checklist will inevitably contain errors. Malawi already has checklists of the Trees & Shrubs and of the Grasses: Professor Blodwen Binns has now* filled the gap caused by the lack of a list of the herbaceous plants.

Malawi falls within the area of *Flora Zambesiaca*, but, well as that project moves, progress is too slow to wait for its completion before attempting some local list for immediate use in Malawi. The larger undertaking should indeed benefit from the increase in local activity and this will be stimulated by Professor Binns' list.

A checklist has two functions, to give an approximate idea of the content of a flora and to expose current misinformation about it. Apart from errors of inclusion and omission, there are two other kinds in this list which it may be helpful to note. One is purely nomenclatural: the same plant occurs under different names. For instance, *Gerbera piloselloides* and *Piloselloides hirsuta* are the same thing, as are *Nelsonia campestris* and *N. canescens*. The other is slightly different: a plant gets two names because of a change in concepts. *Liparis bowkeri* is, I strongly suspect, the same plant in Malawi as *L. neglecta*, its earlier reference to the South African species, *L. bowkeri*, having now been superseded. *Androcymbium melanthiodes* and *A. striatum* probably represent one plant, called *A. melanthioides* var *striatum* by K. Krause in his revision of the genus. Both these kinds of error stem basically from a common weakness, in communication. This list was compiled in Africa, and it reminds us that what is common knowledge in European herbaria takes a long time to percolate to the countries where the plants grow. Lists of determinetions can be singularly uninformative and difficult to correlate with old published and distributed determinations. The result that names may appear in a compilation of this nature although they are no longer current in the herbaria from which they originally emanated. They could have been eliminated by further work and correspondence, but at the cost of much delay.

Whatever mistakes there may be, Professor Binns has done well to get this list published. She has started things moving in the right direction and if additions and corrections flow in, that will be her reward. Production and printing, by the Government Printer, Zomba, are first-class. The format is the same as that used for the other lists and for Chapman's account of the vegetation of Mt Mlanje, and they are all a pleasure to have on the bookshelf.

B. L. BURTT.

* A First Check List of the Herbaceous Flora of Malawi. Blodwen Binns. Government Printer, Zomba. Pp 113 and map. 10 inches. Twenty five shillings.