## Book Review

**Flora Europaea vol. 4.*** Botanists are by now so familiar with the format and objectives of *Flora Europaea* that little need be said on this score, save to remark that volume 4, though very similar to its predecessors, costs £25 as against £12 for volume 3. No doubt this startling increase is largely attributable to the monster inflation, but subscribers may derive some crumbs of comfort from the fact that the latest volume contains 505 pages against an average of 430 for the other three. I should perhaps have said *some* subscribers for out of this *largesse*, no fewer that 307 pages are devoted to one family, the Compositae. While acknowledging the versatility and ingenuity of this group, I find it difficult to wax enthusiastic about them: they are the *nouveaux riches* of the plant world, pushing, swollen with success, but tainted with a common factor of vulgarity. However great my regard for Nature as a whole, the news that there had been a drastic and general decline in the ranks of the Compositae would, I fancy, leave me unmoved. By comparison, the European Rubiaceae, those poor relations of a splendid line, begin to acquire a lustre, and the humble Plantains, to my mind ill-at-ease in this company and in this volume, become models of taxonomic propriety.

It so happened that vol. 5 of the *Flora of Turkey*, exclusively concerned with the Compositae, came to hand almost at the same time as the volume now under review. and comparison was irresistible. Since the total area of the *Flora of Turkey* is less than one-tenth that covered by the *Flora Europaea*, the number of taxa involved in the former work is, as one might expect, smaller than in the latter. But by no means proportionately so. Against a total of 181 Composite genera in *Flora Europaea*, the *Flora of Turkey* can marshal no fewer than 130. Leaving aside such imponderables as *Taraxacum* and *Hieracium*, the largest genus by far in both Floras is *Centaurea*, with 221 species in Europe and 172 species in Turkey. Thereafter there is a rapid decline in size and a divergence in the proportions represented, the ten largest genera in either Flora, in descending order of magnitude being:

| *Fl. Europaea* | *Fl. Turkey* |
|---|---|
| Crepis (70 spp.) | Cirsium (52 spp.) |
| Senecio (67) | Anthemis (49) |
| Anthemis (62) | Tanacetum (44) |
| Cirsium (60) | Achillea (40) |
| Artemisia (57) | Scorzonera (39) |
| Achillea (52) | Senecio (39) |
| Carduus (48) | Cousinia (38) |
| Scorzonera (28) | Crepis (36) |
| Leontodon (27) | Tripleurospermum (+ Matricaria) (27) |
| Aster (27) | Inula (26) |

The virtual absence of *Cousinia* from Europe (one questionable record from SE Russia) and its local superabundance in western Asia, is a well-known aberration, but an analysis of the reasons for some less striking discrepancies might prove just as interesting. One is particularly struck by the relative paucity of monotypic genera in both areas, and by the fact that, of the few recorded many are such obvious derivatives from other and larger genera that one might well debate their claims to independent generic status. Indeed, I cannot but regret the artifice which has reduced such old monuments as *Chrysanthemum* to shattered ruins of their former selves. What a mercy to find that *Centaurea* has been largely spared this fragmentation in both treatises. *Genus dat characterem, non character genus.*

R. D. Meikle

* Flora Europaea, vol. 4, edited by T. G. Tutin et al. Cambridge University Press, 1976. Price £25.