

The Plant Glycosides

By Prof. R. J. McIlroy. Pp. vii+138. (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1951.) 18s. net.

A MODERN monograph on glycosides is long overdue since the subject has not been thoroughly reviewed for twenty years. It is somewhat disappointing, therefore, to find that the present volume only comprises 125 pages of text and that the information in it is incomplete and often inadequate.

After a brief definition of the term glycoside and a short account of the occurrence, extraction and purification of plant glycosides, the nature of their hydrolysis products, the determination of their structures and their functions in the plant metabolism, there follow a number of chapters each devoted to one type of compound, for example, glycosides of alcohols and phenols, thioglycosides and cyanogenetic glycosides. The information about each individual substance varies greatly; in the most complete accounts the melting point, specific rotation (often without temperature, concentration or solvent), plant source (invariably without botanical authority), nature of the sugar portion and of the aglycone and structural formula are given. In many paragraphs the information is extremely meagre, and frequently no physical data are quoted. Some sections, for example, that on the coumarin glycosides, are very incomplete. There are a few tables listing various types of glycosides, and the index of the work is good. There are a short account of analytical methods, and appendixes on the preparation of enzymes and on recent advances.

This work, owing to its incompleteness and general lack of detail, cannot be termed a monograph; but it is a substantial bibliography of the subject containing, as it does, a list of references at the end of each chapter, many of which cite reviews or refer to general aspects of the subject. As such the author earns the gratitude of the chemist.

A. MCGOOKIN

Flore du Congo Belge et du Ruanda-Urundi

Préparée par le Comité exécutif de la Flore du Congo Belge et le Jardin Botanique de l'État. Spermato-phytes, Vol. 2. Pp. vi+609 (58 plates). (Bruxelles: Institut National pour l'Étude Agronomique du Congo Belge, 1951.) 300 francs.

THE second volume of this fine flora deals with the families from Chenopodiaceae to Hamamelidaceae in the sequence of the system of Engler. Among the twenty-six families enumerated the more important are Amaranthaceae, Caryophyllaceae, Ranunculaceae, Menispermaceae, Anonaceae, Lauraceae, Capparidaceae, Cruciferae and Crassulaceae. The descriptions are in French and are precise but adequate. Determination is aided by artificial keys. There are fifty-seven full-page black-and-white line illustrations, nine smaller text-figures, several photographs and two plates in colour. The frontispiece is one of these last and depicts *Sedum churchillianum* Robyns at Boutique, named in 1945 in honour of Mr. Winston Churchill.

The preparation of the work is under the direction of an executive committee, of which Prof. W. Robyns, director of the Jardin Botanique de l'État, is the president. The present volume has a dozen authors who are responsible, entirely or partly, for one or more families, of which the largest is Anonaceae. In spite of the range of authors, the general treatment

is relatively uniform with, however, some variation in the treatment of varieties.

Since the publication of the extensive "Flora of Tropical Africa" (completed except for part of the Gramineae), the tendency has been to prepare floristic accounts of more restricted areas that nevertheless cover large portions of the continent. When the works now in course of publication or contemplated are fully published, most of Africa within the tropics will be adequately covered by modern floras. Since these are being written in Brussels, Florence, Kew, London and Paris, it is to be hoped that consultations in the recently formed Association pour l'Étude Taxonomique de la Flore d'Afrique Tropicale (A.E.T.F.A.T.) will ensure reasonable uniformity of taxonomic treatment and nomenclature.

W. B. TURRILL

Journey through Utopia

By Marie Louise Berneri. Pp. xii+339. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1950.) 16s. net.

THE descriptions and critical assessments of the more important utopian writings, from Plato's "Republic" to Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World", which Marie Louise Berneri has compiled is a useful contribution to discussion of the relevance of the development of utopian thought to the history of social conditions and ideas. The book was completed before Aldous Huxley's "Ape and Essence" or George Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four" appeared, and there is no mention of Lord Samuel's "An Unknown Land". Otherwise the book is reasonably complete, and it rescues from oblivion some utopias such as that of Gabriel de Foigny's "A New Discovery of Terra Incognita Australis or the Southern World" of the seventeenth century. There is a good bibliography which includes references to other general studies of the same type which have appeared during the past seventy years. The book is scholarly and a useful reference work as giving a clear warning of some of the dangers which attend the attempt to plan and order society too rigidly, no matter how admirable the ideals on which the plans are based.

Penny Rate

Aspects of British Public Library History, 1850-1950. By W. A. Munford. Pp. ix+150. (London: Library Association, 1951.) 21s.; to Members, 16s.

NO doubt Mr. W. A. Munford is not to blame for the fact that this remarkably concise history of the 'free' libraries in Great Britain has appeared just a year too late to take full advantage of the public's interest in the treasure-house in its midst that the centenary celebrations in 1950 occasioned. Yet he has an exciting story to tell and one which should be known to a wider public than examination candidates and members of public library committees. A popular version in 1950 might well have helped to confirm the high national regard which the public libraries eminently deserve.

Mr. Munford, whose library very properly shares in the recent rise of Cambridge to city status, is thoroughly at home with the movement of which he writes. His aim is modest and he rightly contents himself with a straightforward historical record of events from Edward Edwards's appearance before the Select Committee in 1849 to the centenary of the Public Libraries Act in 1950. Dates and facts and figures, it is true, abound, but they do nothing to quench their recorder's enthusiasm for his chronicle or to dull his reader's interest in the epic growth of a potent