

an indefinite incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity" receives more than one illustration.

The author has a light touch, and his handling of some topics (see the article on absolute pitch) becomes easily conversational without in any way becoming discursive. It must not be assumed that the author has been unmindful of Leslie Stephens's warning—"No flowers, by request"—to contributors to the "Dictionary of National Biography", but the fact remains that his treatment of many topics is so thoroughly absorbing, so admirable an example of the art that conceals art, that there is a danger of the book's becoming a pleasant fireside

companion rather than a volume for the reference shelves.

The author has consulted experts in many friends, and has done so in the true spirit of Boswell, receiving the corrections with deference, but not always agreeing with them. He is to be warmly congratulated on the completion of a single-handed effort the magnitude of which cannot often have been equalled or exceeded.

The book is admirably produced, is profusely illustrated, and should indeed prove to be a Good Companion to all lovers of the art of music. But why omit all mention of Sims Reeves?

A. F.

Plant-Life of the French Mediterranean Region

La distribution géographique des végétaux dans la région méditerranéenne française

Par Ch. Flahault. Œuvre posthume publiée par H. Gaussen. (Encyclopédie biologique, Vol. 18.) Pp. xi+180+4 plates. (Paris: Paul Lechevalier, 1937.) 100 francs.

BOTANICALLY the Mediterranean region is one of the best defined of the larger floristic and ecological divisions of the earth's surface. This is because of the high constancy of the seasonal distribution of temperature and rainfall maxima and minima. Data are not yet sufficient for an adequate survey of the whole region, which includes considerable parts of southern Europe, northern Africa, and western Asia, but the work here noticed is a valuable contribution to such a survey, in that it brings together especially the results of the author's numerous studies of the plant-life of a very typical and well-worked area of the western Mediterranean Basin. The work is published posthumously, since Flahault died in 1935, and was awarded the Gay Prize in 1937 by the Paris Academy of Sciences.

Much of the book is naturally concerned with details of the distribution of species and vegetation in the south of France, but many broader discussions and comparisons are included. The flora of the French Mediterranean basin is said to include about four thousand species of vascular plants; but a considerable number of these have a wide distribution extending far beyond the limits of the Mediterranean region. The interesting question of 'characteristic' species is discussed at some length. The high value which has been assigned to the olive as the sole or main indicator of the limits of the Mediterranean region (in France) is disputed on strong grounds. It is concluded that "le Chêne vert"

(*Quercus Ilex*) "est partout, dans le bassin française de la Méditerranée, où règne le climat méditerranéen; il est partout où se développe la flore méditerranéenne dans les limites du bassin. *Il est le terme principal d'une association de végétaux qui caractérise la région méditerranéenne, mieux que tout autre caractère.*"

The limitrophic regions (of the halophytes, mountains, etc.) are briefly considered, and the French Mediterranean region proper is divided into three sectors as the result of a very full analysis of environmental conditions and their correlation with characteristic species and types of plant communities. Four maps form a valuable aid to a clear understanding of the text. One of the maps, particularly well printed in a wide range of colours and coloured patterns, shows the distribution of the main communities.

The influence of man on the existing flora and vegetation of the area is considered to be limited. The conclusions reached are exceedingly interesting, partly because they differ in some respects from those of other workers in other parts of the Mediterranean region. Thus Flahault definitely says that man has not profoundly modified the flora, even with reference to forest species; that man has unintentionally caused the extinction of relatively few species; and that man has introduced very few species which have become naturalized to the extent that they would survive in competition with the native plants were the human 'protecting' conditions removed. Naturally occurring species survive destruction, for at least very long periods, by a kind of passive resistance. Man's 'troubling of nature' is ephemeral, even in a country of ancient civilization, and Nature necessarily regains her rights as soon as the modifying agent is removed.

W. B. T.