

States, whereas the other two are natives of Japan. But it is in the endemics of the region that the chief interest of the flora rests. Some of these, such as *Romneya Coulteri*, the genera *Eschscholtzia* and *Lewisia*, are familiar to British horticulturists. In the family Polygonaceae the monotypic genera *Gilmania*, *Nemacaulis* and *Hollisteria* are all endemic to California while of the 150 known species of *Eriogonum* 80 are found in the Pacific States, many of them endemic. In the Crassulaceae there are some 35 endemic species belonging to the genera *Sedella*, *Budleya*, *Stylophyllum*, *Hasseanthus* and *Gormania*. In the Cruciferae most of the species of *Thelypodium*, *Streptanthus* and *Caulanthus* are endemic. The Rosaceae, too, provide a large number of endemics, particularly in the genera *Horskelia* (19 spp.) and *Ivesia* (17 spp.). In the Leguminosae the outstanding genera in this respect are *Lupinus*, of which 58 species are probably endemic, *Hosackia*, of which most of the 39 species are endemic, while *Astragalus* is represented by 137 species of which 83 are probably endemic.

It is obvious therefore that botanists generally will warmly welcome the appearance of the second volume of Prof. Abrams' monumental work. The first volume appeared in 1926 and dealt mainly with the vascular cryptogams and the monocotyledons. The present volume comprises the families belonging to the Polygonales, the Centrospermeae, the Ranales, the Rhoeadales and the Rosales and contains generic and specific keys, descriptions and illustrations of 1,663 species. The figures are in general good, but some of those reproduced from Britten and Brown's Flora might well have been replaced, such as those of *Dryas drummondii*, *Lychnis coronaria* and *Rumex pulcher*, where the characteristic appearance of the species had quite evaded the artist.

The plan of the Flora and the concept of species which is adopted is very similar to that in Britten and Brown's "Illustrated Flora of the North United States and Canada". It is therefore of some interest to compare the plant populations as presented in these two works. The richness of a flora in species is related on one hand to the size of the area concerned and on the other to the diversity of ecological conditions which it presents.

Britten and Brown's Flora treats of a vast area of some two million square miles, ranging from the Atlantic to the 102nd meridian and from south Virginia to the Arctic. The Pacific States, on the other hand, comprise an area of only 323,000 square miles, but include mountains rising to an elevation of more than 14,000 ft. and a southern limit that extends beyond the Tropic of Cancer. Moreover, the geology is very varied in character. It is therefore of interest to note that, even in the families with which the volume under review is concerned and which are mostly north temperate in their climatic requirements, the number of species is about 50 per cent larger than for the northern States and Canada. In the Rosaceae alone does the Pacific State flora lag behind. In the Polygonaceae and Leguminosae, the Pacific States have more than double the number of species, while in the Saxifragaceae, Papaveraceae and Portulacaceae there are three times as many.

All botanical libraries will no doubt wish to add this volume for its own sake, but their straitened finances will enhance appreciation of the public spirit of those through whose financial assistance it has been possible to place this work on sale at so low a price.

E. J. SALISBURY.

## RITUAL PROHIBITIONS IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES

### Taboo

A Sociological Study. By Dr. Hutton Webster. Pp. xii+393. (Stanford University, Calif.: Stanford University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1942.) 24s. net.

PROF. HUTTON WEBSTER is well known from his earlier books on "Primitive Secret Societies" and on "Rest Days". His new book, on "Taboo", collects together from ethnographical literature a mass of data concerning the ritual prohibitions found in what are commonly called 'primitive societies'. His aim, as stated by himself, is "to show how important a place taboos hold in the cultural evolution of mankind". The author's definition is as follows: "Taboos form a specific series of thou-shalt-nots. They are not to be confused (as in popular usage) with social conventions and regulations of a negative sort, conventions and regulations without an obvious utility. They are to be distinguished from restrictions resting on the vague notion of unluckiness which attaches to certain acts or things or times, restrictions found in the lower culture and, under the attenuated form of a survival, lingering among ourselves. More important still, there are innumerable prohibitions, both animistic and non-animistic in character, which must likewise be excluded from the conception of taboo if this is to possess any scientific validity and retain a place in ethnological theory. Taboos are prohibitions which, when violated, produce automatically in the offender a state of ritual disability—"taboo sickness"—only relieved, when relief is possible, by a ceremony of purification".

Prohibitions relating to the reproductive life, the relations of the sexes, death and the dead, strangers and strange phenomena, sacred persons and sacred things are dealt with in separate chapters and there are more general chapters on sin and ritual defilement, on the economic aspects of taboo and on its social aspects.

What anthropological science needs is a satisfactory general theory of taboo, or better still a theory of ritual prohibitions in general. Such a theory should enable us to understand not only the widespread existence of such prohibitions, but also the forms they take. Interesting as the present work may be as a collection of examples, it fails to make any contribution to anthropological or sociological theory. Prof. Webster regards taboos in general as arising from the fears and forebodings that beset "primitive man" in an "unfriendly world". The fears themselves "are often the product of a lively imagination and of an abysmal ignorance". Taboos "reflect", he says, "man's ignorance of his surroundings, whether natural or what we call supernatural. They are rooted in the fear of the unknown and the unknowable".

It is evident that the statement that taboos result from man's ignorance and fear does not provide any explanation. It does not, for example, give any reason for those ideas of ritual defilement or pollution which Prof. Webster himself regards as an essential characteristic of taboos.

Perhaps it is unjust to criticize the author for not doing what he does not set out to do. He has given us an extensive compilation of illustrative instances of taboos. The theoretical problem of the nature and function of these prohibitions remains just where it was.

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