

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondent.

FURTHER NOTES ON THE VASCULUM!

Sir,—The earliest mention of the botanist's vasculum is, we are told, in 1844. Maybe 1957 will see us writing "finis" to its active life. It is sometimes found necessary to open the crop of a bird to see what it contains. If we were to open the vasculum of a field botanist after a good day, many of us would be shocked to find the rarities therein, condemned never to reproduce their species.

Of all the predators on our natural flora, only the botanist discriminates by scarcity. Slugs, snails and rabbits select for succulence; children for bright colours; our adult lady friends with an eye to filling the cut-glass vase in the drawing-room. Weed-killers, increasing marginal cultivation by the farmer, deforestation and reafforestation all destroy in their peculiar ways. Only the botanist knows what is unusual and selects for that reason.

The rarer the bloom the more likely is it to be coveted and given the place of honour in the herbarium. Every herbarium specimen, however, only makes the species rarer still. Few botanists would pick the common flowers, and any gathering of plants by botanists can only mean that the uncommon are becoming scarce, the scarce are becoming rare, and the rare will soon be extinct. The pride of private collections must now give way to the higher ideal of preserving specimens in their natural habitat. Nothing, not even gathering for identification, justifies the picking.

Every specimen picked, whether for study, research, or identification, hastens the day when we shall know of certain flowers by hearsay and preserved specimens only. To-morrow, the vasculum of to-day will be known as the tomb of many an extinct species. Instead of bringing the specimen home to study or identify, take the study or the books to the specimen. If the study cannot be done so comfortably and efficiently in the natural surroundings, at least the plant will survive for someone else to study it and its succeeding generations.

There are now 1,300 botanists in the B.S.B.I., and no doubt several thousand more outside, and transport now makes access so easy that the danger to the uncommon plants is increasing at an alarming rate. The time has come when the flowers are more important than the botanist.

Give your vasculum to the local museum with a card reading:—
1844-1957. Flores quiescant in pace.

Yours faithfully,

H. M. WILKS.

Seasalter, Whitstable, Kent.