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Introductory Note

By R. Lloyd Praeger, Dublin

Ireland is privileged in that it has on two occasions been the venue of the International Phytogeographical Excursion—first in 1911, when the organization was in its infancy, and again in 1949, when it was well established. Many lands have been visited by the I. P. E. in the meantime, and it is an indication of the high interest pertaining to the western outpost of European land that this island should have been again thought worthy of botanical examination. Many vicissitudes, including two world wars, have marred the peaceful progress of natural science since the first I. P. E. was held, but our international foundation has remained unimpaired; long may it continue so. It is to be regretted that general impoverishment and political uncertainties affected the latest excursion by reducing the personnel and by limiting the area which it was possible to visit with the funds available.

Ireland is undoubtedly a land of high biological interest. Remaining unsubmerged throughout most of Tertiary times, spared the worst rigours of the Ice Age, and forming sometimes an island and sometimes a portion of the Continent, it has had a varied biological history. The mild climate and prevailing westerly winds which have mostly been dominant, due to the proximity of the Atlantic Ocean, have left their impress on the vegetation, apparent now in the great development of peat-bog, the wealth of moisture-loving cryptogams, and the lowering of the tree-limit. The high temperatures experienced especially along the western coast have produced a considerable northward extension of the range of plants which on the Continent are found mostly south of the Alps. Other conditions not yet thoroughly clear have depressed the lower limit of alpine and northern species, bringing down even to sea-level plants which in Central Europe are mountain dwellers.

Again, the Atlantic Ocean has not proved an insuperable barrier to the eastward migration of plants of North America, so that, particularly in western Ireland, a curious mixture of organisms from north and south, east and west, may be observed. Nowhere

else may one find *Neotinea intacta* growing among *Dryas octopetala*, nor *Trichomanes speciosum* in close proximity to alpine saxifrages.

Another feature which strikes the observant botanist is that in many cases Irish plants are not quite identical with their counterparts on the Continent, or even in Great Britain. Isolation during periods when no water-barrier separated Ireland from Britain, and also persistent slight difference of climate, are no doubt the causes of this feature. In the reports which follow (which I have not yet had an opportunity of perusing) I do not doubt that some of these cases are mentioned.

It has been a very great privilege to Irish botanists to have had the opportunity of discussing problems connected with the Irish flora, and receiving from the visitors comments on the characters and behaviour on the Continent of plants found also in Ireland. It would appear to follow that our foreign friends may have gained fresh knowledge from their study of the flora of Ireland.

I very much regret that advancing years prevented my taking an active part in the recent trip. I remember very clearly the pleasure associated with previous I. P. E. meetings—in Ireland, Switzerland, Scandinavia. I should have gained much from the 1949 visit, and it would have afforded me gratification to have placed at the disposal of my colleagues any information I possess concerning Ireland and its flora. It is a great satisfaction to learn how excellently this and similar duties were performed by Dr. Webb.