

BOOK REVIEW

Forest Trees of Sarawak and Brunei and their Products by F. G. Browne, B.Sc., Conservator of Forests, Sarawak. Printed at the Government Printing Office, Kuching, Sarawak, 1955—369 pages and 48 photographs. Price 12 Malayan dollars.

This book will be a welcome and useful asset to foresters and timbermen and also to teachers and others who want to know something of the native trees of Sarawak and Brunei. Indeed, there is no flora or manual on this subject, the existing publications are scattered in various scientific journals, many of which are rare or out of print, and which often describe only one or a few species of a particular group. The present work deals primarily with a large number of trees of economic importance, and fortunately, as well, with others of no special value but which are so conspicuous in a forest that one naturally wants to know what they are and thus a better general picture of the diversity and characters of plant families is framed. A book of this size cannot be exhaustive since there are some 3,000 tree species in the area concerned; it is not intended to be a flora nor a work for the serious taxonomist. Although a systematic botanist will not be able to 'key down' every species he meets, or even half of them, he has much to learn from it in the way of certain useful characters and information which will not be found in any other publication. These, if remembered, will often give him good diagnostic clues to a particular species even if the local vernacular name alone is known to him. The book is excellent for vernacular names, many of which are different from the equivalent Malay name and which cannot be found in most existing publications.

The most pleasing thing about the book is that the descriptions and observations are the author's own, made from the living tree and are not merely copied from other works of reference. There is also much interesting information on the economic uses of timbers and the ecological and biological aspects of certain species and the part they play in Dyak legends and folk-lore. The book can also be recommended for the excellent descriptions of bark characters which a systematic botanist so often looks in vain for on collector's labels and in past literature and publications.

There are two keys, a larger one based on bark, crown, bole and leaf characters but not including those of flowers or fruit, and a smaller one for wood sections. The former is for use in the field

since bark slashes have to be made and the general appearance of the tree noted. It is a pity that more stress has not been placed on floral characters and that some use of them had not been made in the key. The author says that little attention need be paid to flowers, which are rarely seen, and are generally not of much use for field identification when they are. This sort of statement is apt to discourage foresters and others from taking any notice or further interest in them. Quite often two closely related species have similar leaves but the flowers are the only safe guides to distinguish between them. For example the leaves of *Melanorrhoea wallichii* and *M. woodsiana* are very similar but the former has white petals while in the latter they are white with a yellow streak on the basal third of the inside. Further there is all the helpful difference in the world between a gamopetalous corolla and a sympetalous one. On the question of botanical names a little criticism might be useful. The only serious case was in connection with *Planchonella obovata* H. J. Lam, where H. J. Lam is not the author and has nothing to do with this species as far as nomenclature is concerned. It should be *Planchonella obovata* (R.Br.) Pierre. Sometimes in combinations one of the authors names is omitted, e.g. *Thespesia populnea* (L.) Soland ex Corr.; *Xylopia ferruginea* (Hk. f. et Th.) Hk. f. et Th.; *Antiaris toxicaria* (Pers.) Lesch.; *Arenga pinnata* (Wurmb.) Merr. and *Cantleya corniculata* (Becc.) Howard where the underlined author's name is left out. *Vitex perolata* King is now *Teijsmanniodendron pteropodum* (Miq.) Bakh. and *Bruguiera eriopetala* W. et A. is *B. sexangulare* (Lour.) Poir. *Pongamia pinnata* (L.) Merr. should be (L.) Pierre and *Oncosperma tigillarum* (Jack) Ridley will replace the synonym *Oncosperma filamentosa* Bl. *Oncosperma* is neuter and *O. horrida* Scheff. will be *O. horridum* (Griff.) Scheff., the specific epithet ending in *um* in both cases.

The photographs, unfortunately are not up to the standard of the text. Many of them are disappointing and are not typical of the tree depicted. In fact, one must often fail to identify the tree they propose to represent, indeed, if they are intended for such a purpose. For example the one of *Dyera lowii* opposite page 72 could easily pass for a Rubber tree; the plate of *Fagraea fragrans* opposite 248 is merely a mass of dense foliage and shows nothing of the very characteristic bark of that species. *Melaleuca leucadendron*, opposite page 272 could be almost any other tree; *Rhizophora mucronata* opposite page 312 could pass for a *Dillenia*. The plate of *Angsana* opposite page 240, although it may show the general outline, will convey little to a person who is not

already acquainted with it. It would have been better if a part of the space in the plate had been reserved for a drawing of a few leaves and the very characteristic round pod. The same may be said for the other plates. A clear drawing of a single leaf or a leafy twig would have been more useful than a dim *ombrage* of foliage. The expression 'different kinds of tree' used several times, may not be pleasing to everyone.

However, finally, and apart from these minor points of criticism, the general 'set up' of the book with the nice, large, easily readable type and the excellent binding in grey imitation lizard skin all for twelve dollars, is good value.

J.S.