

Review

E. J. H. CORNER AND K. WATANABE, *Illustrated Guide to Tropical Plants*.

Hirokawa, Tokyo, 1969. 1147 pp., 29 colour pl., c.2000 line drawings.

The title of this large and ambitious book is deceptive: It is based on a collection of line drawings of phanerogams, made by Professor Watanabe during a 3-year stay in Singapore and Malaya; the species selected are therefore largely unrepresentative of the tropics as a whole, both on taxonomic, ecological and utilitarian grounds. Besides most of the commoner cultivated plants of Malaya, many of which are exotics and indeed widely grown in the tropics, they include a somewhat arbitrary selection of native species, weeds, and many plants existing in that region only as individuals in botanic gardens, of which some are by no means common in their countries of origin. The drawings are arranged by families according to Engler's system; each is captioned by its family name. Beneath the illustration is given the scientific, Malayan (if known), Japanese, and sometimes Indian and English names; a short but useful descriptive note indicating distribution, habit, leaf arrangement and flower and fruit colour by Professor Corner; and a note on uses in Japanese. The usefulness of each plant is then summarised in a curious annotated point-grid system, which appears to have been intended as a ready-reference abbreviation but is in fact the very reverse, being difficult to follow and space-demanding; finally, the position in Hutchinson's classification is indicated. Some 700 of the more than 2,000 line drawings were originally published in two volumes by the Japanese administration of the Singapore Botanic Gardens during the second world war, entitled "Illustrations of Useful Plants of the Southern Regions: Section 1: Medicinal," and "Section II: Edible Plants." These books are now rare, but many of the same plates were used again by Professor H. B. Gilliland for his book "Common Malaysian Plants" (University of Malaya Press, 1958).

This book cannot be used for identifying plants, as the illustrations and descriptions make no attempt to be diagnostic, and no keys are given. Its purpose would appear to be a reference book for laymen in S.E. Asia, especially foreign agriculturists, foresters and businessmen who, on being shown a named plant to which certain useful properties have been ascribed, wish to check the veracity of this information. The book is a monument to Professor Watanabe's energy, but it is a pity that the illustrations, the originals of which must generally have been of high quality, have had to be reduced to a scale where the details, especially of floral morphology, have often been lost.

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