

REVIEW

D.J. MABBERLEY: *The plant-book, a portable dictionary of the higher plants*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K., 1987. xii + 706 pp. Price £ 20.00, US\$ 34.50. ISBN 0-521-34060-8.

This excellent and useful book is based on the early editions of J.C. Willis's 'Dictionary of the flowering plants and ferns'. Those early works have been called 'the most remarkable botanical works of reference ever written – true vademecums for every botanist's pocket' (Prof. P.W. Richards). The last edition dates as far back as 1931. After that time the late Dr. Airy Shaw changed the format drastically in making a catalogue which is very useful in its own and ornates nearly every botanist's desk. But most of the general information had to be deleted. The omitted data were gathered again and updated by F.N. Howes of Kew, but because of his untimely death the book was not published. It is Dr. Mabberley's merit to have taken up the task again and even to finish it. Thus a tremendous amount of general information on plants is given to be used as well by botanists as by other people who are professionally or just for the fun of it interested in this kind of information.

Mabberley has taken a broad approach to family and genus concept, convinced by the arguments of the late Professor Van Steenis and Davis and Heywood. For the user this makes the book easier to work with than Airy Shaw's editions with all that small split-off families and genera. In case of doubt Mabberley uses the broader concept, but includes entries of all the accepted and most common synonymous names. Sometimes the author of a recent revision is added, sometimes not. If a recent revision of an entire group exists the reference is given.

That the book is very British appears from the fact that a great number of English plant names is included. The family system used is that of Cronquist.

Included is a short biography of Willis, a survey of Cronquist's system, and of the vast amount of literature scanned, divided in a list of floras and handbooks and one of periodicals. Also a list of abbreviations is given, in two parts, one general and one of author names.

The plant-book – what a curious name! – is highly recommended. It is well executed and of a peculiar shape hardly fitting the word 'portable' used in the subtitle.

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