

WHAT WOOD IS THAT?

By DR. ALFRED SCHWANKL

(Thames and Hudson, 25/-)

SKILL in the identification of timbers by eye alone has hitherto been attainable only by long experience but in this book we are presented with a short cut to that attainment. The most important part of the book, and perhaps the most original, is the small collection of 40 actual timber specimens. These are in the form of thin slices of timber glued to cards—4 to a card—and showing longitudinal surfaces of 38 common native and imported timbers, and both radial and tangential surfaces of elm. If these surfaces are of lesser diagnostic value they are the ones which are most often visible and which it is most desirable that we should be able to identify at a glance.

The text, ably done into English by H. L. Edlin, is divided into three parts. Part one gives a succinct account of the gross features and properties of timber and their use in identification. Wood structure, grain, colour, hardness, specific gravity, shrinkage and seasoning are all clearly outlined.

Part two consists of the keys. We are given twelve keys, each based on a distinct property of the timber or of the tree from which it is got. All are cross-referenced to the first which is called the main key, and is based on the colour of the timber. Six colours are here distinguished, namely, whitish, yellowish, greenish, reddish, brownish and blackish. But we find that our process of identification may begin from any of the first seven keys, from which we are referred back to the main key to complete the process.

In the third part we find more detailed descriptions of the timbers indicated by the keys, each preceded by a brief description of the parent tree. Following these are a comprehensive glossary and an index of timber uses. This latter makes fascinating reading. The objects listed range from aircraft, arrows and artificial limbs down to xylophones and zithers.

It is important that a forester should know his trees; it is equally important that he should know the timbers which they produce. Such knowledge will be quickly gained by a study of this book. Despite such inaccuracies as the reference on page 26 to "a cube $3 \times 1 \times 1$ centimetres" it succeeds admirably in helping us to answer the question posed by the title.

N. O'C.