

## Review

### THE STORY OF AUGUSTINE HENRY

*THE WOOD AND THE TREES. A biography of Augustine Henry. By Sheila Pim, London : MacDonald, 1966. Pp 256, 14 photographs. 40s.*

A reviewer's approach to his subject need not necessarily be critical, nor should he be too enthusiastic because it happens to be "his kind of book". Rather, a review should be a balanced appraisal from which the reader can make his own decision as to whether he wishes to read the book or not. Having said that much I am tempted to fall into both traps. My only serious criticism is not of the text but of the title. I fear the words "The Wood and the Trees", set on a very pleasing picture of an oak-wood in winter, may give the uninformed the idea that here we have yet another work on "do-it-yourself" forestry.

However, the magic is contained in small letters below — "A Biography of Augustine Henry". Whether one is interested in the Ireland of the first decades of this century, in the plants in one's garden, in the early days of forestry or in arboriculture, this book has much to offer. As a bonus we are treated to some superb descriptions of the vast and beautiful landscapes of the Chinese interior. These, like so much of the material in the book, were painstakingly gleaned from the personal correspondence of Dr. Henry with his life-long friend, Miss Evelyn Gleeson.

Miss Pim has taken immense trouble to ferret out all sources of information concerning this man of many parts, who was firstly a medical doctor and then a Customs official in the pay of the Chinese Imperial Government. It was during this service that his plant collecting developed beyond a mere hobby and he is credited with having sent over 16,000 carefully labelled specimens to Kew for their collections. Many plants shrubs and minor trees seen in Irish gardens today were Henry introductions, without which we would be very much the poorer. Names familiar to us as specific epithets, and indeed as generic titles, lace the pages of this book, reminding us of our indebtedness to the collectors of the day, not least amongst whom was this simple and gracious man, Augustine Henry. It is not difficult to associate such names as Fortune, David, Maximowicz, Balfour, Veitch and Faber with plants and trees well-known in gardens and arboreta. However, Miss Pim's work is not a botanical who's-who, but a well-told story of a man who was later to be the driving force behind the establishment of State forestry in Ireland as well as creating the Chairs of Forestry in Dublin and Cambridge. His studies to fit him for these posts took him to many parts of the

world, and in the pages of this book we can sense the beginnings of recognition of what we now know to be our bread-and-butter forestry species.

Not unnaturally, we learn of the conception and birth of that great stand-by of all who wish to verify a tree identification, "The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland", by Elwes and Henry. The fact that this work is still so sought after is proof of the thorough nature of Augustine Henry's work, as it was he who was the technical force behind the publication.

It should be a source of some pride to members of the Society of Irish Foresters that Miss Pim has included a photograph of our memorial stone at the "Henry plot" at Avondale amongst her illustrations.

Miss Pim gives us a source reference running to 383 entries, as well as appendices listing Henry's plant introductions and his publications.

All in all it is a book in which forester, gardener and layman alike should enjoy a humanly told story of a great and talented Irishman.

A.M.S.H.