

## WHAT WOOD IS THAT?

**A Manual of Wood Identification.** *Herbert L. Edlin, Stobart and Son.*  
£6.95 (plus tax).

ON opening this book the reader is confronted with its most noteworthy feature: actual samples of each of the 40 woods described. The samples are attractively arranged in a fold-out section inside the front cover. They provide a valuable and extremely interesting collection of woods. Some such as lacewood plane and palado are quite beautiful and others display, remarkably clearly, the characteristic features of the wood.

The text runs into 160 pages of which 55 deal with wood identification. This section is centred around 14 keys to assist the identification of 40 woods. The author acknowledges that the keys are based on an earlier book "Welches Holz ist Das?" by Alfred Schwankel (reviewed in translation in *Irish Forestry*, Vol. 13, 1956) and the whole book appears to be very similar if not identical to a book of the same name, by the same author, published by Thames and Hudson in 1969 (*Irish Forestry*, Vol. 26, 1969).

The main problem with the keys is that they are not comprehensive, that is they do not cover all the woods likely to be encountered in everyday use. This might well seem an impossible task, but any manual of identification should state the totality to which it may be applied and then should strive to include all objects within that totality. Neither are the keys entirely satisfactory in that they are not designed for methodical sequential use. Rather the main

key puts the woods into one of six main colour groups with the other keys providing ancillary information on features of the wood such as rings, pores, grain, hardness etc. The trouble is that the most of this information has already been included in the descriptions of the woods in the main colour key.

It is not clear for whom the book has been written. The dust cover mentions "dealers, architects, carpenters and other craftsmen as well as householders, teachers, nature-lovers and youth-club leaders." Is there anyone left out? Perhaps the author would have been wiser to have confined his book to the identification of for instance furniture woods. However, one of four examples included to assist the reader in the use of the keys concerns the case of a "friend" who brings a log from the forest, requesting identification of the timber. As it turns out he proves to be a good and true friend. The log is quickly identified from the keys as Douglas fir, one of only four conifers included in the book. The other three are Ponderosa pine, Western red cedar and Cedar of Lebanon. While the difficulties of softwood identification with the naked eye may have deterred the author from including a wider selection, one feels that the more common forest trees of these islands should at least have been mentioned. The only reference to spruce, for example, is that it (Norway) is used in the manufacture of violins and guitars. Again, while the use of trade names in the varieties of tropical hardwoods is defended, the word "deal" which might be of help to both the carpenter and the householder is never mentioned.

The book contains over 60 black and white illustrations many of which are rather too small, with up to three figures crowded into half a page.

However, despite the criticisms the wood samples make this a book worth having, the chance for every man to be a collector of many fine and beautiful timbers.

E. P. Farrell