

E. J. H. Corner's Botany

by

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The spirit of our little book is one of progress; although nodding to the past, we are looking ahead. Here then, is not the place to list the events of Professor Corner's life, his appointments, wanderings and honours: it has been done before*. What has not been written is that courses of Tropical Botany at Cambridge begun by Professor Corner and now, alas, discontinued, were an inspiration to generations of undergraduates and research students. Further, those beginning in less favourable surroundings and hearing Professor Corner as a visiting lecturer, have been led to see through the blinkers of that botany which is orientated to the plants of the temperate zone and peddled by the pusillanimous. These are the blinkers which have dragged the study of the whole plant down to the popular image of "pressing flowers", and driven many to the narrow reaches of the esoteric in pursuit of academic respectability. Of those fortunate to have been able to shake off such tyranny, and of the few who were able to do so at the Botany School in Cambridge under Professor Corner's supervision, I am privileged to say that I was one, though the last.

How did it begin? A new schoolmaster fresh from Cambridge went to Rugby: in the sixth form was John Corner. The schoolmaster had read the writings of A. H. Church, a remarkable philosopher of botany, then working in the Botany School at Oxford. Corner read Church's unassuming, unillustrated and rather slim *Oxford Botanical Memoir* entitled *Thalassiophyta*. Despite the tightly argued and rather heavy prose, much of which was not understandable to a schoolboy, the blinkers fell away. Much of the botany taught at Cambridge, whither he went from Rugby, was, in consequence, dull and uninteresting. He cut lectures. He read. In 1928 he presented a paper (still preserved at the Botany School) on *Thalassiophyta* to the Botany Club. A friend introduced him to Church, and, whilst still a research student in mycology at Cambridge, he travelled to Oxford to see Church and became his disciple. Church's works and teaching, unfashionable at the time, reflected an astounding vision and an unparalleled grasp of the fundamental problems of botany. He, who had never ventured beyond Plymouth, could discourse on the floras of the world. When Corner set out for the forests of Malaya, Church advised him, "Note everything! Draw everything! Photograph everything!", advice passed through Corner to his pupils, and now to Church's "great-grand-pupils".

This is not the only legacy as we hope this volume shows. It reflects Professor Corner's interests as shown by comparison with his list of publications. Some of the papers are controversial: Professor Corner's writings have never avoided controversy. Obvious are the Durian Theory, the new classification of *Clavaria*, as well as papers on conservation and the teaching of botany which have encouraged and excited discussion.

* *Flora Malesiana* I, 1: 117-118 (1950) & I, 8: XXVI (1974); *Biol. J. Linn. Soc.* 2: 322-324 (1970); *Who's Who*: 680 (1975); *Flora Malesiana Bull.* (29): 2536-2538 (1976).

The Indomalayan flora and "funguses", figs and breadfruit, durians and pachycauls; from trees, their form and evolution, to trees and man, to trees in horticulture and trees in conservation — a few of his subjects. And so here is offered Stearn's paper on the impact of tropical rain forest on those introduced to it for the first time; Ashton on the ecology of the Durian Theory; Soepadmo and Eow on the reproductive biology of *Durio* itself; Jarrett on the construction of the syncarp of *Artocarpus*; Mabberley on the afroalpine pachycaul flora; White on the origins of African geoxylic suffrutices, the final bars of the leptocaul opera; remarks on the evolution of rainforest herbs by Burtt. Brunig & Klinge compare the structure of forests in Borneo and South America. Van Steenis takes up the question of differing modes of evolution in animals and plants, while Fedorov deals with the 'Vavilovian' evolution he sees in Dipterocarpaceae. Stone sets down the infrageneric classification of *Pandanus*, pachycaul monocotyledons *par excellence*. Of the Malayan flora so well known to Professor Corner, Hsuan Keng describes a new species of Theaceae and Holttum monographs a group of thelypterid ferns, whilst David and Jaquenoud describe new Tremellales from Singapore. Perreau & Heim continue the mycological papers with a new *Boletus* whilst developmental anatomy is represented by Fahn & Joel's paper on the secretory ducts of the mango, and Sporne presents an essay on the enigmatic girdling bundles of dicotyledonous flowers. The construction studies pioneered by Professor Corner are represented by the paper of Hallé and Mabberley on primitive tree-forms while the origin of primitive flowering plants is tackled from a different angle by Thorne. Professor Corner's monographic work on Asian and Australian *Ficus* is here complemented by a study of the origin of the sycomore in the Middle East by Galil and co-workers, and by Wiebes's history of fig wasp research. The importance and limits of taxonomy are stressed by Heywood and the problems and objectives of Flora-writing by Frodin, whilst Menninger ends the volume with a consideration of the aesthetic importance of trees in tropical and subtropical horticulture.

Although Professor Corner has retired, the flow of work is unabated. The monumental *Seeds of Dicotyledons* which appeared in 1976, is the fruit of over thirty years' painstaking investigation and interpretation, whilst even now in Shelford surrounded by his books, notes and collections in a veritable *thesaurus botanicus*, enlarged to contain his fungus herbarium and other specimens, he is writing up the flora of the Sedili River in eastern Johore!

List of Publications

(excluding reviews, letters and reports of discussion)

(To 1 January 1977)*

- CORNER, E. J. H. (1927). A cytological investigation of a sport in a plant of the garden stock. *Proc. Linn. Soc. Lond.* **139**: 75-77.
- (1929). A Humariaceous fungus parasitic on a liverwort. *Ann. Bot.* **43**: 491-505.
- (1929). Studies in the morphology of Discomycetes I. The marginal growth of apothecia. *Trans. Br. mycol. Soc.* **14**: 263-275.
- (1929). Studies in the morphology of Discomycetes II. The structure and development of the ascocarp. *Trans. Br. mycol. Soc.* **14**: 275-291.
- (1930). Studies in the morphology of the Discomycetes III. The Clavuleae. *Trans. Br. mycol. Soc.* **15**: 107-120.

* The compiler is indebted to Mrs. Heap of the Botany School Library, Cambridge for assistance, particularly in tracing some of the rarer items.

- (1930). Studies in the morphology of the Discomycetes IV. The evolution of the ascocarp. *Trans. Br. mycol. Soc.* **15**: 121–134.
- (1931). Studies in the morphology of the Discomycetes V. The evolution of the ascocarp (continued). *Trans. Br. mycol. Soc.* **15**: 332–350.
- (1931). The identity of the fungus causing wet rot of rubber trees in Malaya. *J. Rubb. Res. Inst. Malaya* **3**: 120–123.
- (1932). The fruit body of *Polystictus xanthopus* Fr. *Ann. Bot.* **46**: 72–111.
- (1932). A *Fomes* with two systems of hyphae. *Trans. Br. mycol. Soc.* **17**: 51–81.
- (1932). The identity of the brown-root fungus. *Gdns' Bull. Straits Settl.* **5**: 317–352.
- (1933). A revision of the Malayan species of *Ficus*: *Covellia* and *Neomorphe*. *J. Malay. Brch R. Asiat. Soc.* **11**: 1–65.
- (1934). An evolutionary study in Agarics: *Collybia apalosarca* and the veils. *Trans. Br. mycol. Soc.* **19**: 39–88.
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- (1935). Observations on resistance to powdery mildews. *New Phytol.* **34**: 180–200.
- (1935). A *Nectria* parasitic on a liverwort: with further notes on *Neotiella crozalsiana*. *Gdns' Bull. Straits Settl.* **8**: 135–144.
- (1935). *Cassia* in Malaya. *Malay. Agri-hort. Ass. Mag.* **5**: 37.
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- (1938). *Annual Report of the Director of Gardens for the year 1937*. Singapore: Govt. Printing Office.
- (1938). The systematic value of the colour of withering leaves. *Chronica bot.* **4**: 119–121.
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- (1939). A revision of *Ficus*, subgenus *Synoecia*. *Gdns' Bull. Straits Settl.* **10**: 82–161.
- (1939). Notes on the systematy and distribution of Malayan phanerogams. Part III. *Gdns' Bull. Straits Settl.* **10**: 239–329.
- (1940). Botanical monkeys. *Malay Agri-hort. Ass. Mag.* **10**: 147–149.
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