

TABLOID BOOK REVIEW

THE FAMILIES OF FLOWERING PLANTS. I. DICOTYLEDONS. By J. Hutchinson, F.L.S.
London: Macmillan and Company. 1926.

A new botanical taxonomy is im Werden. The first-fruits of Darwin's popularization of evolution, in the middle of the last century, eventuated in the "natural system" of Engler and Prantl, which pretty thoroughly jolted the old taxonomy loose from its moorings. But it has been growing increasingly apparent that this system, like all other earthly things, is not final and must give way before some new one which better embodies the newer knowledge of the phylogeny of plants. It requires courage to undertake such a job, however, because there are few scientific fields where more diverse ideas are more stoutly defended by their proponents, than the field of botanical classification. Mr. Hutchinson apparently has this courage, and a somewhat cursory examination of his book seems to indicate that he can muster right respectable forces to defend his thesis. It seems a bit queer to find the labiates at the head of the table instead of the old familiar composites; but if botanists generally accept the new system the queerness will wear off. The contention that the composites really form a composite family, being derived from rather widely separated stocks, will be sharply challenged by some botanists, but the debate may be beneficial in clearing up a number of tough problems presented by this difficult group of plants. The illustrations in the book are worth mention: they have verve and individuality. The little distribution maps, too, are a very helpful feature.

MIDAS, or THE UNITED STATES AND THE FUTURE. By C. H. Bretherton. New York: E. P. Dutton and Co. (Today and Tomorrow Series) 1926.

Do Oxford dons wear high hats? At any rate, here is one who is very distinctly high-hatting us. From his roost on Boar's Hill he looks down (quite definitely down) on these Benighted States, and tells us, always sententiously if not always sapiently, what ails us and how we are going to get over it. Eventually. Perhaps. Some of his observations are shrewd and to the point, and one might be lulled into accepting his conclusions; but he slips upon occasional significant facts, and by his own proposed test of "tremendous trifles" betrays himself. Indeed, in the very paragraph wherein he proposes this test he chooses as his example the dyspepsia-provoking cold pumpkin pie, which he blames for everything from American teeth to American philosophy. Then he lets it be understood that pumpkin pie has a top crust. Similarly, in the body of his thesis, he states that the American negro is becoming evenly distributed over the whole country. This will be news in South Carolina. Again, he states that all policemen in New York are Irish. They are -- if Abraham and Guiseppe are typical Irish names -- But what need have we of further witnesses?

FORMAL LOGIC. By Augustus DeMorgan. London: The Open Court Company. 1926.

A great deal of first-rate experimentation and observation is wasted nowadays because the experimenters do not know how to extract all the legitimate inferences from it. More unfortunately still, some first-rate pieces of work get themselves discredited or at least looked at doubtfully because the authors infer too much. Probably all of us of the present generation could stand some drill in the rigid syllogistic thinking, if not of the Schoolmen, at least of the more modern systems of logic. This reprint of De Morgan's work of eighty years ago, therefore, is a task for which physical as well as metaphysical science owes a real debt to the editor, Prof. A. E. Taylor of Edinburgh.
