

*Revision of the Eastern Asiatic Myrsinaceae, By E. H. Walker*

After 10 years of intensive study, carried on at the Smithsonian Institute, Walker presents an elaborate taxonomic survey of the Eastern Asiatic representatives of a botanical family. While Engler-Gilg in their *Syllabus of Plantfamilies* (1912) limit the brief characterisation of the whole family to but 17 lines, the author's exemplary record embraces 258 pages and 37 striking line drawings, illustrating the main characteristics. (see *Philippine Journ. of Science* vol. 73, Nos. 1-2, 1940).

The work was undertaken on account of the general confusion observed by Dr. Merrill, director of the Arnold Arboretum, in Herbarium collections of this family; Merrill also had found the identification of Eastern Asiatic specimens from literature data "exceedingly unsatisfactory." Walker confirms this confusion and also point out the lack of coordination in the various treatments of the *Myrsinaceae* of Eastern Asia, making a revision necessary. In as much as the representatives of Indo-China have recently been described by Pitard in *Lecomte's Flora générale de l'Indo-Chine*, vol. 3, 765-877, 1930, and those of Thailand by Fletcher in *Craib's Florae Siam. enum.* vol. 2, 325-352, 1938, Walker limits himself mainly to the Chinese species.

In his historical review he refers to the adoption of the name *Ardisiaceae* by the Japanese botanist Nakai, as this name was first used in 1810 by de Jussieu. However, comments Walker, *Myrsine Linn.* is the oldest recognized genus, and article 23 of the International Rules of Botanical Nomenclature, Cambridge 1930, states that "names of families are taken from the name or former name of one of their *genera* and end in-aceae." There seems, therefore, no reason to change *Myrsinaceae*, based on *Myrsine Linn.* Nakai, followed by other Japanese botanists, also rejects the genus-name *Ardisia*, because of the priority of the name *Bladhia*, and on account of certain morphological differences of the American species. Walker, however, found no characters, justifying the generic separation of the New and Old World species.

The *Myrsinaceae*—with the exception of *Ardisia primulifolia*-, are woody plants, shrubs, trees or vines, are related to the Primel

family and are characterised by a solitary seed (only *Maesa* having more seeds in the fruit). Walker has used floral and vegetative characters, whenever possible, "because these are the characters usually present in flowering, fruiting and sterile specimens,—and because, after all, keys are essentially the tools for identifying specimens." Every species, included in this revision, has been re-described by Walker, according to a uniform pattern, by the use of a printed blank, on which are recorded the characters of similar species—with a paragraph added to the citation of the specimens, giving the principal recognition characters. The treatment, the author says, is in many respects tentative and essentially conservative as, unfortunately, no fieldstudies whatsoever were possible. The descriptions often leave out such useful characters as those of fruits and seeds, obviously missing from the specimens examined, as well as all reference (with a single exception) to the local uses, economic, medicinal, food or ornamental, of the plants or their products. Such data, we hope, will be supplied, when fieldstudies become possible.

Walker described 19 Asiatic species of *Maesa*: 1 of *Aegiceras*, 53 of *Ardisia*, 18 of *Embelia*, 4 of *Myrsine* and 6 of *Rapanea*. In addition he discusses critically under every *genus* uncertain and excluded species. He gives finally for purposes of record and checking a long list of cited specimens. Of supplementary interest, we feel, is the enumeration of species in this family, recorded in the book *Chinese Medicinal Plants* from the *Pen Ta'ao Kang Mu*, by B. E. Read, 3rd ed. 1936, published by the *Peking Natural History Bulletin*. The roots of 3 *Ardisia* species, and the leaves and stems of one *Maesa* species are used in medicine; one *Maesa piriifolia* Miqu. is reported to contain saponin. Finally, the leaves of one, *Maesa parvifolia* A. DC., according to statements one of Walker's labelled specimens, yielded upon drying (sun and subsequent artificial heat) a delicious tea.