

The Grasses: Earth's Green Wealth

By ALMA CHESNUT MOORE. New York, Macmillan, 1960. 150 p. \$5.00.

This is a series of scholarly and entertaining essays on those important cultivated grasses, wheat, barley, oat, rice, corn, and millets, which provide the bulk of the world's food. Much information on the historical, botanical, agronomic and economic aspects of each species is brought together and presented in an informative and most readable fashion. It is obvious that the author knows her subject well, has consulted the most recent and reliable sources (mainly the United States Department of Agriculture, and has effectively sifted the significant facts from the great mass of information that must be available. There are also fascinating chapters on bamboo, sugar cane, and the soil-building grasses, on their diseases and pests, and their structure. One is soon convinced of the truth of Dr Jennings' prefatory statement, that "were it not for the grasses, civilization as we know it today would not exist."

WILLIAM G. DORE

Cowry Shells of World Seas

By JOYCE ALLAN. Newton, Massachusetts, Branford, 1956. 170 p. \$10.50.

In this useful book, Joyce Allan has discussed and illustrated every known species of cowry (class Gastropoda, family Cypraeidae), a group of exquisite marine mollusks, containing about 150 species, which has long been a favorite of shell collectors. Many cowry-like species are treated also. Much careful research has gone into this well-written work and it will be most helpful to anyone who collects tropical or world-wide shells.

It is unfortunate, however, that Miss Allan did not follow her own better judgment and reject the extreme splitting of taxonomic groups perpetrated by some workers. Perpetuation of 52 small genera (many of which contain only one species) within this compact group appears exceedingly unwise to this reviewer

and to most other workers as well (see, for example, Alison Kay, in *Proc. malac. Soc. Lond.* 33: 278, 1960). Readers would do well to continue using older generic names such as *Cypraea* for the true cowries and *Trivia*, *Cyphoma*, etc., for related groups and to disregard most of the other genera given in this book. Such a procedure will greatly reduce the difficulty in remembering names and restore the genera to their proper function: that of showing relationship.

Objection must also be raised with respect to Miss Allan's definition and use of subspecies. A true subspecies, by the accepted definition, must be geographically separated from the nominate species and cannot occur "throughout a whole region inhabited by . . . [the nominate] species", as stated on page 11. Also, within a family such as the Cypraeidae where morphology is still the basis of classification, groups below the level of the species must be morphologically distinguishable from the typical form and should not be defined on the basis of locality, the procedure recommended by the author on page 12.

Nevertheless, *Cowry Shells of World Seas* is an exceedingly valuable reference book for the identification of species. The illustrations and discussions are excellent and it will make a worthwhile addition to the library of any shell collector.

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Aquatic Phycomycetes

By FREDERICK K. SPARROW, JR. 2d rev. ed. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1960. 1187 p. \$22.50.

This is not a book for popular reading. However, for any naturalist who is interested in aquatic organisms, who has a good microscope available, and who would like to try out the baiting technique for obtaining aquatic fungi, this book could open the door to a fascinating new world. It is a monumental treatise and reference work, comprising a very



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