Latin as a living language. The International Code of Botanical Nomenclature still enjoins that plants new to science must be described in Latin if their names are to be considered validly published. This is the last stronghold of the language which was once the common tongue of botanists. The Code, be it noted, is not itself in Latin but in English, with authorized versions in French and German. Latin descriptions are stipulated because Latin is held to be the international language of taxonomy that all can read: but a botanist must be able to read the Code in English, French or German to learn that Latin descriptions are necessary

Plant taxonomy has a long history behind it and the taxonomist is constantly referring to the writings not only of his immediate predecessors but to those several generations back, when Latin was the natural language of the scholar. It is often possible for a botanist to get help with the decreasing number of new descriptions that he has to write; but in reading the old a knowledge of Latin will remain essential in an age when the education of a biologist does not necessarily give him any grounding in the language at all.

W. T. Stearn has now attempted to supply in one volume* the aid necessary for a taxonomist who is not also a classicist—though, as Stearn points out, botanical and classical Latin can be very far apart. (I should certainly feel very shaky at the knees if I had to present my Latin descriptions of plants to my old schoolmasters!)

The author has not found it necessary to write every one of the 566 pages himself. Much of this volume is compilation, the bringing together in one place (as he says in the Preface) of material that has hitherto been scattered and, to some, difficult of access. A brief survey of the Contents will show how expertly he has done this, and it must be recognized that much of the material incorporated has had to be skilfully tailored to its new setting. An interesting feature is a series of descriptions in Latin with more or less literal English translations, ranging over all the main groups of the plant kingdom. These are the exemplars that the halting pen of the tyro may attempt to imitate.

The story of the development of botanical Latin terminology is told in Chapter 3. It will be a great pity if this chapter is missed by those who have some competence in the Latin language and, thus, little need of the rest of the book. It is a most valuable and illuminating account and many of those who construe Latin fluently enough will understand the early literature much better after reading this chapter.

Botanical Latin now includes a large number of words of Greek origin, for the greater flexibility of Greek has proved invaluable in the construction of compounds. In general this difficult subject of graeco-latin is well done, but it was a disappointment to find (p. 97) the statement that Greek adjectives ending in –es, –ys "raise difficulties of declension"—and no more. Being confronted, in a different context, with the feminine adjective 'hyperdasa' derived 'from the Greek *hyper-dasus*' (i.e. *hyperdasys* in the more usual transliteration), I should have liked some guidance. Is *hyperdasa* admissible, or is it better deemed an error for the Greek feminine *hyperdaseia*?

In pure latinity Stearn gives his authority to *extus* and *sparse*. He certainly would not have admitted the latter if his early descriptions had been vetted by the late Sir William Wright Smith in Edinburgh! Whatever their use in late Latin it will probably be advantageous to avoid these words that qualify neither for a standard Latin dictionary nor for a technical botanical glossary. With *parce* and *sparsim* at hand, *sparse* is surely redundant and perhaps tiresome for those who do not read a romance tongue.

The price of books has risen so steeply in recent years that five guineas may not seem an exorbitant sum to the young taxonomist. It is to be hoped that it will not. The purchaser will undoubtedly acquire not only an invaluable aid to his handling of botanical Latin, but a veritable mine of miscellaneous information.

B. L. BURTT.

*Botanical Latin by William T. Stearn. London. T. Nelson & Sons Ltd. 1966. xiv, 566 pp. Price: one hundred and five shillings.