Notes R.B.G. Edinb. 38(3):386 (1980)

Book Review

Ivies.* We tend to think of ivy as a typically Victorian plant and put it into the same class as all those dark yews, boxes and spotted laurels (*Aucuba japonica* 'Variegata') so popular at the turn of the century. One of the results of the recent revival of interest in ivies is Peter Rose's book, in which the great versatility of the plant is ably demonstrated. The book emphasises the horticultural uses of ivy and considers it as a wall-plant, as camouflage for unsightly buildings and as ground cover, as well as for smaller-scale uses in terraria or hanging baskets, and as a house plant. It is interesting to see that the author maintains that ivy will not harm a wall or building provided that it is structurally sound, and can in fact protect it from the effects of weathering.

There are chapters on cultivation, and on pests and diseases, but the largest part of the book is devoted to descriptions of species and cultivars. Mr Rose has made a valiant attempt to sort out the enormous confusion surrounding the many cultivars, of which there are probably over 200. He describes six species and 125 of the most usually cultivated variants (including giving notes on history and uses) and admits that the list is incomplete; omissions include cultivars of little horticultural value or those whose identity and naming is still confused. Much of this confusion dates back to 1782 when Shirley Hibberd published his famous book *The Ivy*, in which he ignored the nomenclature of previous botanists and gave his own names to established cultivars—often two or more names for the same taxon have persisted to the present day.

A deficiency in the book is the lack of a key, either to species or cultivars—a deficiency which will frustrate the more botanically-minded gardener. There is some compensation in the large number of successful colour photographs which are of enormous help in identification. About half of the cultivars included in the book are illustrated, but one worries a little about the remaining half; I am sure that most of the unillustrated cultivars will remain unidentified. While on the subject of illustrations, the book is provided with an attractive dust jacket depicting six cultivars of *Hedera helix* painted by Victoria Gordon Friis.

Present interest in ivies has led to the formation of the British Ivy Society and it is a little surprising that Mr Rose makes no mention of this, although he refers to the American Ivy Society which is the international registration body for ivy names.

All-in-all, *Ivies* fills a gap in the literature which has been open for too long, and it should be on the bookshelf of anyone interested in these easy-to-grow, low-maintenance plants. I hope that it will be bought and consulted by nurserymen selling ivies, so that there will at last be a reduction in the plethora of names under which ivy cultivars are offered to the public.

V. A. Matthews

* *Ivies* by Peter Q. Rose. 180 pp., 71 figs in colour. 1980. Blandford Press, Poole, Dorset. Price £6.95.