This long-awaited book replaces Dr H. H. Allan's handbook of similar title which, since 1928, has proved its worth as a quick and reliable source of reference, and not only to beginners. It has been long out of print, but the new publication will inevitably be judged in comparison with its predecessor.

From enquiries among interested, reasonable, unbotanical acquaintances, I find that a fair consensus of opinion may be summarized "attractive but daunting". The illustrations command immediate admiration, as indeed they should, and the more artistic types invariably make special reference to the dust-cover. The whole layout of the book is most attractive and in strong contrast to that of Dr Allan's handbook, the format of which was its most irritating shortcoming.

It is the absence of opening clues in this book that is so daunting; the simple vegetative key of the 1928 publication had been its greatest asset. The complaint is quite general that, without some knowledge of systematics, the book is baffling. Its aim is clearly stated as being "to assist those interested . . . to identify the woody plants . . ." but for the tyro the first step can only be to look through the illustrations, which from their very abundance presents quite a formidable task. However, a great deal of care has been given to their grouping; the larger genera can be quickly located once one suspects he is dealing with a koromiko, a coprosma or an olcaria. Thereafter it is plain sailing.

Another handicap arises where a genus is monotypic, and cannot therefore be grouped with relatives on a single page. Its illustration has to be of unusual form to catch the eye. Mangaro, ngaio, putaputaweta and tawapou are examples that take some locating (unless one cheats and uses the index). Similarly, the ugly duckling olan easily recognized family—e.g., Neopanax anomalum among the five-fingers—can easily be overlooked.

This review has attempted to regard the book from the point of view of a casual user, and to give some help to the uninformed enquirer. In doing so, it reads ungenerously and does not do justice to the brevity and clarity of the descriptions. Increasing familiarity with its contents and with the New Zealand flora will provide more frequent clues, leading to positive identifications. The detailed generic keys, plus the illustrations, make for quick recognition of the commoner members of a group. The ground is also cleared considerably by tucking away the plants of limited distribution in each genus under a separate heading and using a small type-face. Due allowance is also made for subspecies of varying form, and warnings are given of where hybrids are likely.

It is thus a book whose value will be appreciated increasingly with use. The opening account of the main forest types, their history, problems and management, is also a valuable bonus to those of an ecological or historical cast of mind.

N.L.E.