A Family Key.* The aim of this pocket book is to provide a simple guide to all the flowering plant families, indigenous or cultivated, that are likely to be encountered in temperate regions of the northern hemisphere. An introductory section dealing with the terminology used is followed by a key to eleven large artificial family groups which are then broken down, by means of contrasting alternatives, into individual families. The key is followed by a synopsis of the families dealt with and includes brief descriptions and geographical distributions.

As anyone who has ever attempted to key out a large number of taxa will readily appreciate, the authors set themselves a Herculean task in trying to cover so much ground. By casting their net so wide—260 families, including glass-house plants, are covered—it is only to be expected that some species do not run down. But these exceptions do not appear to be numerous, judging by a selection of unknowns that were put to the test; most of them were cultivated species and often anomalous members of the family—e.g. some members of the Flacourtiaceae, Urticaceae and Valerianaceae.

The key, in general, is easy to use and the alternatives are clear, but occasionally, as in the division between the major family groups 5 and 6, the differences are ill-defined. In most cases where the alternatives are difficult or involve very accurate observation, as in the section dealing with the Bicarpellatae, it reflects the uncertain boundaries between the families.

Within its limits, the key is probably very satisfactory for the great bulk of plants that the average user is likely to meet. It is, however, most important, before starting to use the long key, to read and digest the section dealing with the usage of terms. Most of those used are, of course, unequivocal, but the author's usage of the term perigyny runs counter to the generally accepted meaning and without awareness of this the user of the key would certainly run into serious trouble. It is unfortunate, in this particular case, that the authors have re-defined perigyny to their own needs, especially when this is primarily a book for students.

In lay-out and typography, there is little to criticise. Both are very clear. Errors are rare and ambiguities infrequent. Sometimes the brief family descriptions include puzzling phrases; e.g. in the Umbelliferae "Infl umbel, rar head", and sometimes a term used is not defined, e.g. "syngenesious".

As already suggested, this booklet will be useful to students, teachers of taxonomy and interested amateurs. It contains a great amount of accurate information about all the commoner families one is likely to encounter in the northern hemisphere (and many, such as the Crossosomataceae and Podostemaceae, which one is unlikely to encounter!) Similar information is contained in other books such as Lawrence's 'Taxonomy of Vascular Plants' and Rehder's 'Manual of Cultivated Trees and Shrubs' but they cover a narrower field, cannot be slipped into one's pocket and cost a great deal more.

I. C. HEDGE.

* The Identification of Flowering Plant Families, by P. H. Davies and J. Cullen. 124 pp. $7\frac{1}{4}'' \times 4\frac{7}{8}''$. Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1965. Price Twelve Shillings and Sixpence.