Book Review

Plant Taxonomy for Everyman. Most previous accounts of plant taxonomy, at least those written in this country, have either been small chapters in general botany text books or else advanced works for a specialist minority. Few have attempted to explain to a lay reader the aims and methods of putting names on plants by covering most facets of the subject. When this is done as in this small book* by an active practising taxonomist with a broad knowledge of his subject and an ability to write simple unstuffy English, the outcome should be satisfactory. There are chapters on the fundamentals and processes of classification, taxonomic hierarchies, scientific naming of plants, practical naming of plants, systems of classification and taxonomy today. Each gives a very adequate and readable account of the subject. Naturally, much has to be condensed and omitted in a book of this type and its success or otherwise largely depends on the selectivity of the author. The overall impression is of well-balanced impartiality but occasionally as in the chapter on "Systems of Classification", the brevity is rather too condensed. In this chapter, Takhtajian's system is used as the example of a modern type of classification although it is not indicated what the basis of it is nor is it at all clear what its special merits are; at least the lay reader may gain the impression that the system is merely a new juggling-about of family groupings without much scientific basis. There are two useful appendices to the book: one, a suggested routine for practical work, the other a list of useful references of which, it is pleasing to note, very few were published before 1950.

This is a refreshing lively book that presents taxonomy not as a strange mystique but as a logical, necessary and interesting practice. It is highly recommended reading for anyone interested in plants.

I. C. Hedge

* An introduction to plant taxonomy. By C. Jeffrey. J. & A. Churchill Ltd., London. 1968. 8½ in. Pp. 128 with 8 plates and 20 figs. Price 24 shillings.