

### ACCURACY IN POPULAR BOTANICAL PUBLICATIONS

One of the functions of Botanical Societies in New Zealand might well be to encourage a high standard in popular works on native plants. Publishers are beginning to appreciate the growing demand for such books, and it is perhaps time for our members to take the stand that we insist on accuracy, however small or "popular" a book may be. As an instance we may consider "Nature in New Zealand: Native Plants" by Charles Masefield (A. H. and A. W. Reed, Wellington, June, 1949).

The "Dominion" in reviewing this book remarks "Relativity few people can identify the more common New Zealand trees, one of the reasons being the lack of a ready reference book that shows clearly how closely allied trees can be differentiated from one another". With this we would agree in part, but it should be pointed out that this new booklet does little to remedy the lack.

At each opening there is a black and white drawing on one side, text on the other. Fifteen of the drawings depict landscapes, each with a trunk of the tree being discussed in the foreground and others of the same species in more distant view. At the side is a circle of wood showing the grain. No details of leaves or flowers are shown here. A typical incident indicates the value of these pictures. The text was covered and the drawing of one of the beeches was shown to a past President of this Society who is known to have some interest in the genus *Nothofagus*. After puzzling some time he suggested tentatively that "he supposed it was one of the pines"!

The other plates show closer views of twigs of fifteen more species. Some, like flax, kowhai and clematis are easily recognized, though inaccurate in detail. It is of considerable interest to compare these three and several others with Miss Daff's fine water colours reproduced in "New Zealand Flowers and Birds" published by the Tourist Department. Other species, like red mistletoe and puta-putaweta are harder to name. *Ranunculus lyallii* is shown without one of the characteristic big saucer-shaped leaves; clematis sports tendrils whereas it invariably climbs by leaf petioles; and so on.

The text has a good deal of accurate information, but contains also some surprising statements, e.g., "All the species of *Ratas* are vines which depend upon other forest trees for support while they are growing. Finally they become strong forest giants with timber which is tough and durable. . . ."; pukatea's "nearest representative is found in the forests of Brazil" though most authorities say Chile; taraire fruit "is said to be poisonous to human beings unless it is boiled for a long time" yet children in North Auckland eat the

berries freely. It should have been easy to check such points before publication.

Like some films, this book is definitely unsuitable for children. Only disappointment could come from any effort to identify the larger trees from it. The best recommendation to adults is to warn their friends against it. Under the circumstances it is perhaps a pity that the cover design is quite attractive, after the style of King Penguins. The price is 5/-. Cockayne and Phillips Turner's "The Trees of New Zealand" with 126 good photographs costs 7/6.

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## Scrub Fire on Mt. Hikurangi

In December of last year I was fortunate enough to go with a small party on an ascent of Mt. Hikurangi (5,606 feet) in the East Cape District. From Ruatoria we travelled up the Tapu-waeroa Valley to Pakiharoa Station, where the actual climb began. At about 3,500 feet we left the cleared land and ascended the scree that has a special significance as being the type locality of *Coriaria pottsiana*. We saw quite a bit of this small tutu but it was not as abundant as another small species, *C. plumosa*. From the top of the scree we followed the track that leads through the last few hundred feet of silver-beech forest to the scrub belt above.

The Manager of Pakiharoa had told us before we left that a scrub fire had occurred in the summer of 1947-48, but I was not prepared for anything like what we saw that day after leaving the bush. Almost the entire belt of about 500 feet had been burnt on the western end and southern side of the mountain. Everywhere the dead stems, mainly leatherwood (*Olearia colensoi*), were still standing, bleached and spikey, indicating that the fire had swept through dry litter, scorching rather than burning the shrubs. Only three of the original species were growing in any quantity: *Ranunculus insignis*, *Craspedia uniflora* var. and *Viola cunninghamii*. The root-stocks of these herbs had apparently survived the fire and sent up new shoots. In the upper part of the scrub belt particularly, the *Ranunculus* was growing in great abundance. The plants were up to two feet high and in full flower, so that from a distance the mountain sides were distinctly yellow. Needless to say deer are practically absent from this area—such growth would not be found in their presence.

But over wide areas, mostly below the level of the buttercups, there was little growing between the dead stems, the only plants that had come in on the loose bare soil being willow-herbs (*Epilobium* spp.), thistles, cudweeds (*Gnaphalium* spp.), catsear, etc. There was no sign of young leatherwood or other shrubby species. A small