

## RECENT LITERATURE.

**The Allen Bibliography.**<sup>1</sup>—A most welcome addition to bibliographic literature is the catalogue of the published scientific writings of Dr. J. A. Allen. We feel sure that all readers of 'The Auk' will heartily endorse the foreword by Prof. Henry Fairfield Osborn in which he states that the life and writings of Dr. Allen "have exerted so great an influence on the progress of ornithology and mammalogy in America that all who have the interest of these branches of science at heart, both in this country and abroad, will welcome this biographical and bibliographical volume." "It is issued" he adds "as an expression of the appreciation of Doctor Allen's life work by the Trustees of The American Museum of Natural History and his devoted colleagues on its Scientific Staff".

The total number of titles amounts to 1453, of which 966 relate to birds, the other topics covered being mammals, reptiles, zoögeography, nomenclature, and biography. Of mammals he has described no less than 573 new forms and 21 new genera and subgenera, while of birds he has named 49 new forms and 4 new genera. These figures alone will give some idea of the tremendous amount of work that Dr. Allen has accomplished and a perusal of the titles themselves will further emphasize the breadth of his knowledge and the part that he has played in developing his favorite branches of science.

By far the most interesting portion of the volume, however, is the delightful autobiographical sketch which precedes the bibliography. Others can express their appreciation of a man's life work and set forth its value to the world, but no one can describe the conditions under which it developed or the factors that contributed to its growth, so well as the man himself. We are therefore, under obligations to Dr. Allen for this sketch which is most interesting reading and rich in historical detail, much of which probably no one but Dr. Allen could furnish at this late day.

To quote again from Prof. Osborn's foreword: "we are sure that naturalists in all parts of the world will unite in felicitating Dr. Allen on the great work which he has accomplished and in wishing him many more years of strength and activity".—W. S.

**Thorburn's 'British Birds'.**<sup>2</sup>—With the third and fourth volumes of Mr. Thorburn's splendid work before us, another of the many books

<sup>1</sup> Autobiographical Notes and a Bibliography of the Scientific Publications of Joel Asaph Allen. Published by the American Museum of Natural History, New York. 1916. Svo. pp. 1-215, frontispiece portrait.

<sup>2</sup> British Birds | written and illustrated by | A. Thorburn, F. Z. S. | With eighty plates in colour, showing over four hundred species. | In four volumes | Vol. III | Longmans, Green and Co. | 39 Paternoster Row, London | Fourth Avenue & 30th Street, New York | Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras | 1916. | All rights reserved. | Large 4to. pp. 1-87, pll. 41-60. Vol. IV. 1916. pp. 1-107, pll. 61-80. [Price \$10. per volume, net.]

dealing with the birds of Great Britain is brought to completion. The bird life of any country appeals to such a large number of people, that there will doubtless always be a demand for bird books which present the subject in an attractive manner. There have appeared during the last century and a quarter, the 'British Birds' of Bewick, Yarrell, Selby, MacGillivray, Gould, Lilford and others of lesser prominence, and some of these have gone through many editions, edited and amplified by ornithologists quite as notable as the original authors.

Each author has approached the subject in his own manner. Some, like MacGillivray, have made the text their main interest, and there is little doubt but that Dr. Coues, who was a great admirer of MacGillivray, got from his writings the idea of his famous 'Key'. Others who like our own Audubon were artists first and authors of necessity, have been mainly interested in the plates and some of them indeed did not write the text of their works at all.

Mr. Thorburn belongs to this latter, artist, class and as we explained in reviewing the earlier volumes of his work<sup>1</sup> he originally intended that it should be simply "a sketch-book of British Birds" but was induced later to write a short account of each species which is admittedly largely a compilation. It is from the standpoint of the plates, therefore, that his work is to be judged and we think that on this basis it stands ahead of anything of the kind that has been produced. Bewick and Yarrell were noted for the beauty of their woodcuts, those of the former being executed by himself, those of the latter by Thompson. In comparing the two a reviewer in the 'Report of the British Association' for 1844 states that the beauty of the latter is "much enhanced by the improvements in the preparation of paper and ink and in the mode of taking off the impressions," and adds that were Bewick's blocks "intrusted to one of our first rate London printers an edition could be now produced, far superior to any which was issued in the lifetime of the author." This fact must be borne in mind when considering the relative merits of colored plates and we think that Mr. Thorburn has been most fortunate in his engravers. The softness of the plates and the delicate gradation of the colors we have not seen excelled in any ornithological work, and one has to look close to be convinced that they are really produced by the 'half-tone' process. While it would be interesting to see the paintings of some of the other British artists reproduced with the same excellence, we do not think that Mr. Thorburn would have any difficulty in holding the foremost position. He and Mr. Fuertes stand apart from all others except Audubon in the thoroughness of their knowledge of the activities and postures of the birds which they represent. Many an artist can paint what has been aptly termed a "map" of a bird, accurate in proportions, colors etc., but it is quite another thing to give to each bird that individuality of pose or action which characterizes its species, and this is what Thorburn and Fuertes have done.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Auk,' January, 1916, p. 84.

The two volumes before us cover the water birds (except the Steganopodes and one plate of Herons, which appeared in Vol. 2), the Gallinaceous Birds and Pigeons. The Ducks, Pheasants and Grouse give the artist his best opportunities and he has prepared some superb plates. As in all such works the pleasure which we derive from the beautiful pictures is mingled with regret that it is not possible to give each species a plate to itself instead of having to crowd so many together. This is, of course, not the artist's fault and as we said in connection with the earlier volumes he has displayed wonderful ability in grouping his subjects, so that each plate appears as a single finished painting, while each figure is displayed to the best possible advantage.

All in all we think that Mr. Thorburn's work will take its place as the best series of colored illustrations of British birds that has yet appeared, and is a work that should be in all reference libraries. It will appeal moreover to many lovers of the beautiful in art and in illustration, to whom birds are of only secondary interest.— W. S.

**Evans' 'Birds of Britain.'**<sup>1</sup>— "This little work" we are told in the preface "though primarily intended for schools, may be found useful by those who require a short hand-book which includes the results of the most recent observations." With such a plan and with an author of Mr. Evans' reputation and ability we are led to expect an authoritative and thoroughly up-to-date treatise. This expectation has apparently been realized in the main text, but a perusal of the introductory chapter covering the more general principles of ornithology, is decidedly disappointing.

In his treatment of migration the author has nothing to say of the work of the late W. W. Cooke, while he seems to be quite ignorant of the experiments of Dr. J. B. Watson, with terns on the Dry Tortugas islands, which have probably thrown more light on the subject of migration than any other recent investigation. The time-honored causes of migration — changes of temperature and abundance of food supply — are cited, but no mention is made of periodic physiological activities; while the statement that "Hardy birds such as Penguins. . . need hardly migrate at all," does not accord with the accounts of the recent Antarctic expeditions, in which regular migrations covering hundreds of miles, from the pack ice to the nesting grounds, are described.

The half-tone illustrations are of varying merit and unfortunately we are not told which are photographs from nature and which from mounted specimens. In some the figures are so minute as to be of little value and this obscurity has led to the printing of the cut of the Spotted Flycatcher upside down.

The book will, however, prove of much value in spreading a knowledge of the British avifauna, which after all is its chief object.— W. S.

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<sup>1</sup>The Birds of Britain, their Distribution and Habits. By A. H. Evans. Cambridge, 1916. Small 8vo., pp. 1-275, numerous text figures. \$1.25. (G. P. Putnam's Sons.)