

RECENT LITERATURE.

Herrick's 'Audubon The Naturalist.'¹—Most of us have come to feel that we are so thoroughly conversant with the life of Audubon, many of us having prepared brief biographical sketches or addresses in connection with the numerous societies which bear his name, that we are apt to look upon a "new life" of the naturalist as necessarily a work of supererogation — a redressing of a well worn theme. If anyone open Prof. Herrick's volumes with such an idea in mind, he will very soon be disabused of it. Almost from the first page we realize that here at last is the real life of Audubon beside which all previous efforts fall into insignificance.

Not only is there a vast amount of new data covering the blanks in the accounts of former biographers, rounding out many incidents and correcting many errors, but the whole treatment is that of the disinterested, unprejudiced biographer and scholar. Previous sketches of the naturalist's life when carefully analyzed are found to be largely based upon his own brief autobiography, apparently written for his children, without reference to documents and hence relying mainly upon memory, with inevitable lapses and errors. Most of the estimates of his character and achievements too, are to a greater or less extent tinged with the spirit of hero worship, that such a lovable, picturesque and magnetic man as Audubon was bound to arouse even in those who knew him only through his writings and paintings. Prof. Herrick on the contrary has, we think, maintained an eminently just attitude throughout his work, as behooves the good biographer; always thoroughly in sympathy with his subject, praising his achievements, and yet frankly admitting his errors. The result is that after reading these volumes we seem to know Audubon better than we ever did before and to have a still better appreciation of him.

When we realize what Prof. Herrick has accomplished in tracing out the life of Jean Audubon, father of the ornithologist, and ascertaining the date and place of birth of the latter as well as the identity of his mother,—all of which were previously involved in obscurity, we wonder why no one ever made the attempt to solve these problems before, and why we were content to conclude that the last word had been said upon the life of this remarkable man.

Prof. Herrick realizing the inadequacy of existing biographies and the need of much additional original information systematically set about searching for it, with the result that he finally discovered in France the

¹ Audubon, The Naturalist. A History of his Life and Time. By Francis Hobart Herrick, Ph. D., Sc. D., Professor of Biology in Western Reserve University; Author of "The Home Life of Wild Birds," etc. In two volumes. Illustrated. D. Appleton and Company. New York and London, 1917. 8vo. Vol. I, pp. i-xl and 1-451. Vol. II, i-xiii and 1-494. Price, \$7.50 net.

greater part of the manuscripts, letters etc., of Jean Audubon, still in the possession of the family which had inherited his widow's estate. With this material it was possible to clear up all the doubts regarding the birth of the ornithologist and to sketch in detail the life of his father. We now learn that Audubon was born on April 26, 1785, not May 5, 1780, as is usually stated; and that the place of his birth was Les Cayes on the southern coast of Haiti not in Louisiana, while his mother proves to be a French creole, one Mlle. Rabin.

Continuing his researches Prof. Herrick brought to light many unpublished letters and documents in the possession of the descendants of Rozier, Audubon's business partner during his early life at Mill Grove and in Kentucky. These shed much interesting light upon this period of the naturalist's history. The well known collections of Auduboniana belonging to Mr. Joseph Y. Jeanes, of Philadelphia, Mr. Ruthven Deane, of Chicago, Col. John E. Thayer of Lancaster, Mass., and Harvard University, were carefully studied and all printed matter relating to Audubon has been consulted.

With the results of his researches extending over ten years, thoroughly digested, Prof. Herrick has written his notable biography,—or better, history, for it is far more than a biography, following out as it does so many side lines in chapters replete with interesting historical information relating to many persons, places and events only incidental to the main theme. The work abounds in detailed information, with foot-notes full of references and exact quotations, and an abundance of illustrations — photographic reproductions of historical documents and early sketches, portraits of Audubon and of various persons mentioned in the text, as well as views of buildings and places associated with the life of the ornithologist. There are also several reproductions in colors of some of the plates of the 'Birds of America.' A series of appendices contain copies of original documents of all sorts; a list of original drawings by Audubon which are still extant; a list of the subscribers to the 'Birds of America'; a list of the authentic likenesses of the ornithologist and a bibliography of two hundred and thirty-four titles of which Audubon's own contributions are seen to number but thirty-seven all told.

This brief resumé will give some idea of the scientific and historical value of the book. But it has other merits as well. Prof. Herrick has the happy faculty of writing history and biography in a manner that is not only eminently scholarly but exceedingly interesting and as a result we have in these two volumes a delightfully entertaining piece of literature, which will appeal to many who may care little for Audubon as an ornithologist.

It would be manifestly impossible in the short space of a review to call attention to all the original matter presented by Prof. Herrick and everyone interested in Audubon must read the volumes for himself. Mention may however be made of certain chapters, dealing with the character of the man, which has always been a matter of foremost interest.

In that dealing with Audubon's 'Episodes of Western Life,' Prof. Her-

rick has published some interesting parallel accounts by other writers of incidents described by the ornithologist, which differ widely as to detail. He says in commenting upon this discrepancy, "Whenever Audubon went directly to nature to exercise his pencil or brush or wrote with his subject before him, he was truth itself, but in writing offhand and from memory of past events he was wont to humor his fancy disregarding dates as readily as he did the accents on French words."

A striking example of this carelessness is seen in his unfortunate article 'Notes on the Rattlesnake,' which brought forth such bitter attacks upon his veracity as a naturalist. This remarkable account describes the venomous reptile pursuing a Gray Squirrel through the branches of a tall tree and eventually capturing it after leaping to the ground after it. This remarkably detailed account, says Prof. Herrick, "could not possibly have been an invention for it is strictly and minutely in accordance with facts except in one important particular; the snake whose behavior Audubon watched and so accurately described was not a Rattlesnake but the Blue Racer or Black Snake . . . by some curious twist of his notes or memory the species became confused in his published account."

This peculiar trait so well appreciated by Prof. Herrick, has to our mind been at the root of all the unfortunate controversies over Audubon's work as well as of the so called "rivalry" between Audubon and Wilson, which of course did not begin until long after the latter's death. To the scholarly closet naturalist like George Ord, as to anyone trained in the painstaking accuracy of systematic natural history, the freedom and looseness of Audubon's style, the "poetic license" with which he handled scientific matters, was utterly repugnant. They could recognize no natural history but that fostered in the museum. John Cassin, another closet ornithologist had exactly this same idea of what constituted a naturalist and as he never showed any prejudice against Audubon and indeed seems to have been rather friendly disposed towards him, it is interesting to note his opinion of him, which by the way Prof. Herrick does not seem to have given. He met Audubon at the Philadelphia Academy in June, 1845, and wrote to Baird on the twenty-third of that month: "Audubon has been here — do not particularly admire him — is no naturalist — positively not by nature — an artist no reasonable doubt of it." ¹

So the estimates of Audubon will probably vary for all time to come according to the personal temperament and attitude of mind of his critics.

As to the Audubon and Wilson "controversy"; to anyone who has carefully and impartially studied the lives and characters of the two men the idea of comparing them by the same standard of judgment is utterly preposterous. They represented entirely different sides of ornithological study and one might as well try to argue, in these days of extreme specialization, who is the greatest living ornithologist, as to say that either of these men was greater than the other.

¹ Leading American Men of Science, p. 80.

That Prof. Herrick's volumes contain references to all the existing matter relating to the ornithologist we doubt, and he would probably be the first to admit this possibility. The very amount of material, astonishing as it is, that he has gathered together only makes it more probable that there are yet other published notes and manuscripts undiscovered, but they are not likely to alter in any material way the history that he has written, even while his pages were going through the press several notes have appeared in print, among which we may mention the description of Audubon republished by John H. Sage in 'The Auk' (April, 1917, p. 239). Another article in the same journal 'Miss Lawson's Recollections of Ornithologists' by F. L. Burns (July, 1917, p. 275), corrects a statement regarding Wilson which we notice Prof. Herrick has perpetuated, *i. e.* referring to "his fingers stiffened by the hard labor of his hands." This we always thought to have been a fiction of some of his biographers, as he wrote a beautiful hand, played skilfully on the flute and worked at the loom, none of which accomplishments accord well with "hands knotted and hardened by labor," these points Miss Lawson emphasizes adding that her mother spoke of Wilson's hands as small and delicate.

In closing, we should like to emphasize in the strongest terms Prof. Herrick's plea for the restoration and preservation of the dwellings of Audubon and his sons in New York City which "though in dire neglect, are not beyond repair," and that the ground where they stand, between Riverside Drive and the Hudson River, should be converted into a real Audubon Park. As he truly says "such a memorial would contribute to the instruction and pleasure of all the people, for every generation of Americans that is to come" — and we may add that this closing sentence of Prof. Herrick admirably describes the volumes that he himself has given to the public, the contents of which we have here endeavored to describe.—
W. S.

The New 'Birds of America.'¹—The present work the publishers tell us in the preface is put forth to meet the demand for a single work which will present "a complete review of what is known today about American birds." While this is a pretty large task even for the imposing array of authors and artists whose names appear on the title page to say nothing of the advisory board of nineteen more, nevertheless we think that the work will fill a very general need. It is by all odds the most thoroughly illustrated work on North American birds that has yet appeared and the great demand for the admirable colored plates of Mr. Fuertes, which

¹Birds of America. Editor-in-Chief, T. Gilbert Pearson; Consulting Editor, John Burroughs; Managing Editor, George Glidden; Associate Editor, J. Ellis Burdick; Special Contributors, Edward H. Forbush, Herbert K. Job, William L. Finley and L. Nelson Nichols. Artists, L. A. Fuertes, R. B. Horsfall, R. I. Brasher and Henry Thurston. The University Society Inc. New York (1917). Vol. I, pp. i-xviii, + 1-272; Vol. II, pp. i-xiv, + 1-271; Vol. III, pp. i-xviii, + 1-289. 4to, numerous illustrations, and 110 colored plates. Comprising Volumes I-III of the 'Nature Lovers' Library'.