

however, attention may be called to the caption explanatory of fig. 21 (opposite p. 610), where there is evidently a mix-up of some sort. Then too, as regards the sentence at the foot of page 178, summing up the evidence in a peculiarly interesting line of argument, while the point the author wishes to make is evident enough, the wording is so vague as to bear an interpretation almost contrary to the meaning that it is intended to convey.—H. S. SWARTH.

ROBERT CUSHMAN MURPHY'S "NATURAL HISTORY OBSERVATIONS FROM THE MEXICAN PORTION OF THE COLORADO DESERT" (Abstract of Proceedings, Linnaean Society of New York, nos. 24-25, 1917, pp. 43-101, pls. I-VI) is well worth the reading by anyone who is interested in the desert, be he traveller or naturalist. Murphy's "Narrative" of his month's trip south from Calexico in search of antelope for the Brooklyn Museum will furnish much information of value to the prospective visitor to that or any similar region; while the more or less blasé frequenter of desert country will have his memories pleasingly vivified by the accurate and lively description of day-by-day experiences. Some of the comments, such as those upon the psychology of the burro, and the fearsomeness of rattlesnakes, verge upon the naive, but usually save themselves by reason of refreshing allusions, often of keen aptness. One's first experience in a new land is certainly the one to take advantage of in recording impressions, and Murphy proves himself to have realized this to good purpose—aided by a ready pen.

Ornithologically, we find that there are many good field observations scattered through the narrative, as also in the "Annotated List of the Birds" (pp. 80-100); for example, upon the apparent ability of the Desert Quail to go entirely without water. This seems to be a really new idea, and should be followed up by others in a position to ascertain the facts. The "List" numbers 134 species and is based not only upon the author's own observations but also on a previous paper by Stone and Rhoads (Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci., Phila., 1905, pp. 676-690). The only serious criticism we can make of Murphy's work is that he should have taken Rhoads' sight determinations at face value and thus perpetuated a lot of exceedingly doubtful records (see CONDOR, VIII, 1906, p. 78). Also why not as well have taken into account W. W. Price's article on "Some Winter Birds of the Lower Colorado Valley" (*Bull. Cooper Orn. Club*, I,

1899, pp. 89-93), which covered nearly the same region?—J. GRINNELL.

BIRDS OF AMERICA; Editor-in-Chief, T. GILBERT PEARSON, National Association of Audubon Societies. Consulting Editor, John Burroughs. Managing Editor, George Gladden. Associate Editor, J. Ellis Burdick. Special Contributors, Edward H. Forbush, William L. Finley, Herbert K. Job, L. Nelson Nichols. Artists, L. A. Fuertes, R. B. Horsfall, R. I. Brasher, Henry Thurston. Nature Lovers Library [vols. I-III]. The University Society Inc.; New York [1917]; 4to, vol. I, pp. xviii+272; vol. II, pp. xiv+271; vol. III, pp. xviii+289; pls. five+106, numerous half-tone illustrations and some line drawings, all these being scattered throughout the three volumes. Issued about November 1, 1917.

I suppose there is no copyright on the title "Birds of America". Even so, it seems a sacrilege that this distinctive title, once used with authority, should be now appropriated for a work which falls far behind what such a title ought to cover. In the first place, the present book deals with any approach to adequacy only with birds of the eastern half of North America north of the Mexican line; and in the second place, the treatment is at best, save pictorially, superficial and far from "complete", though this word is used rather blatantly in the claims for the work set forth in the Preface, Introduction, and announcements. From a strictly scientific point of view I believe that this work, instead of advancing the previous standard of ornithological output, or even maintaining it, tends to lower it.

It is from the western viewpoint that the book here under review is most seriously at fault. The text, almost wherever it deals with exclusively Californian or western birds, is characterized by inconsequential verbiage where it is not actually misleading or even erroneous. I will cite some specific illustrations.

The Mountain Chickadee, so widespread from the Rocky Mountains westwardly, is dismissed (vol. III, p. 212) with one paragraph as "very similar" to its "eastern relative"! The account of our common California Brown Towhee (vol. III, p. 61, under "Cafion Towhee") is simply nonsense. The Abert Towhee (same volume, p. 62) is accorded just six lines of 10-point comment, the first sentence of which is: "Despite the fact that the Abert's Towhee is the largest of the plain Towhees he is extremely shy."