

## RECENT LITERATURE.

**A Naturalist's Rambles about Home.\***—Under this taking title Dr. Abbott has written a popular book—consisting in part of previously published essays—on natural history, detailing in a pleasant way his long-continued observations on the habits of the beasts, birds, reptiles, and fishes met with in his rambles in the immediate neighborhood of his home at Trenton, New Jersey. Nearly one-half of the book (pp. 96-249 and 451-475) relates to birds, which are treated in Chapters XII-XXVII, in addition to which an annotated list is given in the Appendix. As regards the birds, the author's remarks, aside from the List, relate in the main to comparatively few species, many others, however, being mentioned incidentally. The titles of the chapters are suggestive of the matter and method of treatment. Under 'Our Birds in General' are noted changes in the habits and distribution of certain species, as, for example, the Bluebird and Carolina Wren, which are regarded as now resident species, though believed to have been formerly migratory; the Summer Redbird and Mockingbird of late appear only as rare stragglers rather than as common summer residents, as was formerly their status; and other southern species are cited as of much more common occurrence in winter than they were twenty years ago. Under 'The Migration of Inland Birds' are discussed at some length various phenomena of migration, to which are added speculations regarding the cause of migration. 'A Short Study of Birds' Nests' gives detailed observations on the nesting of several species, as the Baltimore Oriole, Robin, etc., the subject being considered with reference to Mr. Wallace's well-known essay on the 'Philosophy of Birds' Nests,' whose views, Dr. Abbott finds, "to a certain extent, at least, . . . will apply to our birds." A chapter is also devoted to 'The Songs of Birds,' and others to the following subjects: 'Chats and Wrens: a Summer's Study'; 'The Carolina Wren: a Year of its Life'; 'Do Swallows Hibernates?' Rose-breasted Grosbeaks'; 'Feeding Habits of Kingfishers'; 'The Saw-Whet and other Owls'; 'Notes on our Herons'; 'Notes on the Wood Duck,' etc. These chapters, and others with less explicit titles, abound with observations on various species of birds, interspersed quite freely with speculations as to the cause of observed or suspected changes of habits, etc. The chapter on the hibernation of Swallows attempts to account for the belief in hibernation, and to explain the 'testimony' that has come down to us regarding alleged instances of hibernation. The hibernation of Swallows the author believes to be merely 'a fancy'; but as regards our Chimney Swift, the case seems somewhat different, and the author confesses himself 'fairly staggered.' To this subject he contributes several suggestive facts, such as the finding of living Chimney Swifts in a stove-

---

\*A Naturalist's Rambles about Home. By Charles C. Abbott. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1, 3, and 5 Bond Street, 1884. 8vo. pp. 485.

funnel in December, and others, apparently but a short time dead, in a hollow sycamore in February.

The ornithologist will be surprised at many of the facts recorded in Dr. Abbott's book, and will feel inclined to think that New Jersey birds have ways of their own, particularly as regards times of migration. The Bank Swallow, for instance, is repeatedly said to be the earliest of all the Swallows to arrive in spring, and the last to disappear in autumn, the date of arrival being 'often as early as the 10th of March,' and that they depart late in October, or may remain longer, 'undaunted by the chill November fogs.' The experience of other observers is quite different, the Bank Swallow being almost universally reported as the latest to arrive of all the Swallows, and one of the earliest to leave in autumn. Dr. Abbott's dates for the spring arrival are a month earlier than those given for the latitude of Washington, and two months earlier than the dates usually given for their arrival in the Middle and Eastern States! Instead of being the earliest of the Swallows to arrive in spring, it is commonly preceded by a full month by the White-bellied Swallow,—at least this is the uniform testimony of all previous writers. There are many other marked discrepancies between the behavior of birds in New Jersey—particularly as regards migration—as reported by Dr. Abbott, and as observed in contiguous territory by others. New Jersey Owls seem also possessed of eccentricities, since in Dr. Abbott's chapter on 'A Secluded Corner,' we are regaled with an account of a family of Short-eared Owls observed "during a pleasant moonlight evening last *October*," the younger members of which are represented as still too young to be able to fly well or to provide for themselves. Strangely, too, for Short-eared Owls, their nest was '*in a tree*.' Short-eared Owls outside of New Jersey have the habit of nesting much earlier than this, usually in the Middle and Eastern States, from April to June; furthermore, their nesting place is on the ground, usually in marshes, and not in trees. But the Owls are not the only peculiar creatures which enter into this pleasing story, New Jersey frogs having also strange habits, since the 'racket made by the frogs,' on this beautiful *October* evening, did not wholly prevent Dr. Abbott's hearing the 'varied utterances' of the Owls. Even as a piece of natural history romance, 'A Secluded Corner' is far from a success, while as a piece of sober narrative, detailing facts of observation, as it purports to be, it is a most unfortunate composition,\* since such interludes of

---

\* In the desire not to do the author injustice, his attention was called to some of the eccentricities of New Jersey birds as narrated in his book, and since the above was written we have been favored with a brief reply, in which he says he has "found *Otus brachyotus* nesting in a capacious hollow of a tree—not a cooped up hole that would suit a little Screech (*S. asio*)."  
He also says "October should read *August*," and that Bank Swallow "should read White-bellied." It strikes us, however, that the substitution of August for October illy harmonizes with the context, while to substitute White-bellied Swallow for Bank Swallow results in an incongruity bordering upon absurdity, as may be readily seen by referring to p. 100, and especially by reading pp. 161-163, as well as other passages in the book.

reverie reflect unfavorably, not only on other parts of the book, but upon the general trustworthiness of the author's scientific writings. Even in natural history romance, probabilities should at least be kept in view. In other parts of the book there are passages which evince a surprising degree of ignorance on points well-known to many much less pretentious observers.

Throughout the work the author betrays a penchant for gratuitous and not particularly sagacious speculation, as witness repeated attempts to account for changes in habits when the author himself admits that he is not sure that the changes have in reality occurred. There is also a looseness of expression at times that ill-becomes a writer whose rambles are made habitually with note-book in hand, recording on the spot whatever seems worthy of note. The List, in the Appendix, of 219 species of birds is practically, the author tells us, a reproduction of Turnbull's list, "with annotations based upon the observations of the sixteen years which have elapsed since Dr. Turnbull wrote his work." He says his list "may be said to constitute the ornithic fauna of Mercer County." It is, however, disappointing as a faunal list; the annotations are unsatisfactorily meagre, in many cases merely quotations from Turnbull, and in many others are marred by more or less obvious misstatements.—J. A. A.

**Seebohm's History of British Birds.\***—This work, the prospectus states, is intended to form three royal octavo volumes, of about 600 pages each, and will be published in six parts, illustrated with between 60 and 70 colored plates. It is the author's intention to issue a part every six months. The illustrations, executed in chromo-lithography, are to include all the known eggs of British birds, and those of several species will now be figured for the first time. Four parts have already reached this country, the first three being dated 1883 and the fourth 1884. The typographical execution of the work is excellent, and the plates are entitled to high praise. The author's style is attractive, and his fitness for the undertaking being well-known, the work cannot prove otherwise than a most important addition to the literature of British ornithology. In respect to nomenclature and classification Mr. Seebohm is conservative to a degree approaching eccentricity, but in respect to the general subject his views are liberal, philosophic, and progressive. As regards details of distribution, habits, etc., of the species treated, we are not in position to judge critically, but the work seems to carry the stamp of care and thoroughness. The illustrations have certainly rarely been equalled.

In an 'Introduction' of some twenty or more pages the author unfolds his plan and principles of work. He considers, very properly, that "the question of the development of species by evolution is one which lies at

---

\*A History of British Birds, with colored Illustrations of their Eggs. By Henry Seebohm. London: Published for the author by R. H. Porter, 6 Tenterden Street, W., and Dulau & Co., Soho Square, W. Roy. 8vo. Vol. I, 1883, pp. xxiv + 613, pl. 20; Vol. II (Part 1, 1883, Part 2, 1884), pp. xxxiv + 600, pl. 22.