

A Life of John Davis. By Clements R. Markham, C.B., F.R.S. (London: George Philip and Son, 1889.)

THIS is the first volume of what promises to be a series of great value and interest. The object of the series, as explained by the editors, is to provide a biographical history of geographical discovery. Each of the great men who "have dared to force their way into the unknown, and so unveiled to us the face of mother earth," will form the subject of a volume; and an attempt will be made, not only to present a vivid picture of the character and adventures of these heroes, but to estimate exactly the scientific value of their work. If the scheme is carried out in a manner worthy of the stirring tales to which it relates, the series will be a source of much wholesome pleasure to all who care to understand how our present knowledge of the earth's surface came to be built up, and who are capable of appreciating the splendid qualities, moral and intellectual, of all who have won for themselves a place in the list of illustrious explorers. The subject of the present volume could not have been entrusted to a more suitable writer than Mr. Clements Markham. He tells in a simple and natural style the tale of Davis's life, displaying at every stage of the story full and accurate knowledge, and summing up clearly the achievements which entitle the discoverer of Davis Straits to be ranked "among the foremost sea-worthies of the glorious reign of Queen Elizabeth." Two admirable chapters are devoted to the following-up of the work of Davis, and in an appendix the author gives all necessary information as to authorities. Mr. Markham has done his work well, and it will be no easy task for the writers of the succeeding volumes to maintain the series at the same high level.

The Brook and its Banks. By the Rev. J. G. Wood. (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1889.)

The Zoo. Second Series. By the Rev. J. G. Wood. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1889.)

THE first of these two books was written for the *Girls' Own Paper*, and a few chapters of it have been printed in that periodical. Now the complete work is issued separately, and it will no doubt be welcomed by many readers who have already profited by the late author's well-known writings. The reader is supposed to be conducted along the banks of an English brook, and to learn, as he advances, the characteristics of the living creatures which are to be found by the way. The idea is carried out brightly, and—we need scarcely say—with ample knowledge. There are many illustrations, and they add considerably to the interest of the text.

"The Zoo" contains an account of animals of the weasel tribe, the seal tribe, the rodent family, and various kinds of oxen. The descriptions are clear, compact, and lively, and cannot fail to interest the young readers for whose benefit the book was originally planned. Mr. Harrison Weir contributes a number of excellent illustrations.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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Protective Coloration of Eggs.

THE following letter records a very interesting observation which is new to me, and I should be glad to hear if any similar fact has been noted before. If not, it would be very interesting

if those who have the opportunity would, in the coming spring, seek for as many nests as possible of the red-backed shrike, and see if they can find any correlation between the colours of the eggs and the lining material of the nest.

Parkstone, November 1.

ALFRED R. WALLACE.

"Merchant Taylors' School, Crosby, Liverpool,
October 15, 1889.

"DEAR SIR,—I wish to bring before your notice an observation of mine relative to the purpose of colour in animals.

"The red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*). Colour of eggs—either pale blue or green, white ground with zone of spots at larger end; or, pink ground with reddish spots.

"Observation.—The colour of the lining substance of the nest—such as roots—assimilates to the colour of the eggs, being dirty gray material when the eggs are to be pale (blue or green) white, but being of red-brown roots, &c., when the eggs are to be pink.

"Evidence for above statement. About sixteen years ago I was a lad of fifteen, an enthusiastic birds'-nester, living at Maidstone, and found several (I forget how many) nests, and noticed this; and it so puzzled me—because I could not make out how the bird knew what coloured lining to select, because she made her nest before she laid her eggs—that I have never forgotten it. In those days I had never heard of 'The Origin of Species,' nor did I trouble myself about evolutionary theories, knowing nothing about them, so that there was no predisposing cause in me to make a wrong observation. Yet I remember it was only a school-boy's observation, and therefore it needs confirmation.

"Assume the fact. Protective, obviously. Yet, how does the bird know? We know birds build nests from observing other nests, and not by instinct wholly.

"(a) Have we here incipient species, in which the young, emerging from pink eggs, remember their own infancy in a reddish nest?

"(b) Has the sight of the red lining an influence over the mother to tinge the eggs pink—i.e. would a shrike brought up in a pink cage be more likely to lay pink eggs? or a gray rabbit in a black or white hutch have a greater proportion of black or white variants in her litter?

"(c) A mere coincidence; too few observations.

"Will you forgive one who intends to be amongst your audience on October 29 and 30, if not prevented, thus trespassing on your time—time which, spent in research, is so valuable to the whole scientific world? Yet, I do think my boyhood's observation is worth recording, if only to direct other observers.

"E.g. has the amount of white quartzite veins in a cliff, or chalk, any influence in the percentage of white, as against blue, eggs of the common guillemot?

"Believe me, yours faithfully,

"(Rev.) FRED. F. GRENSTED."

Science and the India Civil Service Examinations.

THE position of science candidates in the Civil Service competitions is largely in the hands of the science examiners. In some cases they have practically struck their subject out of the schedule by requiring, or by acquiescing in, the demand for a standard of knowledge far beyond the proportion of marks assigned. Even in the last India Civil Service competition the first two men in chemistry only scored 196 and 195 respectively, whilst the first two in German, out of the same maximum, gained 359 and 353. If the eminent men of science who undertake these examinations would see that science had fair play, many more candidates would be encouraged to study it. Whatever the private views of the Civil Service Commissioners may be, their absolute justice and honourable impartiality are unassailable. Even if they did not altogether concur in the opinions of the examiners, they would give their arguments careful consideration, and see that all interests should be duly regarded.

It will not advance the claims of science to weight them with the very doubtful proposition that "the Universities of England and India" are the only places where "well educated" men are to be found. Many most distinguished men of science have not had the advantage of a University degree in early life. No one would venture to class them for this reason in "an inferior order of men."

HENRY PALIN GURNEY.

2 Powis Square, W., November 15.