

THREE NEW BIRD BOOKS.¹

THE issue of these three works, which have no connection with one another, save as regards the approximate time of their birth, serves to indicate the increasing popularity of ornithology, and a consequent demand for histories of the avifauna of each and every country. As regards Great Britain, systematic treatises on its bird-fauna are, as we all know, to be counted by the dozen; and the chief business of the ornithologist of the future should accordingly be concentrated on the habits and distribution of the birds inhabiting this area. In America, on the other hand, much doubtless remains to be done in the working out of the details of local faunas; and there is accordingly in all probability ample room for the second and third volumes on our list. Although these are primarily intended to popularise the subject, they both possess a certain amount of importance to the systematic naturalist as being, apparently, accurate lists of local faunas. Not that by this statement we intend in any way to disparage the value of the work standing first on the list; we ourselves being at the present day inclined to assign a higher value to treatises dealing with the habits and environment of animals than to those devoted to their taxonomy.

The brothers Kearton appear to have set themselves the task of photographing and describing the nest and eggs of every species of bird known to breed in the British Islands; and although their labours are still unfinished, the issue of the present volume brings them not very far from their goal. To those who have not made the attempt (and, so far as we are aware, the Messrs. Kearton stand alone in this respect) it may be difficult to realise the amount of labour in the task which the author and his brother have set themselves. But when we are told in the preface that the mere railway and steamboat travelling hitherto undertaken totals up to something like ten thousand miles, while many valuable hours and days have been spent in unsuccessful tramps across bog and fell, it becomes evident that the task is no sinecure, either from the point of view of time or expense. Only strong enthusiasm could, indeed, have enabled the author and his brother to have persevered thus far, and it may be hoped that circumstances will permit them to complete their arduous labours.

The volume in which the nests of the commoner British birds were figured was published in 1895; and as the present issue contains figures of the nidification of no less than fifty-seven additional species, it is evident that neither author nor artist have been idle since that date. Exquisite as are the illustrations in the first volume, those in the present issue are in many cases even more successful, and bear self-apparent testimony to the care spent on them by the artist. As an example, we reproduce the figure of Fulmar Petrels nesting. Neither is the letterpress less attractive. Naturally, the brothers met with many adventures during their wanderings, and we may particu-

larly direct attention to the account on p. 109 of the manner in which the great Skua attacked one of them as he approached its nest. Very curious, too, is the habit these birds have of building an additional nest in the neighbourhood of the one in use, to which the eggs or young may be conveyed when the former is flooded or otherwise damaged. The author by no means confines himself to the description of the nests and eggs, but gives an interesting account of the kind of country in which they are found, a view of the scenery distinctive of the habitat of particular species being frequently given.

As already said, the text, from a natural history point of view, is thoroughly satisfactory; but it must be confessed that it is not altogether free from literary blemishes. Take, for example, a sentence in reference to the Siskin (p. 104), which runs as follows:—"The nest has been found sparingly in various parts of England from time to time, but in Scotland it breeds regularly in many of the great pine forests so well suited to its habits."

The foregoing mention of the great Skua reminds us that Mr. Kearton has much to say regarding the efficiency or otherwise of the regulations in force for the protection of the rarer birds and their eggs, his remarks on this

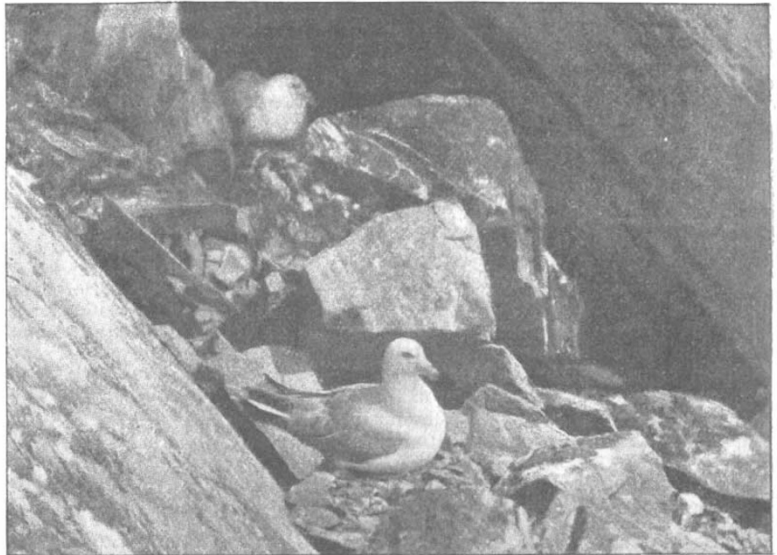


FIG. 1.—Fulmar Petrels Nesting (from Kearton's "Rarer British Breeding Birds").

subject being well worthy the best attention of County Councils and landowners interested in bird protection. While not one of those who urge that on no account should a comparatively rare species ever be shot, as witness his observations in reference to the Peregrine Falcon, he considers that the present wild bird protection laws are almost a dead letter. After stating that eggs of species specially protected by law are openly hunted for by people of all ages and conditions, he adds: "I have no hesitation in saying that the only real good done in the United Kingdom in the way of bird preservation has been accomplished by private efforts." He then goes on to say that, as a matter of fact, the enforcement of the law as it stands frequently ends in the destruction of the bird it strives to protect by calling attention to the places where it occurs. His remedy is to restrict protective laws to the dozen species or so for which they are most urgently needed, and to afford effective protection to such selected species during the whole of the breeding season by means of reliable watchers.

Commending these important suggestions to those

¹ "Our Rarer British Breeding Birds; their Nests, Eggs, and Summer Haunts." By R. Kearton. Illustrated from photographs by C. Kearton. Pp. xvi + 149. (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1899.)

"The Birds of Rhode Island." By R. H. Howe, jun., and E. Sturtevant. Pp. 111. Illustrated. Privately printed, 1895.

"The Birds of Eastern North America—Water Birds." Part I. Key to the Families and Species. By C. B. Cory. Pp. ix + 142. Illustrated. (Chicago: Field Columbian Museum, 1899.)

they most concern, we take leave with regret of one of the most attractive little volumes on birds it has been our fortune to peruse.

Of a very different type is the work standing second on our list, although here, too, we have to call attention to some excellent illustrations of the environment of particular species of birds. Apart from the classified list of species frequenting Rhode Island, the leading idea in Messrs. Howe and Sturtevant's little volume seems to be the peculiar nature of bird migration in this district, much of which takes place to seaward of the island itself. Especially interesting are certain local migratory movements, both along the coast and in Narragansett Bay; foremost among which is the westward migration of white-winged Scoters in May. These birds winter in the neighbourhood of Cape Cod, and during their spring migration fly west, it is said in millions, across Rhode Island, and then shape their course in a north-westerly direction for the great lakes, where they breed.

Following a list of the nesting times of the various species breeding on the island, the authors give an interesting account of "Cormorant Rock," which appears to be the favourite bird-haunt. This is followed by the detailed list of species; the special interest of which can be best appreciated by local observers and students of geographical distribution. In reference to the description of "Cormorant Rock," we may point out to the authors that it is somewhat redundant to speak of the "Island of Rhode Island"; and that the "mesa top of the rock" is a phrase of which the meaning is not quite as apparent as it might be.

Of the third member of the trilogy we cannot at present speak very fully, since the part before us appears to be only a small instalment of what promises to be a work of some size and importance. Mr. Cory is already well known to bird-lovers by several works devoted to the avifauna of North America and the West Indies; while to the sportsman his name is familiar as the author of "Hunting and Fishing in Florida."

In the present work it appears to be his object to teach the beginner the external anatomy of a bird (if such an expression be permissible), and then to lead him on to learn how to distinguish and recognise the various kinds of "water birds" found in eastern North America. Although using the latter term in a very wide sense, and including under it such diverse forms as Auks, Gulls, Ducks, Herons, and Snipe, his "keys" appear to be carefully drawn up, and to suffice for the identification by an artificial method of the various species inhabiting the area of which the work treats. The illustrations, although some are on an unduly small scale, are for the most part of a high grade of excellence, and serve to elucidate the technical matter of the text. It is, however, distinctly a subject for regret that the author has seen fit to multiply in a most unnecessary degree the number of "families" of water birds. He divides the Limicolæ, for instance, into the *Phalaropodidae*, *Recurvirostridae*, *Scolopacidae*, *Charadriidae*, *Aphrizzidae*, and *Haematopodidae*, whereas in the British Museum Catalogue the whole of these are included in a single family. Moreover, if such divisions were necessary the term *Himantopodidae* should have been employed, instead of *Recurvirostridae*, for the Stilts and Avocets.

Neither is the author quite happy in some of the statements in the Introduction, as, for example, when he speaks of the extinct New Zealand Eagle (*Harpagornis*) as being the prototype of the "Roc of nursery lore." In all probability the honour of that position belongs to the extinct Malagasy *Epyornis*, and most assuredly the legend does not owe its origin to the "nursery."

On the whole, however, the work, so far as we can judge at present, appears well adapted for its purpose, and we shall look forward with interest to its completion.

R. L.

THE LONDON UNIVERSITY ELECTION.

EVERY graduate of the University of London who has the advancement of learning and the best interests of his University at heart, will give careful consideration to the address which has been drawn up by Sir Michael Foster's Election Committee, and the accompanying letter from Sir Michael Foster himself. These two documents should completely remove the impression that the return of Sir Michael Foster would mean the neglect of the rights and privileges of private students. The position of such students and the system of open examination for them have already been definitely settled by Parliament, and it is improbable that any change will be made no matter which candidate is elected. It is therefore not reasonable to think that the electors will let this question influence their votes. Sir Michael Foster stands both for external and internal students, and not for any particular party or as the champion of any one section of the graduates. As a man of distinguished eminence, who has shown his regard for the welfare of the University, we claim for him the suffrages of an intellectual electorate. By returning him to Parliament, not only will the progress of the University be secured, and a member be obtained whose best energies will be used to further the interests of all branches of learning, but the existence of a University representative will be justified.

The following correspondence has been sent to the electors:—

1, New Court, Carey Street,
Lincoln's Inn, London,
January 26, 1900.

SIR,—It will soon be the duty of the Members of the Convocation of the University of London to choose a representative in Parliament in the place of Sir John Lubbock.

It is now generally admitted that University constituencies should send to Parliament men distinguished in learning, science, or literature, and qualified therefore to strengthen the Legislature in dealing with those questions which most nearly concern the intellectual interests of the community. This has been recognised of late years in the election of Sir George Stokes, Prof. Jebb, Mr. Lecky and Sir William Anson, in which cases the example set by the University of London in its election of Mr. Lowe and Sir John Lubbock was followed by the older Universities. We hope that the graduates will not now depart from the precedent set on those occasions.

At the present time, when the reconstruction of the University is imminent, it is most important that the representative selected should be a graduate of the highest literary or scientific distinction, able to speak with authority on matters connected with education or research. The new duties which the University will have to undertake must raise questions on which the Government and Parliament will look to the representative of the University for guidance; while the graduates will desire that the claims of the University shall be adequately supported by their member.

So far as the domestic policy of the University is concerned, it should be borne in mind that this is now definitely and permanently settled by the Act of Parliament of last Session, which provides guarantees for the maintenance, in unimpaired efficiency, of the system of open examination for external students. No interference with this settlement on the part of the Legislature or the Government is to be expected or will be required.

Sir Michael Foster, K.C.B., M.D. (Lond.), Senior Secretary of the Royal Society, and now President of the British Association, has, at our earnest request, consented to be nominated for the vacant seat. He holds, in the estimation of the public, as well as in that of scientific men, such a distinguished position—not only among the graduates of the University, but among the leaders of scientific thought in Europe—that it is altogether unnecessary for us to dwell on his qualifications in this respect. We may say, however, without fear of contradiction, that there is no one whose opinion on questions affecting scientific education and research or the study of medicine would have greater weight in the House of Commons. His long academical experience, first at University College, London, and subsequently at Cambridge, together with his full knowledge of University