

THE WILD ANIMALS OF NORTH AMERICA¹

THIS is a scientific work of a very unusual kind. It consists of a series of capital life studies of the most important big and small mammals of North America, by Edward W. Nelson, Chief of the Biological Survey, with admirable colored pictures by Louis Agassiz Fuertes and track sketches by Ernest Thompson Seton, and some excellent photographs and sketches by other men.

The book is of first-rate importance. Mr. Nelson, the Chief of the Biological Survey, is one of the best and keenest naturalists we have ever had, and a man of singularly balanced development. He is a trained laboratory and closet scientist. He is a field naturalist of wide experience from Alaska to Mexico. He is an exceptionally close and accurate observer. He is able to deduce the truth from the facts he has seen; and he has the gift of recording this truth with power and charm.

This unusual combination is absolutely necessary if first-class work is to be done. No lover of science who knows the works of the great masters of science from Huxley down can fail to realize the immense increase in efficiency which comes to the scientific leader of thought if he possesses or can acquire the ability to portray with clearness, vividness, and attraction what he has to say, so that it can appeal to scientific laymen and become part of the store of garnered wisdom to which all men of

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knowledge and cultivation have access. Nothing is more fatal, whether from the standpoint of science or of history or of any other branch of knowledge, than that tendency to segregation between what is serious and what is interesting, which results in a pile of solemn unreadable volumes of fact on the one hand, and on the other in a pile of agreeably written matter which is not true. The latter is wholly valueless; the former has only the value that attaches to bricks in a rubbish heap—later some builder may be able to use a few of them.

This book is of interest to every intelligent out-of-doors man or woman. It is of great interest to the field naturalist. It is of interest to the intelligent hunter. It is a delight to the lover of the life of the open. It is also of high value to every laboratory naturalist worth being called such—that is, to every naturalist whose horizon is not limited by collecting, comparing, and recording "specimens" in the stamp-collection spirit. The wide grasp of the subject shown in the vigorous introductory sketches, first to the big mammals and then to the small, shows a power of generalization indispensable to the first-class worker.

The life histories themselves surpass anything of the kind that we have yet had on so considerable a scale. They are better than the excellent life histories of mammals by Audubon and Bachman, and the few good recent studies have covered much smaller fields. Owing to the conditions under which the book has been produced they are of unequal value; but

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other observer has done such admirable work in regions faunistically so remote, ranging from the Arctic tundras to the hot deserts. The descriptions of Mr. Nelson's experiences with kangaroo rats and pocket mice are among the best and most delightful of all such things that have ever been written, and there are many other of the biographies, especially of the smaller mammals, which are almost, or indeed quite, on the same high level.

Therefore this is a book which should be read and owned by all, for it is of both present and permanent value. The matter and the manner, the letterpress and the plates, all combine to give it high worth. We owe its production to the National Geographic Society, which expended a hundred thousand dollars on it in the two issues of the magazine in which it appeared as two separate articles. The National Geographic Society, in consequence, share with Messrs. Nelson and Fuertes the credit for an undertaking which makes us the debtors of all of them.

And therefore it is all the more to be regretted that they should have come near "spoiling the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar," and have seriously marred the book as a "permanent natural history" by a slovenly failure to recast the articles into proper

book form. Nothing has been done but put the two magazine articles together, even retaining the magazine numbering on the pages and the magazine headings on the pages. For magazine purposes one article was entitled "Larger Mammals" and one "Smaller Mammals." The absurdity of this arrangement in a permanent book is sufficiently shown by the fact that the possum is classed with the "larger" and the (much bigger) porcupine with the "smaller" animals. The species are jumbled together higgledy-piggledy without any sequence of order. The properly introductory matter is needlessly and exasperatingly split into two parts; there is an index (in the middle of the book) for the larger mammals, and none for the smaller; the plates, text, and track prints for the different species are scattered through the volume with almost no reference to one another. In consequence, this really first-class work is given a stitched-together, makeshift look which utterly belies its worth. When so much money and effort were spent, it is certainly a misfortune that there was the penny-wise-pound-foolish scrimping of the trivial additional amount of money and effort which would have added incalculably to the permanent value of the book.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.