

The preface and introduction show that the authors thoroughly appreciate the difficulties before them, and are determined to spare no pains to make their work as useful as possible; and though they have, from their inability to examine the types, been obliged temporarily to adopt many species about which they evidently have grave doubts, yet a new edition will no doubt enable these supposed species to be relegated to their proper position. The authors' opinion on this important question may be quoted as follows:—

“With regard to species and varieties we have found it convenient to describe where there is any room for doubt under its own distinctive name, every form that has been separately characterised, the question whether any particular form represents a species or a variety of a species can at present be decided in this country only as a matter of conjecture; for a knowledge of the life-history in all its stages is essential to the authoritative settlement of such questions; at the same time the evidently or apparently allied species are carefully grouped together, and the nature of the variety is indicated as closely as our present knowledge will allow.”

With regard to the scope of the work we may again quote the preface as follows:—

“This book does not attempt a life-history of each or any of the insects. The time has not arrived for such a work. The details required for a life-history cannot be gathered until a knowledge of the nomenclature is far more widely diffused. It is simply designed as a handbook of reference, as complete as possible in itself, for the convenience of naturalists in the field, who have no access to libraries. Where necessary full extracts from the works not generally available are given, and where possible and advisable the description of the species are given in the words of the original describers, supplemented by any further details necessary to complete them. For the genera the admirable descriptions by Westwood in the ‘Genera of Diurnal Lepidoptera’ have been followed as closely as possible.

“The book will comprise detailed descriptions of every genus and species known to occur within the limits of India, British Burmah, and Ceylon, and short descriptions will be added in smaller type of species from neighbouring countries on the border, such as Malacca, Siam, Yunnan, Tibet, South Turkestan, Afghanistan, and Beluchistan, which, though not yet recorded from within Indian limits, may very probably subsequently be found to occur within our border.”

If the authors mean to follow out this course it is to be hoped that their descriptions will be of a comparative and not of a general nature. Nothing can be more laborious, more unsatisfactory, and often more useless than wading through long descriptions, when a few words indicating in what character the species in question differs from its nearest allies, are often far more useful. It is just because authors have in many cases been unwilling or unable to make this comparison that they have described species without good cause, and it is frequently found that when such comparison is attempted, the want of distinctive characters is shown at once, whereas in a long wordy description it may easily be concealed. In conclusion, we wish the book success and plenty of supporters, so that it may be completed quickly, and mark the commencement of a new era in Indian entomology.

H. J. ELWES

OUR BOOK SHELF

Winners in Life's Race; or the Great Backboned Family.
By Arabella Buckley, Author of *Life and her Children*, &c. With Numerous Illustrations. (London: Edward Stanford, 1882.)

LIFE, the title of Miss Buckley's thoughtful work now before us would suggest, once it became materially existent, went ever forward, striving after diverse fashions to adapt her children to the best methods of fighting and winning. She felt her way onward in several directions, and in several of these she attained to a fair share of perfection, from shapelessness to symmetry, from a simpleness in structure to a wonderful differentiation thereof; from a mere manifestation of vitality to a high state of instinct, almost of intellect; but there was to all of these a limit all too speedily attained—and it is now plain that no arrangement of epidermis, or muscle, or nerve, no alteration of blood, or alimentary system could get the uppermost in the struggle. It was only with the appearance of a quite new structure—the back-bone of this volume—that Life felt she had acquired a new power, and those of her children who were thus endowed went on gallantly until, *Winners in the race*, they were left without a rival. The record of their humble beginning was still very incomplete but a few years ago, and there was no clue thereto. Now as the reader will learn in the clearest manner from chapter I., we know of such forms as the Lancelet, and those strange *Ascidia* who “once tried to be backboneed, and yet as they grew fell back into the lap of Invertebrates.”

Commencing with these *Ascidia*, this new volume of Miss Buckley proceeds to tell of those “*Winners in Life's Race*,” which are supposed to culminate in our very selves. It does this in a way that most young people and every fairly educated person can understand as well as with a carefulness in detail and a caution in the statement of facts, most pleasing and grateful to the advanced student of Nature. Aply as this little volume is written, and admirable as, in our mind, is the judgment shown in the selection of details, yet it hardly comes to us with that captivating freshness that made the author's story of “*Life and Her Children*” so welcome. Why this is so, we can scarcely suggest; but this record of the battle over, of the fight won, seems to have been the result of a more tiresome labour than the author's previously published records of those other legions which led on so steadily to what was but a forlorn hope. Perhaps this is because there is a wondrous charm surrounding the mysterious beginnings of life which is not felt in the same degree as we approach the consideration of those beings who would seem to be the final product of life's genesis. Still, nothing that we thus write about the contrast between these volumes can lead us for a moment to overlook the fact that we know of no book in our language, which for the general reader approaches this, as an introduction to those animals (fish, reptiles, birds, and mammals) to whom the victory in life's race has been vouchsafed.

E. P. W.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

[The Editor urgently requests correspondents to keep their letters as short as possible. The pressure on his space is so great that it is impossible otherwise to ensure the appearance even of communications containing interesting and novel facts.]

Weather Forecasts

I AM glad that my letter on this subject has been the means of eliciting the letter of the Rev. W. Clement Ley, printed in your number of November 9. I have also received more than