

NATURE-BOOKS.

Round the Year with Nature. By W. J. Claxton. Pp. xvi+302. (London: G. Routledge and Sons, Ltd.; New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., n.d.) Price 7s. 6d. net.

TO write a satisfactory introduction to natural history for children seems to be a difficult task. After examining some hundreds of attempts and testing them practically, I find that the most successful results are obtained by the following type. This has three characteristics: (1) the number of species described is practically complete for the British Isles—if the more significant foreign species can be included, so much the better; (2) there are pictures of every species described; (3) the descriptions, both pictorial and verbal, are of the diagrammatic order; in other words, rigidly scientific. The more nearly the pictures approach the geometric style, and the language the Euclidean—simplified—the better is the result, both for the child's intelligence and actually for his interest. He wants neither baby-language nor mawkish sentiment, nor teleological moralising; he wants solid fact and plenty of it. Those fine photographs from wild life are rather wasted on him unless they approach diagrammatic completeness. The pictures he gets most out of are those which resemble the best kind of toy, namely, the lay-figure type, which can be taken to pieces. His imagination does the rest. He has also an unvoiced demand for some admixture of the comparative method and of evolutionary theory.

This is no attempt at paradox, but a tested conclusion. The teacher is apt to make two mistakes; he either tries to "get down to the child's level," or assumes that the child has no interest, and that this must be created. As for the first, the child has no difficulty in understanding biological fact or biological theory; his only handicap is unfamiliarity with the abstract words and abstract ideas used so largely by his elders. It is this alone which constitutes the difference of level, and it is the teacher's fault if he cannot make his demonstrations concrete. As for the second, the child's interest needs to be attracted; it exists of itself, and develops by assimilation of material, not of other people's exhortations.

Mr. Claxton's book has the merit of giving the child a mixed diet; facts and pictures, zoological, botanical, and miscellaneous, are judiciously combined. Some children never get beyond "fur and feathers," because other roads have not been pointed out. The country-walk method was also Mr. Barlow's, and it is a good one.

But the author wastes much effort and space. The bulk of the volume consists of poetry—an infallible method of damping the child's interest and of imparting error—of antiquated moralisings, and of attempts to stimulate interest—attempts which are nothing but the notes of exclamation which the child himself may supply. There is far too much admiration of the wonderful wisdom and provision of "Dame Nature." Of the sparrow-hawk Mr. Claxton says:—"I do not think anyone who loves birds can admire this fierce-looking creature, and when I have seen one in a

keeper's bag, I have not had much sympathy for her." Yet he waxes enthusiastic over wasp-extermination, otter-hunting, coursing, and pheasant-shooting, and never fails to mention a "luscious" morsel, or something that will make "your mouth water." The nightingale does not haunt the tree-tops, nor was Daphne "one of the most famous of Greek goddesses." He explains that the crocus-corm is not a bulb, but speaks of the gladiolus bulb. To describe the kestrel as "of a greyish colour with a blue tint," and the nightjar's note as "a jarring sound," is scarcely satisfactory. "There are many kinds of elm in England, but possibly the common elm and the wych or Scotch elm are the best known" is somewhat mysterious.

The majority of the bird and mammal pictures are from stuffed specimens. Many of these, as the robin, rook, and swallow, are unfortunate. Many of the plant pictures suffer from indistinctness. The method of Bewick and Sowerby is preferable to this.

A. E. CRAWLEY.

FOOD AND DIETETICS.

Food and the Principles of Dietetics. By Dr. Robert Hutchison. Pp. xx+615. With plates and diagrams. Third edition, revised and enlarged. (London: Edward Arnold, 1911.) Price 16s. net.

THACKERAY is said to have remarked that he got some of his best thoughts 'when driving home from dining out with his skin full of wine.' We need not doubt it, for the statement embodies a physiological truth. It was his skin which was full of wine, for alcohol dilates the surface blood-vessels. . . . Impressed in such a manner, this minor measure of physiological truth is seen on its way towards penetration of the reader's interest and retention in his memory. If any advocate of temperance doubts the sense of judgment which appears to admit the major portion of Thackeray's statement as equally a physiological truth, he will probably change his mind on reading the excellently balanced articles in this volume dealing with this and similar controversial subjects. He will in any case admit the value of the admirable style in which the author's opinions are clearly conveyed, leaving not one of the many "pros" and "cons" swathed in any mist of verbal confusion.

Nor is this quotation quite a fair sample of the many skilful efforts by which Dr. Hutchison has secured attention. The effort is more frequently less obvious and the measure of truth even greater. One might instance cases where his trap is baited with appeals to the special taste more intimately associated with his subject. Thus a tabulated comparison of the chemical constituents of different cheeses and a careful consideration of their economical value follows quite naturally the interest awakened by this palatable prophecy:—

"We may look forward then, perhaps, to tasting cheeses hitherto unknown, and to combinations of flavour as yet unsuspected. We may combine the virtues of Stilton with Gorgonzola, or those of Gruyère with Roquefort, for the artist of the palate will have in his hands the precise instruments of science."

If this book was deprived of these special qualities,