

### My Friend Mr. Leakey

By J. B. S. Haldane. Pp. v+179. (London: The Cresset Press, Ltd., 1937.) 6s. net.

**P**ROF. HALDANE here applies his imaginative and literary craftsmanship to the conquest of new worlds. His friend Mr. Leakey is the most lovable of magicians, with a finer sense of right and wrong than one had learned to expect of his profession, and with limitations—to his still exceptional powers—which are at once convincing and endearing. We can picture few greater joys than dinner with Mr. Leakey; should this note chance to reach Prof. Haldane's eye, perhaps he will relent and put the address of Mr. Leakey's flat (not 221a Baker Street, because it is quite near Haymarket) in the next edition—although we should not be surprised if it had to be in the next edition but one.

It must not be supposed that this book is a frivolous one. It is full of information of the kind that every active-minded reader wants: how to tell a caiman from a crocodile, the difference in display between the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Herald*, the correlation between brain size and versatility, what a man-size—or rather woman-size—butterfly would look like, the physical properties of tungsten, the rivers and glaciers of London, and so on.

Of course we could not hope to understand all the ways of magicians and their friends. So perhaps we may never know why the rat-catching magnets were put in holes that had to be specially dug, instead of being put into the docks, which would surely have suited more than somewhat, nor why Mr. Leakey navigated south-eastward from London to get to India, when every Boy Scout knows that you should start off north of east, nor why he said that the beam wireless to Australia (the Rugby-Sydney axis as the other spell-binders would call it) went over Persia (shouldn't it be Iran?) when it really goes over Moscow, nor why Prof. Haldane chose "none were" instead of "none was" from the two forms which every Girl Guide knows to be permissible, nor why he said "Bortsch" when every Komsomol boy or girl knows that it sounds more like "Borstch".

We hope Prof. Haldane will write some more on afreets in Fleet Street.

*Le milieu et la vie en commun des plantes notions pratiques de phytosociologie.* Par M.-A. Reynaud-Beauverie. (Encyclopédie biologique, Tome 14.) Pp. 238. (Paris: Paul Lechevalier, 1936.) 60 francs.

**T**HIS comprehensive book is largely a compilation, based mainly on extracts from Braun-Blanquet's "Plant Sociology", as well as from other writings by the same author and those of Profs. J. Pavillard and P. Allorge. The book, which will be appreciated chiefly by French-speaking people, owing to the fact that "Plant Sociology" has not been translated into that language, is evidently intended to attract the intelligent amateur as well as those who are professionally interested in the subject.

Until comparatively recently, the activities of natural history societies have been mainly directed to collecting and naming specimens and compiling local lists of species. This has given rise to the popular

view that "Le Botaniste est un Monsieur qui vient dans nos bois, dans nos prairies, cueille nos plus belles fleurs, les fait sécher entre deux feuilles de papier buvard où elles perdent leurs brillantes couleurs, et ensuite . . . il les insulte en latin". It is to be hoped that this book will help to broaden the outlook of, and suggest new lines of investigation to, those whose activities have hitherto been directed to the mere acquisition of collections as an end in itself. This should help to disperse the narrow conception of the nature of a botanist mentioned above.

All who are interested in the study of plants in their natural environment will find this book full of interest, but nowadays the subject is one which can be approached from so many angles that a good grounding in all branches of botany, and some knowledge of physics and chemistry, is desirable before the subject-matter of the book as a whole can be fully appreciated. That this is so will be realized from the diversity of subjects dealt with, which range from particulars of equipment for collecting plants to the influence of light, temperature and rainfall on vegetation, or the detection of nitrates in the soil. It is noteworthy that in the section dealing with the effect of light on vegetation the only methods described for measuring the light intensity in different habitats are those based on the use of sensitized paper. The application of the photo-electric cell for this purpose, which gives more accurate results, is not mentioned.

A fairly extensive bibliography is given at the end of each section of the book; but most of the references cited are French, although some English and German ones are included. The book ends with a short subject index.

### With Camera and Notebook:

*a Naturalist's Calendar (1938).* Edited by Phyllis Barclay-Smith and Rudolf Zimmermann. Pp. 60. (London: M. C. Forrester, 1937.) 3s. 6d. net.

**A** CALENDAR which will sustain interest and give pleasure throughout the year is not easy to find; Shakespearian quotations have become stale, and the Aberdeen joke is satiating after the first hundred. Perhaps the nearest approach to general interest has been achieved by the landscape calendars published by various newspapers, but the idea of a naturalists' calendar on the present scale is a new and excellent one. Each week has its photograph, reproduced by fine-meshed half-tone block about 5 inches by 6 inches in surface, and its appropriate news item, and the fact that the photographers include Seton Gordon, Mortimer Batten, C. W. R. Knight, J. D. Rattar and K. Herschel, is a guarantee of the value of the pictures, scientifically and aesthetically. They are mostly of mammals, birds, insects and wild flowers, and although a few are from Continental examples all the species illustrated are members of the British fauna. Miss Barclay-Smith and Rudolf Zimmermann of Dresden are to be congratulated on the beauty and interest of the photographs they have chosen. The stranded jelly-fish, mistakenly identified as *Aurelia aurita*, appears to be an *Æquorea*.