

# NATURE

## SUPPLEMENT

Vol. 142

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1938

No. 3597

### REVIEWS

#### Audubon

##### Audubon, the Naturalist:

a History of his Life and Time. By Prof. Francis Hobart Herrick. Second edition, two volumes in one. Pp. xcii + 451 + 500 + 56 plates. (New York and London: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1938.) 25s. net.

THIS work may be described as the standard biography of Audubon, from which the lighter and more romantic versions which have appeared from time to time have largely been drawn. It is strange that a life so full of genuine romance and adventure, a personality so individual, magnificent alike in stubborn courage and childlike carelessness and candour, should fail to satisfy the appetites of so many biographers without the added condiment of a fictitious royal birth. Prof. Herrick's careful account of Audubon's early life, in the first edition, would seem to have settled the matter; but subsequent publications have again promulgated the wild hypothesis that the poor fragile Dauphin and the vigorous naturalist were one and the same: certain members of the Audubon family were drawn to the idea, disliking the illegitimate and Creole birth of their ancestor. Prof. Herrick's new foreword and postscript must convince all but the wilfully credulous.

The first part of the book deals with the life-history of Audubon from his birth and adoption, his short period in a naval college, his abortive studies in the studio of the celebrated David, his emigration to America, his many struggles in business, and the two fixed points in the kaleidoscope of his life—his great wife Lucy and his dominating passion for birds and beasts and for their portrayal. Such business ventures as he made, even to portrait painting and the teaching of dancing, were all undertaken so as to get means

for pursuing this, his chosen work; his Lucy loyally bore privations and separations, and herself became a paid worker, so as to help to provide for their children, and to ensure the fame and recognition which she never doubted.

In the next section—Audubon the naturalist—we have the account of his various explorations, extracts from his diaries, certain aspects of the controversies in which this pioneer ornithologist and artist was involved, sidelights on his contemporaries, the account of his ultimate triumph and recognition, and his subsequent work, aided now by his sons. There are several appendixes: original documents; birds of America; likenesses of Audubon; a very full bibliography, and that most useful feature, a careful index.

The illustrations include likenesses of relations and contemporaries, scenes from the homes of Audubon and many reproductions of his pictures, from the early simple drawings to the splendour of the decorative colour plates. This great innovation, namely, the representation of birds and animals in life and motion, in something approaching natural habitat, obtained favour in America only after England, Scotland and France had recognized its charm and value. Prof. Herrick does not omit to pay tribute to the great part played by Havell, the engraver. The large size of the plates, some of no less than five square feet, entailed the most skilful combination of aquatint with etching and line engraving. It was indeed fortunate that the pioneer artist and naturalist should have found a coadjutor of like courage and enterprise.

In biography, romance makes a good servant, but a bad master, and it is well to have this scholarly and critical presentation of a personality and life-history so unusual as almost to invite exaggeration.

E. G. G.