

IF JOHN BURROUGHS really means what he says, that "Riverby" is the last of his out-of-doors books, there will be a great many sadly disappointed people in this country; and they will surely protest, for no one will be convinced that he has told us all he knows. Perhaps he is a believer in the saying that "there is luck in odd numbers," and so stops at the ninth volume, but why not the thirteenth, giving us a full dozen and one for good measure? But if the decision is final, then his publishers should have put a good portrait of the author in his latest volume, for his readers must be anxious to know his pleasant face. There have been since Thoreau's time many writers about nature as we see it in the States, some good and some not so good; each with characteristics of his own, and no one, happily, a mere imitator of the hermit of Walden. Of them all, Burroughs stands easily first. His eyes are sharpest, his ears most sensitive, his cautiousness superlative, and his command of language perfect. The life he writes of stands out in his pages. We hear the song he describes, we see the flowers he mentions, and, whether it be the crackling of dead leaves in December or the rustling of lush green leaves in June, they are tangible facts that the mind grasps readily as we pass with ever-sustained pleasure from page to page. The best proof of the excellence of his books, is that no one after reading them can visit such scenes as he describes without at once recalling what he has said. But Burroughs has probably been mistaken at times; indeed, we know he has, if he applies his assertions to the same bird or animal wherever found. It must be remembered that a bird's habits, for instance, are a good deal determined by the nature of the country it tarries in, and so the locality must not be forgotten when we read. His "Riverby" song-sparrows usually nest on the ground. There are localities, not a hundred miles away, where nine-tenths of these birds build in bushes, several feet from the ground. One must not, therefore, be disposed to criticise adversely, because one's own experience and Burroughs's do not agree. The author is right, and so is his reader. Such minor matters do not detract from the merit of the book, for there is no use in lumbering up pages with explanatory and qualifying remarks. If a reader goes astray, it is his own fault, not Burroughs's.

Writing of nature is a difficult matter. The same sight or sound never impresses two people alike, and in many an instance the author's interpretation will seem forced, when the reader has a like experience. This is because not one in a thousand has Burroughs's eyes and ears. It is well that

it is so. We notice this variation of impression, and strive to fathom its significance, and in so doing advance our own knowledge. We see so little where he sees so much, that we are piqued and strive to do better. These books have made many an interested but unmethodical observer more systematic, and led him to take up many a half truth and round it out to a full one. In this way Burroughs's volumes have done a world of good. What more can be said than that a book has given us both happiness and knowledge—made us both better and wiser? There is one feature of this last volume that does not seem altogether called for, and that is the sharp criticism of Richard Jefferies. This strange man, who saw English landscapes as no other man did, "reported" them in his own way and gives to his readers abundant knowledge and delight. His books serve English readers as Burroughs's do those of our country. The same goal is reached, but by different paths, and why comment upon the method, when no one can say that it is positively a bad one? Jefferies's command of language was great, and if he merely "reports" at times, he does so in such a telling manner that the reader is "at home" when he meets the objects enumerated, in his own rambles. But no one can close "Riverby" and be in a fault-finding mood, unless it be at the author's prefatory note, which he will hope is a false alarm; still, he may ask, before putting down the book, Why is there no index?

---