

REVIEW.

Songs of the Birds. By Walter Garstang, M.A., D.Sc., John Lane. 6s. net.

PROFESSOR GARSTANG has done a good service to ornithology by attempting to interpret bird-music, and to estimate its biological and evolutionary value. The phrases and rhymes in which he endeavours to reduce bird-songs to language and musical notation are disappointing; the present writer, in common with other reviewers, cannot accept them as catching the real genius of bird-song half as well as such popular phrases as the "Little bit of bread and no cheese," or the few really great bird-song poems, such as Shelley's "Skylark."

But in the introductory essay the author seems to break new ground. He insists on the existence of an æsthetic capacity in birds, and urges the importance of recognising it if we are to estimate the various aspects of bird-life correctly. He points out that the birds' monopoly of the air, so far as the higher types of life are concerned, has given them leisure in which the æsthetic sense has been able to develop. Not all systematists would agree, however, that "the most advanced and modern types of bird (the Turdidæ, or Thrush family) display the greatest complexity and variety in their melodic powers." Recent research has set the Crows in that proud place, and the Raven's beautiful song is notorious.

Professor Garstang defines bird-music as a "language of momentary emotions," and song as the expression not of a momentary excitement "but of an emotional state—a prolonged, if periodic, elevation of the spirit"; and he draws "attention to the fact that the nature of the integrating element lies in a sense of tone-sequence, progression, rhythmic balance and similar æsthetic qualities. "The contest for territory, increasing abundance of food, lengthening days, and brightening skies, all contribute to the male bird's excitement and delight."

These ideas seem to deserve much more thorough consideration and exhaustive treatment than is given in these pages; and it may be hoped that Professor Garstang will find time to develop his essay into a treatise. Mr. Shepherd's illustrations are bold in outline, but in other respects rather disappointing; the Wrens, on page 62, are definitely bad; some of the others, such as the Greenfinches, on p. 58, and the middle Hedge-Sparrow, on p. 60, are clever "snapshots" of characteristic attitudes.

H. G. A.