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Literary Notes

WILD ANIMALS THEY HAVE
KNOWN.

A DISCUSSION of a highly edifying nature has lately been going on in the press and periodicals of the United States. President Roosevelt, the indefatigable and megaphonic, has declared himself on the subject of certain animal stories. "Everybody's Magazine," which is the stormy petrel of monthly journalism, published in the June number an interview with the President, recorded by Mr. Edward B. Clark, in which the former asserts: "I don't believe for a minute that some of these men who are writing nature stories and putting the word 'truth' prominently in their prefaces know the heart of the wild things. Neither do I believe that certain men who, while they may say nothing specifically about truth, do claim attention as realists because of their animal stories, have succeeded in learning the real secrets of the life of the wilderness. They don't know, or, if they do know, they indulge in the wildest exaggeration under the mistaken notion that they are strengthening their stories."

Mr. Roosevelt is especially censorious of Mr. William J. Long, inasmuch as the latter's animal yarns have been put into many of the public schools of the country as supplementary reading.

"As a matter of fact, the story of Wayeases is filled with the wildest improbabilities and a few mathematical impossibilities. If Mr. Long wants us to believe his story of the killing of the caribou fawn by the wolf in the way that he says it was done, he must produce eye-witnesses and affidavits. I don't believe the thing occurred. Nothing except a shark or an alligator will attempt to kill by a bite behind the shoulder. There is no less vulnerable point of attack; an animal might be bitten there in a confused scuffle, of course, or seized in his jump so as to throw him; but no man who knows anything of the habits of wolves or even of fighting dogs would dream of describing this as the place to kill with one bite.

"If Mr. Long's wolf killed the caribou fawn by a bite through the heart, as the writer asserts, the wolf either turned a somersault—or pretty near it—or else got his head upside down under the fore legs of the fawn, a sufficiently difficult performance."

Mr. Jack London is also treated to a few unfavourable criticisms. But Mr. London is having such a bad quarter-of-an-hour in explaining resemblances between his books and those of Frank Norris, Stanley Waterloo and the author of "My Dogs in the Northland," that he has no time to worry over what the President thinks of his account of the impossible fight between White Fang and a bulldog.

Mr. Thompson Seton, according to Mr. Roosevelt, has written some valuable animal fiction, but Mr. Seton should label his fiction, so that it may not be taken for fact by those who are all unversed in the ways of wolves. A lynx story, "On the Night Trail," by Mr. C. G. D. Roberts, comes in for some strenuous comment, and the critic sorrowfully remarks that the poet of the Maritime Provinces occasionally fails to consult possibilities.

Mr. John Burroughs appears to be Mr. Roosevelt's pet nature-writer, but Mr. Stewart Edward White is a close second. Although the latter may know "the forest and the mountains and the desert" in a fashion to win the admiration of the White House critic, the said exploiter of the northern wilds wrote a story, published during the summer of 1902, which shows his deplorable ignorance of that domestic creature, a wily woman. His "Barbara" is the weirdest bit of human impossibility yet described. The quarrel of the tellers of animal tales goes merrily on, while those who know little of the wild and woofy regions are wisely mute.

William Briggs announces that the first issue of "Songs of a Sourdough" was exhausted on the day of issue and that a new edition is now ready. Mrs. Blewett's, "The Cornflower", is also in the second edition.

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