



A GOSSIP ABOUT NEW BOOKS.



RESSURE of valuable literary material has prevented our noticing many scientific books published during the latter part of last year. Rarely have we had more valuable contributions to natural science in such a short space of time. Darwin's long-looked for work on "Insectivorous Plants" (London: John Murray) showed us, happily, that the keen and careful research of its author has not yet shown any signs of giving way, nor have his powers of philosophical generalization been weakened. In this

volume, of nearly 500 pages, we have a series of experiments on the so-called "carnivorous" plants, and many of the results seem ludicrous when regarded from the old notion of how a plant ought to behave. Indeed, we are learning every day how arbitrary is our old classification, and how little we have hitherto actually known about organic objects. We need no longer point to the lowest forms of animal and vegetable life as the platform where both meet; these "carnivorous" plants behave as animals also, when it is to their advantage to do so. In calm and philosophical language, and yet in a style so admirably suited to the novel facts and their meanings that the reader willingly gives himself up to the subtle charm of the book, Mr. Darwin discourses on the sundews and the movement of their "tentacles," as he calls the red hairs on the leaves; on Venus's Fly-trap (*Dionaea muscipula*), and the irritation of its filaments; on *Aldrovanda vesiculosa*, a plant which captures crustaceans; on the various species of

Butterwort (*Pinguicula*) and Bladderwort (*Utricularia*); as well as of other plants, such as *Drosera phyllum*, *Roridula*, *Byblis*, &c., which affect "insectivorous" habits. From experiments made on these various plants (all of which are related in the volume before us), there can be no question as to their digestive powers, and their capability of assimilating nitrogenous food. Not long after the appearance of "Insectivorous Plants" the reading world was surprised by another work on "The Movement and Habits of Climbing Plants," by Mr. Darwin (London: John Murray). Such accurate industry has rarely been equalled, and never surpassed. In this latter volume we have those phenomena of the dissipation of motion exemplified by numerous climbing plants, which seem almost to partake of intelligence or instinct. Leaf-climbers, tendril-bearers, and hook and root climbing-plants of all kinds are minutely described; the experiments made by Mr. Darwin upon them almost convincing us that the force of habit in certain of them is nearly analogous to instinct. This book contains more than 200 pages, and in lively interest is equal to that on Insectivorous Plants. Had only these two volumes appeared last year, they would have left their mark on our scientific literature. And there can be no doubt whatever they will largely influence the spread of the doctrine of evolution, which alone among extant theories is able to account for those singular phenomena in plants which form the subject-matter of these two treatises.

In Geology and Physical Geography it is some time since there appeared a work of such importance as "Climate and Time," by James Croll (London: Daldy, Isbister, & Co.). Mr. Croll's theories as to the origin of the Glacial Period by astronomical causes have long been held in high estimation by our best geologists. In this large volume we have the whole subject worked out in its geological relations, and a theory of the secular changes of the earth's climate elaborated in the completest manner. No geologist of any pretension can afford to do otherwise than make himself thoroughly