ALTHOUGH the island of Sokotra is often seen by passengers on the great ocean steamers which pass by the Sokotran Archipelago on their voyages to and from India, eastern Asia and Australia, the fauna had been very imperfectly investigated when, in 1898, a party was dispatched by the joint exertions of the British and Liverpool Museums for the purpose of collecting specimens of the animals, vertebrate and invertebrate. The botany of Sokotra itself had been previously studied by Prof. Bayley Balfour and by Dr. Schweinfurth in 1879-81, and some collections of the animals occurring had been made by them and by other visitors to the islands, but the zoology was still incompletely known.

The party of 1898 consisted of Dr. H. O. Forbes himself, Mr. W. R. Ogilvie Grant, of the British Museum, and a taxidermist. Native assistants and servants were engaged at Aden, and valuable aid was given by the Government of India, which supplied means of transport between Aden and the islands, and lent camp equipage for the use of the explorers.

The Sokotran Archipelago consists of (1) the large island of Sokotra, about eighty-five miles in length, lying 150 miles to the eastward of Cape Gardafui in Africa and about 230 miles S.E. of Ras Fartak in Arabia; (2) Abd-el-Kuri, a much smaller island, lying about half way between Sokotra and Cape Gardafui; and (3 and 4) two islets, Semha and Darsi or Darzi, known as the Brothers, between Abd-el-Kuri and Sokotra. The two larger islands are separated by a submarine valley, 100 fathoms deep, whilst a channel several hundreds of fathoms in depth intervenes between Abd-el-Kuri and Cape Gardafui, and the sea between the islands and the Arabian coast is still deeper.

Dr. Forbes's party landed and made collections on Abd-el-Kuri, and they spent about two months in the hilly region of eastern Sokotra, but were unable to visit the smaller islets. The expedition was much delayed, first by some trivial political difficulties with the Sultan of Sokotra, and secondly, and more seriously, by severe attacks of fever.

Simultaneously with Dr. Forbes's expedition, an Austrian scientific party which, under the direction of Count Lambert, was engaged in exploring the archaeology, geology, and natural history of southern Arabia, visited the Sokotran Islands. This party was larger and better equipped than Dr. Forbes's modest expedition, it had a steam vessel, the Gottfried, at its disposal, and was able to visit the islet of Semha as well as Sokotra and Abd-el-Kuri. Amongst the members of the Austrian party were Prof. Müller, Dr. Kossmat the geologist, and Prof. Simony the naturalist. At a time when Dr. Forbes's party was suffering severely from fever, and had almost been brought to a standstill by illness, most valuable medical assistance was given to them by the Austrians.

The finely illustrated volume now published contains the results of the expedition, and owes its appearance to the Museums Committee of the Corporation of Liverpool, which has provided the funds, and authorised the publication of the work as a special bulletin of the Liverpool Museums. The book is edited by Dr. Forbes, and comprises a narrative of the journey from his pen, and descriptions by various naturalists of the different groups of animals, vertebrate and invertebrate, collected by the expedition. The list of authors is too long to quote in full, but it comprises, besides Dr. Forbes and Mr. Grant, several eminent zoologists, amongst whom are Mr. Bouleniger, Mr. E. A. Smith, Mr. R. I. Pocock, Sir G. Hampson, and Mr. W. F. Kirby, of the British Museum staff, besides Colonel Godwin Austen, Mr.
McLachlan, Lord Walsingham, and several others. A complete list of the plants of Sokotra and Abd-el-Kuri, inclusive of important additions obtained by Dr. Forbes, is furnished by Prof. Bayley Balfour, whilst a note by Prof. J. W. Gregory on the geology is a reprint of a short paper published in the Geological Magazine for 1899. This paper, which was founded on a collection of rock specimens brought back by Dr. Forbes's expedition, is supplemented by an extract from a report by Prof. Bonney on a similar collection made by Prof. Bayley Balfour in 1880. It is very much to be regretted that a translation of some of Dr. Kossmat's published notes on the geology was not also added, for whilst, as might be expected in reports on rock specimens collected by naturalists who are not geologists, the notes now reprinted give a fair account of the crystalline and volcanic rocks of the Sokotran group, they afford a very imperfect idea of the sedimentary formations, although the latter occupy by far the greater portion of the islands. The massive Nummulitic, Alveolina, and Hippuritic limestones, of which the islands chiefly consist, and which are of much greater geological importance than the granitic formations underlying them, are only mentioned vaguely as Cretaceous and Eocene limestones. No notice naturally is taken of one curious discrepancy between the collected specimens and Dr. Kossmat's statements. Both Prof. Balfour's and Dr. Forbes's collections from Sokotra contained comparatively modern volcanic rocks resembling those of Aden, whilst Dr. Kossmat states that no such rocks occur in Sokotra. ("Jungvulcanische Bildungen fehlen auf Sokotra—ganz im gegensatze zur gegenüberliegenden Küste Arabiens—vollstandig," Sitz. math. nat. Cl. K. Akad. Wiss. Wien, 1899, p. 77.) The absence of Prof. Gregory in Australia is probably the reason why a fuller account of the geology as now known is not supplied.

The work is well illustrated with coloured plates and figures in the text. Amongst the plates, the representations of the wild ass (introduced by man but now feral), of some of the birds (especially a new goat-sucker, Caprimalgus fossor), and of the land mollusca, spiders and insects (butterflies, moths, microlepidoptera, wasps and bees, beetles, &c.), are good examples of chromolithography. The text figures of mollusca and beetles, each surrounded by a grey rectangular area in which the actual shell or insect does not always occupy the central position, though good representations, have a somewhat unpleasing effect. The few figures of plants are good, and especial attention may be directed to the remarkable Euphorbia discovered by Dr. Forbes in Abd-el-Kuri.

As is usually the case in books like that now before us, some curious illustrations of zoological nomenclature are conspicuous. For instance, Mr. Kirkaldy, to whom we are indebted for an account of the Rhynchota, has invented a generic name which he spells Klinophilus. Naturalists in general who follow the old rules of Latin orthography would have written Clinophilus, but orthographical heterodoxy is by no means the most extraordinary feature of the case, for the new name is given to a genus the type of which appears, according to the rules of Linnaeus himself, to be also the type of the Linnean genus Cimex. Again, in the two sections dealing with the land mollusca, each of the two authors quotes a generic name, Achatinelloides; given, not by themselves, but by another writer. It is difficult to understand why so absurd a term as this, derived from a double Latin diminutive of dubious accuracy by the addition of a Greek adjectival termination, should be preserved instead of being simply ignored. Some explanation, too, might have been vouchsafed why the same families of mollusca are termed Pomatidae and Pupidae by one author, Cyclostomidae and Helicidae by the other.

The discussion of the "distribution of land and water in the Indian Ocean as indicated by a study of the fauna and flora of the islands" is one of the subjects mentioned in the preface as having been left over for a future publication. It is to be regretted that a general summary of the results obtained, so as to afford an idea of the zoological relations between Sokotra and the neighbouring continents, has not been added to the present volume, and it must be hoped that Dr. Forbes, who has already contributed to our knowledge of the distribution of animal life in the islands of the Indian Ocean, will before long publish his views on the results of his investigation of the Sokotran fauna.

The principal features of Sokotran zoology are the following. There are, as already remarked, no indigenous mammals, no freshwater fish, and no land reptiles. Amongst sixty-seven species of birds recorded from Sokotra, eleven appear to be peculiar to the island, and of the twenty-two birds from Abd-el-Kuri three are unknown elsewhere. Of twenty Sokotran land fishes, no less than fifteen are peculiar, and three genera out of thirteen; the number known from Abd-el-Kuri is only three, of which two are peculiar to the island, whilst one is rather widely dis-