

numbers" 12, 28 and even 76 was due to a natural appeal made by them to the sentiment of primitive man, and the happy accident that they proved adaptable to astronomical facts only "strengthened the faith of the people" in their magical efficiency. Some slight support for this strange theory might be found if it were true that "the important Jupiter cycle" of 60 years—which, as a fact, would not work—was, as we are told, "known to all the nations". But was it?

The genesis of the "pet numbers" is ingeniously explained, but with what bearing on astronomy it is difficult to see. It seems possible that the first cosmographer may have conceived the world as a square, each of its sides bisected by one of the cardinal points. But such a world would surely consist only of the visible hemisphere, and

the subdivision of the four sides into 12 and 28 would not give 12 signs of the zodiac and 28 moon-stations, as neither signs nor stations can all be above the horizon at once. In truth the simplest zodiac implies the knowledge that the heavens encompass the earth on all sides, and such a conception is not primitive. The notion, which pervades Mr. Menon's book, that the zodiac has been a possession of all races from the dawn of history, is as fallacious as the evidence he offers for it. The passage cited from the "Rig-Veda" implies no more than a recognition of years, months and days. That it should still be possible, after writing the names of the Akkadian months and the zodiacal names in parallel columns, to suppose that the former list is connected with the latter, seems scarcely credible. E. J. WEBB.

Short Reviews

Open-Air Library. *Afoot in England*. By W. H. Hudson. Pp. xvi+239. *The Mirror of the Sea: Memories and Impressions*. By Joseph Conrad. Pp. xv+244. (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1933.) 3s. 6d. net each.

THE editor, Dr. Eric F. Daghli, clearly has a happy knack of choosing the right material every time for the "Open-Air Library". The author of each volume is well known and the actual subject matter has already been well read. Nevertheless, that is no reason why such titles, brought under the common heading of "Open-Air" topics and published in an attractive form at a price within everybody's reach, should not have a very wide appeal; especially at the present time.

(1) For example, W. H. Hudson, a naturalist with the inborn genius of interesting others in Nature, scarcely needs any introduction. Much of "Afoot in England" has already appeared in various journals and newspapers; and the complete volume first appeared in 1909. But now that many of the heartiest of English people spend their holidays and week-ends afoot, republication of this collection of essays, in an easily portable form, is opportune. In a way similar to "The Open Road", it should either take you or go with you to the West Country, Bath and Wells, Stonehenge, Silchester, Salisbury, etc., and will surely open up new vistas of interest—natural history, archæology, history, etc.—which are calculated to make a holiday not only more pleasurable, but also more profitable.

(2) Conrad's "Mirror of the Sea" also needs little introduction. He, alone, can tell in this way how the sea's "cruelty may repel, its immensity appal, and its fury distress the mind; but its grandeur, the variety of its moods, its permanent freshness, and even its fickle inconstancy" are bound to fascinate in the long run the most dubious

of land-lubbers. This little volume reveals the true character of the sea. Its hydrographical, biological and meteorological characteristics are never once mentioned in any academic manner; yet having read the book, you feel you know something about all these, and an insatiable desire to know more.

The Saga of Fridtjof Nansen. By Jon Sørensen. Translated from the Norwegian by J. B. C. Watkins. Pp. ix+372+8 plates. (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1932.) 18s. net.

IN this study of Nansen's personality, the author has had access to various private diaries that help to explain Nansen's success in all he attempted and at the same time show the apparent contradictions of the man. He had an extraordinarily wide range of interests and found it difficult to keep to any one line of activity. A dreamy melancholy would give way to buoyant enthusiasm and he would see clearly his path and go forward indifferent to any form of discouragement. He had the capacity for solitude and the steadfast pioneering spirit that are so characteristic of his race.

Mr. Sørensen, who knew Nansen intimately, tells his story well, and though there is no full estimate of Nansen's scientific work in oceanography, indications of its importance are given. His activities as a statesman speaking on behalf of Norway in the dissolution of the union with Sweden, and later at Geneva in the name of Armenian refugees and Russian famine sufferers, are fully treated, and show the outstanding example of a great man of science who used his talents in the wider sphere of statecraft. There is a full bibliography of Nansen's writings. The book is a fine memorial to one of the outstanding figures of his day.

R. N. R. B.