

*Unsere Pflanzen.* By F. Söhns. Dritte Auflage. Pp. iv+178. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1904.) Price 2-60 marks.

*Children's Wild Flowers.* By Mrs. J. M. Maxwell. Pp. viii+171. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1904.) Price 7s. 6d. net.

THE derivation of many botanical names being very uncertain, it is probable that the subject appeals more to the philologist than the botanist. Who shall say, for instance, whether the speedwell takes its name from a saint Veronica, or should be derived from "vera icon" or "vera unica"? Vernacular names are perhaps more easily explained, but vary greatly in different districts. Similar difficulties occur with German popular names, so that Mr. Söhns has a number of problems of an indeterminate nature to solve in his book, which deals with the nomenclature of plants and their place in mythology and folklore. Generally the author's arguments are carefully deduced and convincing, and, as might be expected, the correct derivation is not always obvious. Tausendgueldenkraut, the popular name of *Erythraea centaurea*, suggests a connection with "centum aurum," but the specific name is undoubtedly given in honour of the Centaur Chiron, who was skilled in medicine, and the German name, which was at first hundert guelden Kraut, has apparently given place to Tausendgueldenkraut, where thousand is used in a hyperbolic sense, and thus the Centaur's plant has become associated with a fanciful expression. In addition to etymology, the book contains many references to popular superstitions. On account of the dissimilarity between German and English popular names it cannot be expected that the book will appeal strongly to English readers, but a third edition points to its success in Germany.

The book by Mrs. Maxwell is intended to interest children in wild flowers by narrating the legends and stories connected with them. Scientific description is practically limited to habitat and comparative characters for distinguishing between the species of a genus, and coloured illustrations are provided as a means of identification of the plants. Obviously the purpose of the writer is not to train the powers of observation or inculcate accuracy, but rather to stimulate the faculties of imagination.

*Superstitions about Animals.* By Frank Gibson. Pp. 208. (London and Newcastle-on-Tyne: Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1904.) Price 3s. 6d.

THIS is an unpretentious little book which will interest many people. It brings together some of the most common superstitions about animals, "dealing with them in a light and popular way," with copious quotations from the poets. One of its aims is to sweep away those superstitions that are foolish and degrading, to clear the air for a free appreciation of the real wonders of nature. For "there is no subject under heaven which will give more pleasure or lasting and real profit than that of Natural History." Mr. Gibson deals first with omens, such as the ticking of the death-watch and the baying of a dog; he goes on to distortions of facts of natural history, such as "salamanders in the fire," "crocodile's tears," "the hibernation of swallows"; he ends up with creatures of the imagination, like the "basilisk," the "phoenix," and the "griffin." The author is a devout admirer of the real things of nature with an unusual knowledge of the poets both great and small. He has not seriously tackled the difficult side of his subject—the attempt to account historically and psychologically for the origin and persistence of the more important superstitions. He has forgotten the salt.

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#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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#### A Great Oxford Discovery.

IN a recent study of some eighteenth century naturalists' writings I was a good deal struck by the amount of attention devoted to the problem of whether the white man was a sport from negroid stock or the negro a sport from a white race. The matter was discussed from every standpoint, physiological, geographical, and theological, but the consensus of opinion, based chiefly on the existence of albinotic and pied negroes, and on the misunderstood effects of leucoderma, was that the white might be a negro sport, but that there was no evidence of a black sport in the case of the white races. If such an opinion were correct, and the white man only a negro sport, we should certainly expect to find the negroid cranial type common among the white races. Two distinguished Oxford men of science have just thrown remarkable light on this problem. They have given a very simple series of conditions by which crania can be classed into skulls of negroid, non-negroid, and intermediate types. These conditions depend entirely on a classification of nasal and facial indices, and by their processes our authors are able to distinguish between the negroid, non-negroid, and intermediate types among prehistoric Egyptian crania. Not being an anatomist, I am quite unable to judge of the processes by which they have reached their criteria, and the photographs which accompany their volume are of so obscure a character—indeed, in the present state of cranial photography somewhat unworthy of a university press—that they hardly allow the uninitiated even with a lens to appreciate the justification which the authors find for their classification in the outward appearances of their cranial groups. I think, however, we may safely give the greatest weight possible to a judgment formed by the Oxford professor of human anatomy and the Oxford reader in Egyptology in a folio volume just issued by the syndics of the University Press.

Taking their classification as beyond discussion, I have applied it:—

First, to a fairly long series of admittedly negro crania, all males. I find 7.3 per cent. are non-negroid, 39.0 per cent. are truly negroid, and 53.7 per cent. are intermediate. It is clear that we only need to let the negroes change their skins, and a sensible percentage will be non-negroid.

Secondly, to a fairly long series of English skulls, male and female. I find of Englishmen 20 per cent. are negroid, 46 per cent. non-negroid, and 34 per cent. are intermediate in type. Among Englishwomen 11 per cent. are negroid, 48 per cent. non-negroid, and 41 per cent. are of intermediate type. Thus of the whole English population slightly more than 50 per cent. are either pure negroid or partially negroid; while in an outwardly pure negroid group, upwards of 60 per cent. are non-negroid or mixed with non-negroid elements.

I have not yet had time to apply Prof. Thomson and Mr. Randall-Maciver's test to Asiatic races, but I have not the least doubt that I shall find there also pure negroid and intermediate negroid elements. But that the Englishman should have as large a negroid element in his constitution as the prehistoric Egyptian, and only half as little pure negroid element as admitted negroes, is to my mind an epoch-making discovery, which will at once attract attention to Oxford as a centre for a novel school of craniometry and anthropology.

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#### Inversions of Temperature and Humidity in Anticyclones.

IN NATURE of February 16 Mr. W. H. Dines cited an example of a large temperature inversion, observed with kites during the prevalence of very high barometric pressure in England, and remarked on the possible connection between the two phenomena.