

Das Giftbuch des Šanāq : eine Literaturgeschichtliche Untersuchung

Von Bettina Strauss. (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und der Medizin, Fortsetzung des Archivs für Geschichte der Mathematik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Technik, Herausgegeben vom Institut für Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften, Band 4, Heft 2.) Pp. 64+66. (Berlin : Julius Springer, 1934.) 15 gold marks.

THIS book contains the Arabic text, with an annotated German translation, of the "Book of Poisons" of Šanāq, that is, Cānakya (Chanakya), the minister of King Chandragupta (fourth century B.C.). The Arabic version is not a direct translation of an Indian original, but is rather a compilation from both Indian and Greek sources. It was apparently based on a Persian translation of an Indian "Poison-book of Chanakya" made by an Indian physician, Mankah, of the celebrated hospital at Jundi-Shapur. Mankah also translated other Indian medical books, such as a treatise on the names of drugs, and a medical compendium of Susruta. The Arabic version of the "Poison-book" was made from the Persian by one Abū Ḥātim of Balkh, about whom we have no information. It was later re-edited by Al-'Abbās ibn Sa'id al-Jauhari, who was probably responsible for the introduction of the Greek material.

The book gives a useful picture of early Muslim pharmacology, in which much shrewd and careful observation was diluted with at least as much matter of an unreliable and fanciful character. The Arabic text has been well established and is clearly printed, while the German translation follows the original with close accuracy. It is, however, a great pity that no index of any kind is provided. E. J. H.

Kleine Meteoritenkunde

Von Prof. Fritz Heide. (Verständliche Wissenschaft, Band 23.) Pp. vi+120. (Berlin : Julius Springer, 1934.) 4.80 gold marks.

THE discussion of meteorites in this handy little volume commences with their entry into our atmosphere; the cosmogonical interest has to be found by working back from the chemical analysis of their contents. Even the geophysical phenomena relative to the falls of meteors—the information that they have given as to the highest regions of the atmosphere—are omitted from this book, which is strictly limited to the meteorites that fall to earth. Very full details of these, however, are given and much useful information for the geophysical chemist and mineralogist. The introductory historical chapter is extremely interesting. The number of large crater-fields of meteoritic origin will surprise most readers who come newly to the subject, but it is reassuring to find that there is no certain evidence of any person having been killed by a falling meteorite. Photographs of the devastated country in Siberia surrounding the scene of the great fall of July 30, 1908, show what damage can be done and leave one thankful that so far no densely populated country has been visited by a giant meteorite.

Geologie Südamerikas

Von Prof. Dr. H. Gerth. (Geologie der Erde, herausgegeben von E. Krenkel.) Teil I. Pp. vii+199+17 plates. (Berlin : Gebrüder Borntraeger, 1932.) 22 gold marks.

THIS volume is one of the series of monographs on the regional geology of the earth published under the general editorship of Prof. Krenkel, and deals with the South American continent from the Pre-Cambrian up to the end of the Palæozoic.

The aim of the author has been to provide, not a detailed regional description but a comprehensive general introduction to South American geology and its problems. At the same time the needs of the reader requiring more precise and detailed information on any particular area or subject have not been lost sight of and each section of the book is provided with an extended bibliography.

Approximately half the book is devoted to a consideration of the Pre-Cambrian basement of the continent, and the structural, petrological and tectonic problems are dealt with rather fully. This is by no means excessive in view of the structural importance of the Pre-Cambrian in South America. Each region is considered separately and then the continent as a whole is dealt with in a concluding section. Much the same method of treatment is adopted throughout the remaining chapters on the Palæozoic systems, and the volume concludes with a chapter on the so-called 'Gondwanides'.

The author has brought together a great mass of information from scattered and often inaccessible sources, and has provided a most useful, up-to-date and well illustrated treatise on South American geology.

Dix leçons d'astronomie

Par Ernest Esclangon. Deuxième édition revue et corrigée. Pp. 116+20 plates. (Paris : Gauthier-Villars, 1934.) 25 francs.

IN this volume of popular lectures, the director of the Paris Observatory has given as simple and clear an account of modern astronomy as can be given in one hundred pages. The style is extremely lucid, as is to be expected in a French book, the facts are accurately given and up-to-date, the illustrations are numerous and the whole volume is very pleasantly readable. In addition to the definitely astronomical chapters, there are two which will be read with much sympathy and interest. The opening chapter gives an account of the importance of astronomy in the past in the development of thought and of civilisation; the final chapter, after dwelling upon the glories of French astronomy in the nineteenth century, emphasises the reasons why France has of late dropped out of a leading position in astronomical research. Modern developments require large instruments, and so far the money has not been forthcoming from Government or private sources to keep France abreast of most other countries. It is to be hoped that Prof. Esclangon's appeal in this volume may fall upon fruitful ground—and if fresh developments in France react favourably upon Great Britain, so much the better.