

SOONDAR MOONI. By E. O. SHEBBEARE. Victor Gollancz, Ltd. London. 18s.

Here is another book about Indian (Asiatic) elephants, but one with a difference. Many writers, even experienced and gifted ones, tend to invest the elephant with magical powers, great intelligence and a certain amount of glamour—all of which have great popular appeal; while others endeavour to debunk the popular elephant legends. Mr. Shebbeare does neither of these. In a delightful story, not lacking in continuity and sustained interest to the reader throughout, he describes most of the life history of an individual female elephant of north-east India. He thus lays on record a vast amount of valuable, first-hand, authentic information on elephants in their wild state, how they react to various natural and man-made events, and how they submit to capture, training, and working for man.

The story is mostly told through the eyes and mind of the elephant, and the author appears to have what is probably a very accurate idea of the real thoughts of an elephant—without any undue tendency to an anthropomorphic approach to the subject. The author's illustrations are good enough to make us wish that there were more of them.

Having myself spent over thirty years in this very same north-east corner of India in close contact with wild and tame elephants, I am able to confirm that the descriptions given of the forests, savannahs, elephants and other wild animals are not only faithfully depicted, but also that they are told in a most interesting and readable manner. As far as is known, Kipling never set eyes on the forests of the Garo Hills of Assam, wherein is laid the scene of his famous though imaginary elephant stories: Mr. Shebbeare, on the other hand, lived and worked for thirty-two years in the forests and with the elephants he describes with such charm.

Elephants apart, this book gives a fascinating picture of the human inhabitants of the locality and events of the period: the jungle folk, the elephant catchers, trainers and buyers, the *mahouts*, the Sonapore and other Melas of Bihar, train journeys, tea gardens, tiger shoots in north Bengal and so on. The whole story is written with remarkable modesty and self-effacement for a man who rose to be head of the Forest Department of Bengal and who twice was a member of Everest Expeditions.

Most of the facts of the author's career are given on the dust cover, with further information in the introduction by the

Australian Minister for External Affairs. What is not recorded is the fact that the author was one of the last of a dying race of forest officers in India who knew and loved their forests and the wild life therein more than the office chair.

*Soondar Mooni* is a book as enchanting to read as it is accurate natural history, and must be one of the best yet written on the Indian elephant.

E. P. G.

ELEPHANTS. By RICHARD CARRINGTON. Chatto and Windus, 25s.

This book deals with both African and Asiatic elephants, as well as with their prehistoric ancestors since Eocene times and their historical contacts with man from Alexander and Hannibal down to Barnum and Bertram Mills. It is divided into three parts under the concisely self-explanatory titles "Elephants as Animals", "Elephants as Fossils", and "Elephants and Man".

Mr. Carrington has got to know the African elephant from personal observation and contact with men of experience: for his knowledge of the Asiatic one, apart from advice on some points from the late Colonel J. H. Williams, he has had to rely more on books. His researches in elephant literature have been thorough and he quotes from it extensively, often verbatim, and always with full reference. He has wisely quoted much from Sanderson who, though he wrote in 1878, was far ahead of his time especially in his grasp of what would nowadays be called "behaviour": he was, moreover, an ardent "debunker" of more imaginative earlier writers.

The author regards the digestion of elephants as inefficient, citing experiments which show that they digest only 44 per cent of the hay they eat as against 50-70 per cent for cows, horses and sheep. Hay is, however, unnatural diet for them—a poor substitute for green fodder which is scarce in the temperate zone. The dung of herds living in elephant country, in Asia at any rate, suggests very thorough digestion, for it attracts few insects, is useless as manure and when dry, is composed only of fibres.

Those familiar with the way in which elephants, on a hot march, draw trunkfuls of liquid from their mouths to squirt along their flanks will be surprised to read (p. 44) that "there is no scientific basis for this picturesque superstition". This refers presumably to the source of the liquid and not to the existence of the habit which is surely too well known to be in doubt.