a whole, although the author points out substantial unsolved questions. This comprehensive view is aided by the very readable exposition. The book is recommended to all readers interested in the subject.

PHILIP M. WHITMAN

The world of mathematics. A small library of the literature of mathematics from A'h-mosé the Scribe to Albert Einstein, presented with commentaries and notes by James R. Newman. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1956. 18+2537 pp., 4 volumes. $20.00.

While it is not customary to review popular books on mathematics in this Bulletin, this one so far exceeds the norm both in range and in sales that it demands notice. (It is undoubtedly the all-time best-seller among mathematics books other than textbooks.) A nonmathematician with an amateur's interest in the subject might well wonder at first why he should buy these volumes rather than one of the more compact (and less expensive) popular books, of which there are many excellent ones that have enjoyed a far smaller sale. However, most short popular books on mathematics cover only a limited selection of topics that are not too technical to discuss superficially and are conceded to possess universal appeal. Most of these topics are included here too, but so is much more, and the reader can make his own choice. The subtitle is in a sense misleading, since the contents are much more literature *about* mathematics than mathematics as such. This is of course inevitable in any popular book. A nonmathematician will not learn much mathematics from these volumes, although he is told a great deal about mathematics and about cognate subjects, such as mathematicians, physics, logic, and foreign politics; whether this will help him understand what mathematics is about and what mathematicians do is not for a professional mathematician to say. However, there is also a great deal here of value for the professional mathematician, collected from sources that are not on everyone's bookshelf. Some at least of this material will be helpful to teachers, and it would be hard to find any mathematician who will not be entertained by some of it, or who will not find something that is new to him.

The contents are highly varied. Some of the selections are actually from the mathematical literature in the strict sense, some are written specifically for the layman, and some are mathematics only by the editor's fiat. Some are extremely interesting, some are exasperating, and some are downright dull. It would be neither practical nor illuminating to list the contents in detail: the following remarks are indicative rather than exhaustive. There are numerous assorted dis-