

BOOK NOTICES.

History of the Literature of the Scandinavian North, from the Most Ancient Times to the Present. By FREDERICK WINKEL HORN, Ph.D. Translated by RASMUS B. ANDERSON. 8vo., pp. 507. Chicago: S. C. Griggs & Co. Price, \$3.50.

To all English-speaking people, Scandinavian literature should have a special interest. It possesses strong affinity to our own. In our veins flows the blood of our old Norse ancestors. A strain of their mental constitution affects our intellectual life. It is remarkable to what a literature that grey old North has given birth—remarkable both as to its volume and its character. The Scandinavian Eddas and Sagas are conceived in the grandest poetic vein. They derive their sublimity, in part, probably, from the stern sublimity of the fjords, and fire-mountains, and blended lava and ice-fields of Scandinavian scenery; and in part from the weird, wild mythology of the North, which itself was largely influenced by the aspects of nature.

It seems almost impossible that such a noble literature should have flourished amid the rigorous climatic conditions of the North; but the cold winters and long, dark nights furnished the opportunities for the cultivation of letters that the vigorous intellect of the Norsemen eagerly embraced. Of the 70,000 inhabitants of Iceland, says Prof. Anderson, "there is not an individual who is not able to read." The same intellectual characteristics are shared by the Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians. There is scarce a people on the earth among whom education is more widely diffused, and literature more sedulously cultivated.

Although there are some 2,000 volumes in English, treating, more or less fully, Scandinavian countries, we do not know one which brings within the reach of the English

reader facilities for the study of its literature equal to this volume. Prof. Anderson, in his noble work on Norse Mythology—reviewed on its issue in these pages—demonstrated his familiarity with the spirit of the North. He has here shown his accurate acquaintance with its scholarship. He describes first the old Norse literature of Iceland, the elder and younger Eddas, the Skaldic poetry, so akin in its alliteration to Anglo-Saxon verse, and the heroic Sagas, legends, and folk-lore of the North. With the discovery of printing and revival of learning, Iceland took part in a marked degree in the intellectual activity of the age.

In Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, literature was largely cultivated under the influence of the clergy. The youth flocked the Universities of Heidelberg, Cologne, and especially of Paris, and brought home a love of the "humanities" which they cultivated with distinguished success. Here, as elsewhere, the Lutheran Reformation stimulated free inquiry and intellectual activity; and, with the translation of the Scriptures, created a vigorous vernacular literature. The charming books of Bjornson and Ibsen reveal the poetic fire of the Norse mind, while the contributions of Scandinavia to science are well known.

One of the most striking illustrations of the native force of Northern literature is the fact that the Finnish stories of Prof. Topelius, a native Finn, have procured for him the title, the Scott of the North, and, translated into English and published in the mid-continent of America, exert their fascination over thousands of readers who have been in the habit of erroneously confounding Finns and Lapps and Eskimo in one common and unlettered class.

A striking feature of this book is a bibliography of nearly a hundred pages, by Thorvald Solberg, of all the important books in English on the Scandinavian countries.