

OUR BOOKSHELF.

Norse Tales. By Edward Thomas. Pp. 159. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912.) Price 2s. This book is a successful attempt to popularise the romance and poetry of ancient Norse literature. Though he has not quite attained the dignity and charm of style which render Sir G. Dasent's "Story of Burnt Njal" and the "Popular Tales" from the collection of Asbjorsen classics in our folk-lore literature, this presentment by Mr. Thomas offers little ground for criticism.

The collection falls into two parts:—first, stories of the gods, a rearrangement of the Prose or Younger Edda, compiled by Snorri Sturleson in the thirteenth century; secondly, an adaptation of the excellent collection of early poetry made by Gudbrand Vigfuson and F. York Powell, under the title of "Corpus Poeticum Boreale." Mr. Thomas, perhaps wisely, does not discuss at length the many problems of the Eddas. All that is certain is that the poems were collected in Iceland, that some bear internal evidence of being older than others, and that they assumed their present shape long after the time of their composition. The land in which they were originally written is still uncertain. The editors of the "Corpus Poeticum Boreale" suggest that some may have their origin in these islands, or may have been re-edited here "at a time when the Irish Church, with her fervent faith, her weird and wild imaginings, and curious half-Eastern legends, was impressing the poetic mind on one side, while the rich and splendid court of Eadgar or Canute would stimulate it on the other."

The introduction by Mr. Thomas is excellent, so far as it goes. But as the book seems to be intended for school use, it might with advantage have been extended, and a bolder attempt might have been made to prepare the student for the assimilation of much that is unfamiliar. We must, however, be thankful for what he has given us: "The Making of the Worlds, of Gods, and of Giants"; the twisting of Loki in the cave which causes earthquakes; the tale of Balder and Loki, where a note might have been added to direct the reader to Prof. Frazer's explanation of the myth; Thor, Helgi, and Sigurd—a splendid feast of poetry and romance.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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Further Researches into Induced Cell Reproduction and Cancer.

THE reviewer of Mr. H. C. Ross's book, "Further Researches into Induced Cell Reproduction and Cancer," vol. ii. (NATURE, August 15, page 601), appears to me to have been very unfortunate in saying that "The accuracy of the observations now described depends upon the accuracy of those described before, and they in turn depend upon the accuracy of an

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equation in which degrees of temperature, minutes of time, and cubic centimetres of solutions are added together." The accuracy of Mr. Ross's observations does not depend in any way upon the equation referred to, which is simply a formula for making a certain jelly. The reviewer would imply that the equation itself is unscientific because degrees of temperature, minutes of time and cubic centimetres of solutions are added together, and that therefore the author does not possess even an elementary knowledge of the subject. The reviewer, however, is himself obviously ignorant of the fact that such an addition is quite scientific and allowable. It is not degrees of temperature and minutes of time which are added together, but the numbers of units of these entities concerned. He might as well criticise any chemical formula, such as H_2O , because such would imply that the hydrogen is multiplied by the oxygen. As a matter of fact, Mr. H. C. Ross's equation was given on my advice, because it is the most suitable way of representing the various factors concerned in the proper concoction of the jelly. The equation represents the differential coefficient of a function of many independent variables, which is the sum of the partial differential coefficients obtained from each variable.

The other remarks of the reviewer show the same want of accuracy. Mr. Ross has proved that human leucocytes can be forced to divide in large numbers by certain agencies, as described by me in NATURE of December 14, 1911, No. 2198, p. 231, and it seems to me absurd to maintain that the facts found by him "necessitate the abandonment of every generally accepted belief with regard to mitosis." If the mode of division of human blood leucocytes had been previously determined with certainty, your reviewer's remarks might have been justified; but this is not the case. If Mr. Ross's observations cannot be reconciled with previous hypotheses (which I do not admit), so much the worse for the hypotheses. At all events the leucocytes actually do divide exactly as he has described.

During the last two and a half years Mr. Ross has been subjected to many criticisms of this nature—which criticisms remind me very strongly of the story of Galileo and his critics regarding the satellites of Jupiter. So far as I remember, it is said that the critics denied the possibility of Jupiter having satellites, but at the same time refused to look at them through Galileo's telescope. I think that if some of Mr. Ross's critics would spend as much time over his specimens as I have done they would not be so free with their *a priori* objections. RONALD ROSS.

Johnston Tropical Laboratory, University of
Liverpool, August 31.

A Flower-sanctuary.

I BEG to thank Mr. Perrycoate for his letter in NATURE of September 19. The county of Somerset has for some time had a by-law similar to that of the county of Cornwall; but you will observe that the by-law does not justify the protection of any particular plant, and that the special flora of Cheddar might easily disappear without any violation of its provisions. It only applies to the uprooting or destruction of plants "in such a manner and in such quantities as to damage or disfigure any road," &c., and it is further limited by the proviso which enables persons to collect specimens in small quantities for private and scientific use. I fear that the cases in which a prosecution under such a by-law would succeed are very few, and certainly the by-law falls far short of the realisation of the wish to protect a rare flora.

EDW. FRY.

Fairland, near Bristol, September 21.