the same character made of late years, including several important ones from members of the society, it seemed evident that observation of this planet was not so difficult as is generally represented. It was seen further that if a proper discussion and analysis of all recorded observations were made, the result might be a large addition to our knowledge of the planet's surface.

The Committee, therefore, in inaugurating this important movement, divide the work to be done into three branches:—

1. The formation of a sub-committee of astronomical observers (including non-members of the society) for the purpose of continually observing Venus during one complete synodical revolution.

2. The collection of all ancient observations and drawings of the planet.

3. The collection of as much modern data as possible from existing observations, and from public and private records.

At the conclusion of the observations of the sub-committee, the results obtained, together with the ancient and modern observations collected, will be placed in the hands of a competent astronomer for complete analysis and discussion, when the results obtained will be published.

Those observers who are willing to join the "Venus Observation Sub-Committee" are requested to send their names and addresses to the hon. secretary of the Society, Ashley Road, Bristol, before March 10, stating the aperture and power of the instrument they intend to employ.

The observations will commence on March 20, previous to which a circular, containing full instructions, will be issued to every observer who has expressed his willingness to assist in the project.

PROFESSOR DE NOTARIS AND HIS NEW WORK ON MOSSES

IN the year 1838 Professor De Notaris, of the Universities of Turin and Genoa, published a *Syllabus Muscorum*, which he now calls *Un lavoro giovanile* (a juvenile work). Still it is a very useful manual for the young Italian bryologist, for whom it was first written, and to whom it gives not only the exact characters of each plant, but also their localities and the synonymy. From that time, year after year, he went on increasing and improving his work, till he had gathered together sufficient materials for a new work. It was not, however, till last year that he succeeded in persuading the bountiful municipality of Genoa to take his MS. in hand and publish it, which they effectually did at their own cost some months ago. The simple title of De Notaris' work* was mentioned by one English scientific periodical; but, except Dr. Braithwaite, the well-known contributor of the "Recent Additions to our Moss Flora," and Mr. C. J. Smith, who recently published a "Moss Flora of Sussex," accompanied by a clear and really instructive paper on the structure and reproduction of mosses,† I have hardly heard of any other English bryologist taking account of the newly edited *Atti della Università di Genoa*, the first of which, in large quarto, is entirely taken up by Professor De Notaris' standard work.

This painstaking and well-digested composition represents, as it were, the *résumé*, or, we might say, the quintessence of the long and seldom interrupted labours of the veteran bryologist, who, far from rejecting or disregarding the improvements that bryology has recently made, is quite willing to adopt them wherever he finds them of practical value, but not when, instead of the promised gold, they only give glittering or useless tinsel.

* "Epilogo della Briologia Italiana."

† "I have seen," writes Mr. Smith, "your friend's *Epilogo*, and am much struck with it. What a fine work, and brought out at the cost of the Municipality! When will such things occur in England?"

"I really find myself"—thus he writes in his preliminary comments—"in a sort of quandary (*specie di peritanza*) whenever I have to produce any ulterior, though obvious, re-adjustment, which might probably be attributed to some deplorable mania of upsetting and overthrowing the monumental edifice of the European bryology, or even to an ungracious instinct (*parmaloso istinto*) of seizing upon and appropriating the works of others. For, after all, we must acknowledge that the *Bryologia Europæa* (of Schimpfer) is the bible of every student of mosses."

Whilst admitting that any very small and apparently insignificant character may at times be useful to establish a natural group, De Notaris believes that such differential characters occasionally assumed, to complete the diagnosis of some genus or species, cannot be taken as absolute and invariable, and therefore he prefers to stick to the old Linnean canon: *Quæ in uno genere ad genus stabilendum valent, minime idem in alio genere præstant*.

Thus pointing out the different forms of cells in the epicarp of *Bryum caespitosum* and *B. erythrocarpum*, and seeing that it is not in the power of anyone to examine all the capsular membranes of each individual plant of these two species, he says: "We must not wonder if now and then an exception to the ruling character of the cells is to be found," observing, at the same time, that a pretty good character for distinguishing certain natural groups might also be found in the specific conditions of the *endochrome*. Another striking remark on this subject he makes, where he says that "the epithet *pachydermic*, applied to the cellule of the epicarps, might easily be a source of error, owing to either a stronger or weaker cohesion of the chromoplasm, in which case the cellules might well be *pachydermic*, and flocculently membranaceous at the same time."

He further observes upon the variable characters of the inflorescence that "*Mnium medium* is found both monœcious and polygamous, as well as *Bryum torquens* and *Bryum pendulum*. *Catocopium* is not seldom to be found monœcious as well as diœcious. Even that form, he says, which I have distinguished under the name of *Bryum bimoidium*, may turn out at some time to be merely a diœcious form of *B. bimum*."

The *peristome*, in his view, is but an exudation or, as it were, a hypertrophy in the evolution of the capsule, not an indispensable means for the ripening of the sporules. Hence the reason why he considers it, morphologically speaking, as an apparatus of secondary importance. Thus there are specimens of *Hypnum stellatum*, which bear their ordinary normal capsules, whilst there are others whose capsules are like those of the apothecia, with imperfect and nearly Leskeaceous peristomes.

Other important reflections are to be found in the same "Comments," such as the one relating to the *perichætal* leaves, which serve to distinguish a *Limnobium* from a *Hypnum* better than any other distinction taken from the habit of the stem or the arrangement of the leaves; and the other on the topographical distribution of mosses in Italy, where the great variegation of the "Bryological mantle" mainly depends upon the various constitution, elevation, or undulation of the soil; the heights and the valleys, naked, or well timbered and green with copse and grove, variously contributing to their infinitely varied diversifications.

Among the vagrant species of all regions he points out particularly the *Bryum alpinum*, which, "from the uppermost boundaries of the Alpine zone, spreads itself down to the very brackish pastures that scarcely raise themselves above the sea level in the islets of the Strait of Bonifacio." Again, that gem of mosses *Schistostega osmundacea* (Bridel's *Catoptridium smaragdinum*) which has been till late a *desideratum* in the Italian flora, De Notaris informs us he found himself whilst, in 1865, he was crossing the Morgan on his way to Mont Rosa.

J. GAGLIARDI