

## OBITUARIES

## Dr. Gustav Senn

DR. GUSTAV SENN, professor of botany in the University of Basel, died there suddenly on the morning of July 10. His colleagues and other friends were preparing a *Festschrift* to be given him on November 9, his seventieth birthday.

Gustav Senn wrote his inaugural dissertation in 1899 on certain colonial unicellular algæ; and he dealt about the same time with several families of the lower algæ for Engler and Prantl. In several subsequent papers he discussed the arrangement of chlorophyll and 'chromatophores' in algæ and in higher plants. He wrote a useful little *Flora* of the Western Alps about forty years ago, and published a number of papers on the special physiology of Alpine plants in relation to light and temperature.

But Senn was chiefly remarkable for his admirable knowledge of Greek, and for his devotion to Theophrastus and other lesser sources of Greek botany; herein he was the legitimate successor to the last of our own scholar-botanists, Sir William Thiselton-Dyer. Senn had ambitious schemes in hand, including a revised text and translation of Theophrastus; but he was a slow and most cautious worker, and has left a deal of work undone. The last time I saw him, just before the War, we talked of a difficult and confused part of Theophrastus' work on "The Causes of Plants"; he had cut up and pieced together several pages of the book, and as he thought, and as it seemed to me, the re-arranged paragraphs fell simply and obviously into two separate versions of the story.

Among Senn's classical papers was one on the Theophrastean pine trees of the north-east Mediterranean: that is to say, on the stone pine, the Corsican pine and the Aleppo pine, in Macedonia, in Arcady and on Mount Ida. Another deals with "Theophrastus Differential-Diagnosen für laubwerfende Eichen"; in other words, on the various deciduous oaks, and their somewhat peculiar limitations of habitat and distribution. The number of species to be dealt with is considerable, including *Q. Robur*, *Aegilops*, *Cerris lanuginosa*, *pedunculata*, and perhaps one or two more; and Senn's identification of the Greek names differs in several instances from Dyer's. In yet another paper, on the Greek fir trees, Senn argues (again against Dyer) that what Theophrastus calls the male and female fir are really distinct species. One is the common Greek fir tree, *A. Apollinis*, Link, of which *A. cephalonica* is a local form; the other, *A. alba*, Miller. (= *Pinus Picea*, L.), grows further north, and forms great woods in Macedonia. A better-known and still more curious paper is one on "Oak-galls in the *Historia Plantarum* of Theophrastus", published in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* in 1941 (see *Nature*, April 17, 1937, p. 684). Theophrastus mentions ten kinds of gall on various oaks, giving a very few words to each; and Senn succeeds in identifying every one of these, the common oak apple being the only one of which the identification remains a little dubious. Dyer identified, with more or less certainty, a vast number of Greek names of the higher plants; but he gave no heed to such things as galls, nor to the various fungi and fungoid diseases to which Theophrastus makes passing allusion. Here Senn stood alone. I asked him once if he could explain two diseases of the fig-tree which Theophrastus mentions—the so-called 'rot'

(or *sphacelismus*), in which the roots turn black, and the *krados*, in which the leaves do so. He told me that the one was what the French call *la pourridie* (*Dematophora necatrix*, R. Hartig); and the other was caused by *Fumago vagans*, Pers., the sign of which is a sooty dust upon the leaves. Let the revisers of "Liddell and Scott" take note of these!

D'ARCY W. THOMPSON.

## Prebendary Lonsdale Ragg

THE death of the Venerable Lonsdale Ragg at the ripe age of seventy-nine years has deprived forestry and botanists in general of one who for many years had fostered by all means in his power an interest in trees. He was born in 1866, the son of a country clergyman in Shropshire, and no doubt his upbringing in that delightful county did much to influence his work in future years. His clerical career was distinguished, for he was Prebendary of Buckden in Lincoln Cathedral and had been Archdeacon of Gibraltar since 1934. He was, in fact, particularly interested in the Mediterranean countries, and in his earlier years had served in various chaplaincies in Italy and elsewhere, publishing many theological theses on the history of religion in that region.

To a wider public, however, Lonsdale Ragg was known for his interest in trees, and particularly for his beautiful illustrations of tree-life. He had been editor of the quarterly magazine *Tree Lover* from 1932, and its pages are full of his contributions and of his delightful sketches of trees. These black-and-white illustrations of typical trees were not only most artistic, but were also very accurate as to detail. Although he usually concentrated on depicting particular specimens, some of his work shows that he was also equally competent in producing more general scenes, as is exemplified by his scenes of "Bath after the Blitz" and "The Charm of Foliage"—a drawing of Sydney Gardens in Bath. It was in this city that he had made his home in recent years, and its picturesque surroundings gave him ample scope for practising his art. Many of his sketches consist of details of the trunk and lower branches of some particular giant, and he was particularly interested in famous and historic trees, especially large and well-grown specimens. There is a sketch of a specimen of *Robinia pseudoacacia* at Warminster, with a height of 85 ft. and a girth of 21 ft. 6 in., which is typical of his work.

Lonsdale Ragg kept up his interest in trees until the end of his life. He was a frequent visitor to Kew until recently, when increasing infirmity rendered the journey from Bath under war-time conditions difficult. He was indeed a tree lover, and one of his last communications with the Royal Botanic Gardens concerned the dimensions of a specimen of Monterey cypress which he had discovered near Lyme Regis. He had hoped that this was the largest specimen in the British Isles and was somewhat disappointed when it was pointed out that larger specimens existed.

As a man Lonsdale Ragg possessed great charm, and his enthusiasm together with his old-world courtesy endeared him to all with whom he came in contact. His writings, his sketches and above all his delightful personality will be missed by all tree lovers.

G. EVANS.