

WILHELM von HAIDINGER

WILHELM VON HAIDINGER is no more. He died after some years of failing health, though the illness to which he finally succumbed on the 19th of March was a short one. Among his veteran contemporaries in the mineralogist's craft, such as Breithaupt, Karl F. Naumann, Gustav Rose, and Karl C. von Leonhard, he must have stood second on the ladder of time, the venerable Breithaupt being some four years his senior. His father, Karl Haidinger, was a mineralogist, and indeed was for several years Professor of Mining at Schemnitz. But, while Wilhelm was yet an infant, his father died at Vienna, where he had, in his latter days, filled a post in the Imperial Mint.

The young Haidinger seems in some sort to have inherited his father's taste for minerals, for he joined the class of Mohs at Gratz, where that distinguished mineralogist was giving a new impetus to the study of his science by popularising it in what was termed a natural history system of classification, and by a systematic method of discriminating the different species of minerals; and subsequently young Haidinger went to Freiberg to complete his training in Mining. Count Breunner, who came to England in 1822, and was made a Doctor in Civil Law at Oxford, invited the young mineralogist to accompany him. He embraced the offer, and they travelled together through England, and together reached Edinburgh, where the energetic and winning character of the young Austrian, fresh with the lore of the famous lecture-room at Gratz, at once made him friends in the Northern Athens, in the University of which capital Jameson had already made Minerals a fascinating study. Among the friends he there made was Mr. Allan, the wealthy banker, who during the next year invited young Haidinger to make a home of his house while employed in translating the Mineralogy of Mohs into English. So after returning to Vienna, he once more, in 1823, came to Edinburgh, and made Mr. Allan's house his head-quarters till 1827. He appears to have been a sort of tutor to Mr. Robert Allan, the eldest son of his generous friend; and with him he travelled during these four years through Cornwall, and then through Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Italy, and France. It was mainly during these travels that the famous collection, afterwards the property of Mr. Robert Greg, and now in the British Museum, was formed.

During these four years he brought out his translation of Mohs' treatise, and wrote several Mineralogical papers for the Wernerian Society and the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Subsequently he joined with his brothers in starting a porcelain manufactory at Elbogen near Carlsbad. Here he continued till 1840, still, however, bringing out from time to time memoirs on new minerals or new observations on minerals already known. The minerals Edingtonite, Sternbergite, Fergusonite, Herderite, Erinite, Picrosmine, Johannite, Botryogen, and Hartite, are among those he studied and described previous to and during this period.

In 1840 he returned to his native city, Vienna, to devote himself more exclusively to the scientific pursuits he loved. Thenceforward his memoirs will be found distributed at pretty regular intervals through the Sitzungsberichte of the Vienna Academy.

Among the subjects that he worked at during the next period of his life were the optical phenomena exhibited by crystals in regard to light and colour; more particularly those of pleochroism. He invented, for the investigation of these, the Dichroscope, a simple but useful little instrument, enabling an observer to examine and compare the different characters of the absorption exercised by a birefringent crystal on light traversing it, according as the plane of vibration of the light is parallel or perpendicular

to any one of the principal sections of the crystal. The description of Hauerite, a new mineral, in fact, a manganese pyrites, was given in 1847; that of Kenngottite in 1857. The Haidinger brushes, a subjective phenomenon due to the eye itself, and observed in looking towards a window through a tourmaline or Nicol prism, was an illustration of the acuteness of his powers of observation. A compendious and valuable treatise on Mineralogy, brought out in 1845, to take the place of an earlier treatise, was also, during this period of his life, continually undergoing revision for new editions; while new investigations of minerals were also appearing under his name.

From the moment of the foundation of the Geological Institute for the Empire in Vienna, Haidinger was the obvious man to lead that younger generation by whose labours the new Institute was to be reared and supported. So he was its Director until some two or three years ago, when he retired from the position he had filled so well, with a Ritter's rank and a well-earned pension.

For the last twelve years of his life he had given his attention, almost to the exclusion of other scientific inquiry, to the subject of meteorites. He laboured indefatigably almost to the last in collecting specimens from any new falls of meteorites reported in any portion of the globe, that they might be added to the noble collection in the Imperial Museum; and he was always at work at the interpretation of the strange phenomena witnessed by those who have described the fall of meteorites in any language or country.

Such is a rapid review of the main features in the life of a man who seems always to have been at work; whose pen was one of the readiest and busiest; whose nature was ever genial and generous; and who, at the age of seventy-seven, has finished an honourable life's work, and leaves behind him a name which Austria may cherish as that of one of her illustrious sons, and which many an Austrian and many a foreigner will remember with warm respect; while those who enjoyed nearer relations with Wilhelm von Haidinger will assuredly ever remember him with affectionate regard.

N. S. M.

A TUBULAR POSTAL SERVICE

SOME large iron pipes have just been laid from the General Post Office to the Branch Office at Charing Cross, through which pipes packages of letters are blown in either direction at will, by compressed air. These tubes are to be extended from Charing Cross to the Houses of Parliament; and when the total expenses of laying pipes and of transmitting small packages through them is known by experience, very possibly the system may be extended, and letters intended for quick delivery may be sent by this method at a moderate charge.

This plan of sending messages through pipes for short distances has been employed in the City for many years in connection with the late Electric and International Telegraph Company. Seventeen or eighteen years ago, Mr. Latimer Clark laid down tubes from the Central Office of the Company in Lothbury to the Telegraph offices in Cornhill and Mincing Lane. By means of a steam-engine which worked a great air-pump, messages enclosed in small gutta-percha carriers, each somewhat resembling a sausage in shape and size, were drawn from Cornhill and Mincing Lane to Lothbury. Additional and smaller pipes were afterwards laid down by him, so that the vacuum could be applied to the further ends of the carrying pipes, in order that messages might be sent in the opposite direction also. They were then easily transmitted to and from Cornhill, but the Mincing Lane station being two-thirds of a mile off, it was found that the friction of the air in the pipes was too great, so that carriers could be sent in one direction only, namely, from Mincing Lane to Lothbury. Some years later, when Mr. C. F. Varley became engineer to the International Telegraph