

ALEXANDER BRAUN

WE regret to announce the death of the well-known German botanist, Prof. Alexander Braun, which took place at Berlin, on March 29. He was born in Ratisbon, May 10, 1805, and after the completion of his university studies entered upon the duties of Professor of Botany in the University of Freiburg, in Baden. Here he published his first important book, "Vergleichende Untersuchung über die Ordnung der Schuppen an den Tannenzapfen," in which he formulated the theory with regard to the position of the leaves on plants now essentially recognised by botanists. In 1850 he accepted a call to the University of Giessen, and issued shortly after his most notable work, "Betrachtungen über die Erscheinung der Verjüngung in der Natur, insbesondere in der Lebens- und Bildungsgeschichte der Pflanze." The extensive series of observations, and the numerous valuable theoretical deductions recorded in this suggestive work, formed one of the most noteworthy contributions to vegetable morphology, and placed the author at once among the leading botanists of the day. In 1852 he removed to Berlin, where he had been appointed Professor of Botany and Director of the Botanical Gardens, positions which he occupied up to the time of his death. The unwearied activity of Braun during this period is evidenced by the large number and variety of the contributions made by him to botanical literature. Of these his investigations on cryptogamia assume the foremost rank, embracing papers on the families *Marsilia*, *Pilularia*, and *Selaginella*, African varieties of *Chara*, Movements of the Juices in the Cells of *Chara*, Vegetable Individuals in their relations to Species, Some New Diseases of Plants caused by Fungi, New Varieties of Single-celled Algæ, &c.

Among his more prominent publications on phanerogamia should be mentioned the papers on parthenogenesis, polyembryony, and budding of *calebogyne*, and the oblique direction of woody fibre in its relations to twisted tree stems. His efforts in all investigations were chiefly directed to perfecting our knowledge of vegetable morphology, and by comparative studies in this region, to the establishment of well-defined laws with regard to the growth of plants, and the relationship between different varieties. Braun's theories on the latter subject led to the formation of a system, which, although not accepted in all points, is yet regarded by many botanists as the most perfect approach to a natural classification of plants which we at present possess. A contemporary botanist describes the leading feature of his character as consisting in an "earnest striving to bring all the widely diverse families of the vegetable kingdom, fossil as well as existing, within his grasp, and by means of thorough, comparative study to advance toward the true natural classification."

The merits of Prof. Braun were recognised by the bestowal of numerous German orders, and from the King of Prussia he received the title of "Geh.-Regierungs-Rath." He was a prominent member of the Berlin Academy of Sciences and the Botanical Society, occupying the presidency of the latter for a number of years. His papers appeared chiefly in the *Transactions* of these two societies; the classification of plants being given, however, in Ascherson's "Flora of the Province of Brandenburg," in 1864.

THE LOAN COLLECTION OF SCIENTIFIC APPARATUS

THE last of the "present series" of free lectures in connection with the Loan Collection of Scientific Apparatus was given on Saturday, in the lecture theatre of the South Kensington Museum. Major Festing, R.E., took the chair, and the theatre was, as usual, crowded.

The lecture was given by Mr. W. Stephen Mitchell, M.A., on "The *Challenger* Soundings and the Lost Island of Atlantis." An abstract of this will shortly appear. At the end of the lecture Mr. Mitchell said he thought that as this was the last—at any rate of this series—it would be in accordance with the wish of the audience that a few words should be said by way of *résumé*, to mark the occasion. He regretted that his place was not occupied by some one eminent in science. When the Loan Collection of Scientific Apparatus was opened there were planned in connection with it conferences, demonstrations, lectures to science teachers, and the free evening lectures. The conferences lasted as planned during May and June, the lectures to science teachers were carried out as proposed, and the demonstrations were given till December 31. At that date, in consequence of packing the cases for returning the collections lent from abroad, which were lent for a definite period only, it was necessary to close the galleries to the public. The free lectures, however, had been continued, and the apparatus from the galleries had been brought into that theatre, as it had been found necessary, to illustrate the lectures. The lectures had thus kept up the continuity of the collection. He believed he was right in saying that from the outset the promoters of the Loan Collection had looked forward to the establishment of a permanent physical science museum somewhat in imitation of the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers of Paris. Such a museum was recommended by the Royal Commission on Scientific Education, under the presidency of the Duke of Devonshire, and composed of some of the most distinguished men of science in this country. For a building to contain such a museum the commissioners of the Exhibition of 1851, under the presidency of the Prince of Wales, have voted 100,000*l.*, and offered it to the Government. A petition in favour of the establishment of such a museum had, since the opening of the collection, been signed by officers and fellows of learned societies, and presented to the Duke of Richmond and Gordon. At this last lecture of the series they would naturally ask what was likely to be done for the future. As he was in no way officially connected with the museum he was not in a position to give any certain information; but this much he could tell them, a number of instruments that would otherwise have been returned had been acquired by purchase, a number had been presented, a number were left on loan for an indefinite period, and many were left under certain conditions. The galleries at the present time contained a collection of fair size to commence a permanent collection. Here, as in considering the lost island of Atlantis, they must be careful to discriminate between facts and inferences to be drawn from facts. No announcement had been made by the Government as to its intentions. The present condition of the Collection, as he had stated it, was a fact, and they would draw for themselves inferences as to what this might mean. He had seen a statement that the permanent museum might be open in May, but he could not say how far this represented official intentions. The crowded audiences at the lectures in that theatre was, he said, a proof that they wished the Collection and the lectures in connection with it to continue.

Mr. F. S. Mosely moved, and Mr. J. Heywood, F.R.S., seconded the following resolution:—"We who form the audience at this, the last of the present series of lectures in connection with the Loan Collection of Scientific Apparatus, desire to thank the Board of the Science and Art Department for having arranged this series of lectures. We would wish to take this opportunity to express the hope that the Loan Collection of Scientific Apparatus may lead to a permanent collection of a similar nature. We beg the chairman to convey the terms of this resolution to the head of the department."