

pleasure of pointing out that their chief hierophant, the late Prof. Winckler, got most of his astronomy, on which he based his theory, all wrong. His criticism is all the more effective for the studious moderation of his language.

So the book ends, with the final abolition of an absurdity comparable only to that other absurdity, Winckler's *Musri* theory, which was first exploded in the columns of NATURE some years ago (September 25, 1902). The said theory, so far as we can see, is not even mentioned by Prof. King in his book, so dead is it and buried.

So critical common-sense triumphs over non-sense, and true scientific knowledge increases. And Prof. King's book is a landmark of such progress in Babylonian studies, besides giving the general reader an admirable presentment of a most interesting period of ancient history. Its illustrations are good and well chosen: we show two of the photographs of the ruins at Borsippa and Babylon.  
H. H.

DR. BENJAMIN WILLIAMSON, F.R.S.

THERE has just died at his residence in Dublin Dr. Benjamin Williamson, F.R.S., who was for sixty-three years a fellow of Trinity College. Dr. Williamson was born at Mallow, in the county of Cork, in 1827, and entered Trinity College from Kilkenny College in 1843. In 1852 he was elected to a fellowship of Trinity College, but owing to the stagnation of promotion among the fellows, due to the abolition of the obligations of celibacy and of taking Holy Orders, he did not become a tutor until many years afterwards. The intervening years were not, however, wasted, and Williamson quickly earned a considerable local reputation as a lecturer who was able to estimate the capacity of his hearers and did not endeavour to teach them what they were unable to learn. In 1872 he published his first work, a "Treatise on the Differential Calculus," which was followed in 1874 by his "Integral Calculus," both of which have run into many editions and have been used all over the English-speaking world. In 1879 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society, and in 1884 he became professor of natural philosophy in Trinity College. In the latter year he published, along with Dr. Tarleton, a treatise on dynamics, and in 1893 appeared his last publication, "The Mathematical Theory of Stress and Strain." The articles "Infinitesimal Calculus," "Maclaurin," and "Variations, Calculus of," in the ninth edition of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" are also due to him.

Williamson's personality was one of the most delightful, and his rooms in college in the 'eighties were the place of hospitality which many an Englishman, sent for his sins to govern Ireland, remembered with pleasure. The human side of Williamson was always turned towards his fellows, and his mind was always ready to receive suggestions on which his generosity could act. When, in 1897, he became a member of the governing

body of the college, his ripe judgment and his wide acquaintance began at once to be appreciated by his colleagues. The magnificent new laboratories for physics and botany are a portion only of the fruit of his efforts. In matters of learning he was free from prejudice, and proposals for the founding of new chairs or the improving of old found in him always a ready support. Until a couple of years ago he filled with great dignity the honourable office of vice-provost of the college, and it was only with the greatest reluctance that he was compelled by weakness of the body to abandon cares from which his mind did not recoil. The fate of those who by living too long outlive all their friends was not his, for his genial presence and the freshness of his mind made friends for him everywhere. His death is mourned by all who knew him.  
S. B. K.

COUNT SOLMS-LAUBACH, For.Mem.R.S.

BY the death of Hermann, Graf zu Solms-Laubach, on November 25, 1915, Germany has lost the most distinguished of her botanists and the world of science one of its most impressive figures. The sad news was communicated to this country through the Swedish palæontologist, Prof. Nathorst, of Stockholm.

Count Solms was born on December 23, 1842, and had thus nearly completed his seventy-third year. He came of one of the most ancient of German families, who were sovereign in their own domains down to the year 1806. He himself devoted his life wholly to science, holding the professorship of botany first at Göttingen and afterwards at Strasburg. He resigned the latter post a few years ago, but continued to live in the town, surrounded by his university friends.

His work extended to every department of botany. Beginning with an important series of researches on parasitic phanerogams, he subsequently monographed several natural orders, including the screw-pines. His interest in the morphology of flowering plants continued in later years; in 1900 he described the remarkable Crucifer, *Capsella Hegeri*, with indehiscent fruits, regarding it as a mutant of the common *C. Bursa pastoris*. He was always interested in variation, and carried out important investigations on the history of cultivated plants, such as the fig, the papaw, wheat, tulips, and strawberries.

In embryology, he showed that in certain monocotyledons the growing point of the embryo is terminal, as in dicotyledons.

In addition to the flowering plants, his systematic researches extended to every class of cryptogams. One of his most remarkable works in this field is his monograph of the Acetabulariaceae, a family of calcareous Algæ with an ancient fossil history. This was published in 1895 in the Transactions of the Linnean Society, and was his only paper written in English. His book on the "Principles of Plant Geography" (1905) treats in an original manner of the leading conceptions in this great subject.

Perhaps the most important of all his work was that on fossil botany. Solms was an intimate friend of Williamson's, and appreciated his writings and his collection as no one else did at the time. He wrote the obituary notice of Williamson, published in *NATURE* for September 5, 1905, a worthy tribute to his old friend's work.

Solms's "Einleitung in die Paläophytologie," published in 1887 and translated for the Oxford Press in 1892, was of the utmost importance in bringing home to botanists the value and significance of the geological record as affecting plants.

Among his special papers may be mentioned his brilliant work on the Isle of Wight fossil, *Bennettites Gibsonianus* (1890; translated 1891) the type of the Mesozoic Cycadophytes, on the Cycadofilices *Protopitys*, *Medullosa*, etc.; on the Devonian and Lower Carboniferous plants of Germany, and on *Psaronius*. In a quite recent paper on the last-mentioned group he elucidated, for the first time, the true nature of the root-zone. The remarkable recent progress of Palæobotany is in a great degree due to his researches.

Count Solms became a foreign member of the Linnean Society in 1887, of the Royal Society in 1902, and of the Geological Society in 1906. He received the gold medal of the Linnean Society in 1911, and was made a Sc.D. of the University of Cambridge at the Darwin Celebration in 1909.

He had a thorough knowledge of this country, and was a good friend of the English; many who knew him personally were deeply attached to him. He was always intensely averse to the idea of a rupture between his country and ours. We have no record of his feelings after war broke out, but must remember that he was a patriotic German, who had served in the war of 1870.

He was a striking and original personality, of rare intellectual power, and a born leader of men.

D. H. S.

#### NOTES.

IN the course of a debate on co-operative fiscal and economic policy, in the House of Commons on Monday, reference was made to the fact that some industries were almost entirely in German hands before the war broke out. Mr. Runciman, President of the Board of Trade, made the following remarks upon this subject towards the end of the debate:—We have been placed under grave disabilities owing to the fact that optical glass was made almost entirely in Austria and Germany and so little of it was made in this country. It was one of the first articles in which the Board of Trade took an interest in the autumn of 1914. We gathered together all the information we could on the subject of optical glass. We gave every possible assistance to those in this country who were prepared to undertake its manufacture, and already they are producing optical glass which never before had been equalled here. We trust that the monopoly which was held by Germany before the war will never go back to her. In chemicals we have produced to a remarkable degree a large number of articles which before the

war were almost entirely in German hands. Take the case of dyes. Not only the company which by leave of this House was assisted out of our national funds, but also other concerns have produced an enormous amount of dyes during the war. Electrical apparatus in some particulars was almost entirely in German hands. Every one of these articles, glass, chemicals, dyes, electrical apparatus, and I could name about a dozen others, were industries of vast importance not only to us as a great commercial country, but as a fighting country. Without these glass articles, without some of the porcelain articles which are essential for electrical construction, without the best type of magneto, without some of the best of our chemicals, and without a great range of dyes, which used to be manufactured in Germany, we were placed at a great disadvantage. Never again should that happen. This is more than a mere matter of competing with Germany. It ought to be part of our national organisation. Government departments can do a great deal, and I believe they ought to do more, but without the personal ability, without the training, skill, and industry of the individual, nothing can be done by Government departments. I therefore put down as one of the first necessities of this country, if she is to hold her own during times of war and when war is over, that we must improve our research methods, the education of our people, and the training of our young men. We should not attempt to economise on the money we now spend on technical colleges and modern appliances. There are other directions in which we can cut down expenditure with less national damage.

PROF. W. H. PERKIN, F.R.S., professor of chemistry at the University of Oxford, has accepted the post of head of the research department of British Dyes, Limited. He has also accepted the chairmanship of the Advisory Council of that company, in the place made vacant by the death of the late Prof. Raphael Meldola, F.R.S. The board of British Dyes, Limited, expresses special gratification that it has been able to secure the services of Prof. Perkin, who occupies a position of unique distinction as an organic chemist, and has done much valuable research work in regard to problems arising in connection with the manufacture of dyes. He is a son of the late Sir William Perkin, who was the founder of the coal-tar colour industry.

THE council of the Geological Society of London has this year made the following awards of medals and funds:—Wollaston medal, Dr. A. P. Karpinsky (Petrograd); Murchison medal, Dr. R. Kidston, F.R.S. (Stirling); Lyell medal, Dr. C. W. Andrews, F.R.S. (Natural History Museum, London); Wollaston fund, Mr. W. B. Wright (Geological Survey of Ireland); Murchison fund, Mr. G. W. Tyrrell (Glasgow University); Lyell fund, Messrs. M. A. C. Hinton and A. S. Kennard.

THE late Prof. Meldola left property of the value of 34,956*l.*, the net personalty being 33,767*l.* He bequeathed his entomological collection and cabinets to the Hope Museum, Oxford. After certain legacies have been paid, the residue of the property is left to the testator's wife for life, and then for his children,