

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1896.

The Chief Justice (Sir Lambert Dobson) presided at the monthly meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania.

The SECRETARY (Mr. Alex. Morton) read letters of apology from Sir James Agnew, Hon. C. H. Grant, Messrs. J. Barnard, J. B. Walker, and R. M. Johnston.

DEATH OF BARON FERD. VON MUELLER.

In taking the chair, Sir LAMBERT DOESON said : In the last few hours death had claimed one whose name had stood amongst the foremost of the scientific botanists of the world. Baron Ferdinand Von Mueller had passed away, and it was fitting that on this first occasion of the meeting of the Society they should give expression to the deep regret the members felt at the loss that the scientific world, and Australia especially, had sustained in that sad event; and also to give expression to the high esteem and admiration in which they held the Baron. He was one who commenced life as a practical botanist. He took part in various explorations in Australia, and very rapidly gained for himself a name, and one which, with advancing years, became better known and more respected in the scientific world, till towards the end it might be questioned whether any living botanist stood higher than the learned Baron. This Society owed him a very deep debt of gratitude for all he had done for it. From his earliest days in Victoria—the fifties—he constantly supplied contributions to this society, and whenever they had been at a loss on any botanical question or subject, he was ever ready to give them the advantage of his great knowledge, and that, too, in an unselfish and ungrudging spirit. Baron Von Mueller was one of those scientists who looked upon what he knew as not his own, but obtained for others. The humblest student of botany had but to apply to him to find that the great fountain of knowledge he possessed was ever ready to be poured forth for the benefit of anyone seeking to taste of the springs of botanical knowledge. As early as May, 1858, his eminent services in the science of botany in Australia were very greatly appreciated, and in consequence of the aid he afforded to the Tasmanian Royal Society, it was proposed to make him a corresponding member, and he was accordingly elected unanimously. The meeting of the Council at which he was proposed was attended by eight members. Of those all but our venerable Vice-President, Sir James Agnew, had passed away. He would mention their names—Messrs. Joseph Hone (vice-president), in the chair; Hon. W. Henty, Hon. J. Walker, Alderman Lipscomb, Thos. Giblin, J. W. Agnew (now Sir James W. Agnew), James Sprent, Morton Allport, and Dr. J. Milligan. On September 5, 1882, this Society elected him as an hon. member. They missed the name of two or three of the members of the Council of even that time. Messrs. Jno. Swan, C. T. Belstead, H. J. Buckland, and Justin Browne had gone before him. Fortunately the Baron's work did not expire with him. He had contributed no less than some 20 volumes of botanical scientific information, many of them were illustrated books, and all prepared with the greatest care and diligence. He (Sir Lambert) believed the Society possessed copies of all those works. They afforded a foundation of solid information for any botanist of Australasia to work upon, and he believed the eminent author had assisted Mr. Bentham in his work on Australian flora, and in his great work upon our trees and plants. All this work the Baron had done. He was nominally the botanist of Victoria, but he really had been the botanist of all Australasia. The information he had furnished was valuable alike to all the colonies ; he drew no lines, he knew no distinction—from wherever information was sought he was



BARON FERDINAND VON MUELLER.

ready to give it. His name was as familiar as a household word, within the walls of the Society's rooms, and they would long miss him as an authority unquestioned and unquestionable, to whom any botanical matter could be referred. How Baron von Mueller would be replaced it was impossible to say. Good men generally appeared when called for. There was no doubt—and probably through the Baron's example—the science of botany throughout the colonies had taken great strides of late years. The Baron was not only a scientific botanist, but he also brought his knowledge to bear on botany for economic purposes, having introduced for these colonies a large number of plants and fruits of economic value, and others that he had, at any rate proved, were not of economic value. The Baron had now gone, and he (Sir Lambert) was satisfied that throughout the colonies his loss would be recognised and deeply regretted, and his many admirable qualities would be often alluded to in future years. Now the silver cord was broken and the Baron rested in peace.

FUNGI.

Mr. L. RODWAY read a paper on fungi in his usual interesting and instructive style. He said that whilst all other branches of plant life had ample attention paid to them the fungi were neglected because of vast numbers and variety, evanescence, and obscurity, which necessitated a painted copy and microscopical examination. As to the utility of the study, the work done by fungi in breaking down dead tissue was very interesting and instructive. He next dwelt on the destructiveness of various forms of parasitic life on plants, such as rust on wheat and black spot on apples. The study of fungi was, therefore, useful in considering plant diseases and to learn how to cope with the same. The estimated loss from rust in wheat alone in Australia was between two and three millions sterling. In the United States it was 67 million dollars. In India the loss from all fungoid diseases was 10 million pounds per annum, as stated in the *Agricultural Ledger*, published in Calcutta last year. In England alone, while there are about 1,760 flowering plants, there are 4,895 fungi. Tasmania had about 1,000 varieties of flowering plants, and there was little doubt that the fungi in this colony exceeded 1,500. As neither of these countries can be considered peculiarly rich in fungi, and as the number of flowering plants of the world might be roughly estimated at 100,000, some idea of the number and necessary variety of fungi might be conceived. Fungi formed almost a kingdom of themselves. They fed like an animal, but fruited like a plant. They had a very slight link of affinity attaching them to the other plants, whilst through one section, namely, the Mycetozoa, as the name implied, the approach to animals was very marked. The edible qualities of many fungi were not of great importance to the botanist, nor in Tasmania of much consequence to the utilitarian; but in many countries fungi constituted the luxury of the rich, and a staple article of food for the poor. In Tasmania there were many wholesome forms besides the common mushroom. At the same time there were many fungi which were most violently poisonous. He concluded with a graphic description of the luminosity of fungi in Tasmania, and the phenomena of their growth.

Hearty applause greeted the reader of the paper upon resuming his seat.

Mr. T. STEPHENS, in the course of some comments on the paper, said they could not but regard Mr. Rodway as *facile princeps*—the