

NEWS AND VIEWS

CHAIR OF CRYPTOGAMIC BOTANY AT MANCHESTER

Prof. W. H. Lang, F.R.S.

THE Barker chair of cryptogamic botany in the University of Manchester will be vacated at the end of the academic year by its present tenant, Prof. W. H. Lang. His successor has been appointed in the person of Dr. Claud Wardlaw, officer in charge of the Low Temperature Research Station at Trinidad. He is expected to take up his duties in the autumn. The founder of the Barker chair was himself an expert in the study of mosses: and his aim was to secure not merely instruction, but also general research upon those lower forms of plant life which the title of the chair connotes. In order to secure this double result, such periods of advanced teaching as are demanded from the professor are limited, thus leaving opportunity for research to him and to his pupils.

Since such conditions are exceptional, the appointment to the Barker chair commands a special interest. The distinction of its out-going occupant is well known, and was recognized by the award of a Royal Medal in 1931. Prof. Lang, having qualified in medicine in the University of Glasgow, drifted into the specialized pursuit of botanical science after having graduated with distinction also in science in 1894. In the years that followed he carried out various researches, chiefly upon archegoniate plants and gymnosperms. These marked him out as an acute experimentalist and observer, so that when the Barker chair was founded in 1909 the appointment seemed naturally to fall to him. From the first his use of observed fact was strictly critical, and his approach to constructive conclusions very guarded. These qualities are such as are specially required in palaeophytology, towards which circumstances seemed to have been conspiring to guide him. For while still officially in Glasgow he had become acquainted with that prince of palaeontologists, Robert Kidston, of Stirling: and was not Manchester the place where Williamson had enshrined his own peculiarly exact study of fossil plants?

After Lang's appointment to the Barker chair, the results of a happy co-operation with Kidston culminated in the five memoirs "On Old Red Sandstone Plants showing Structure, from the Rhynie Chert Bed, Aberdeenshire". Published in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* (1916-1921), this series, together with that of Kidston and Gwynne-Vaughan on "The Fossil Osmundaceæ", will stand for all time as twin models of method in palaeophytological research. Moreover, each deals with results of supreme importance to the comparative morphology of vascular plants. The Rhynie memoirs are perhaps the most striking record of Prof. Lang's researches. But since their completion, his laboratory has been a centre of elaboration of palaeontological method, and of its application to other fossils,

particularly those of very early time. He has thus laboriously gathered data which, though largely dealing with isolated facts, will ultimately take their place in the jig-saw puzzle, still very imperfectly sketched, of the earliest flora of the land.

Dr. C. W. Wardlaw

DR. C. W. WARDLAW, officer-in-charge of the Low Temperature Research Station, Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, Trinidad, has been appointed to succeed Prof. Lang. Dr. Wardlaw graduated in 1921 with first-class honours in botany in the University of Glasgow and was immediately appointed assistant to the professor of botany, Prof. F. O. Bower. He carried on the Bower tradition with research on size and form in stellar structure and developed research and teaching in mycology at Glasgow. Three years later he took the Ph.D. of Glasgow and was appointed lecturer. He was sent to study mycology under Brown at the Imperial College of Science and Technology, London, and also visited Prof. Chodat's summer school in Switzerland. He took his D.Sc. degree with papers on size and form and studies on the Lanarkshire strawberry disease. He was often called in as consultant on various diseases in Scotland. In 1929 Dr. Wardlaw was appointed mycologist at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, Trinidad, and undertook investigations into diseases of the banana. Later he took charge of the investigations of cold storage in particular reference to the mycological aspects, and has travelled a great deal in the West Indies and in the north of South America.

It may be thought that to appoint an expert on banana investigations as successor to so distinguished a palaeontologist as Prof. Lang would be a dangerous experiment, but Dr. Wardlaw is in point of fact an all-round botanist, with a bias towards the Cryptogams. His first work was on a parasitical disease of cultivated strawberries. Then followed three searching memoirs on "Size and Internal Morphology", with illustrations, mainly cryptogamic, drawn to uniform scale. Later came a series of memoirs on the fungal diseases of the banana; and again, another series based on experiments at the Low Temperature Research Station at Trinidad. These deal with that phase of physiology which is involved in the successful transport of tropical fruits to serve the home markets. Such results, together with descriptive records of wide travel among the West Indian Islands and on the mainland of Central America, reveal Dr. Wardlaw as a botanist of broad interests, who has used his exceptional opportunities for observation and reasoning to good purpose. A botanist so versatile in what he has already accomplished may be trusted to continue the tenure of the Barker chair along lines in accord with the will of its founder.