



Smithsonian Institution

Smithsonian Institution Archives

Proceedings of the Board of Regents circa 1876 - 1890

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XIV JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS.

Board of Regents, his companions in scientific research, and the great body of younger men who looked up to him as their master, have all been made to realize that something has gone from the world which can ill be spared, and that their own lives have lost a part of that which made up their fullness.

Upon the Smithsonian Institution his loss falls with particular weight, since his active interest in its welfare is almost continuous with its existence, for he was one of the Committee of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the report of which upon the "plan proposed for the organization of the Smithsonian Institution," rendered in 1847, has exercised so active an influence upon the subsequent history of this establishment.

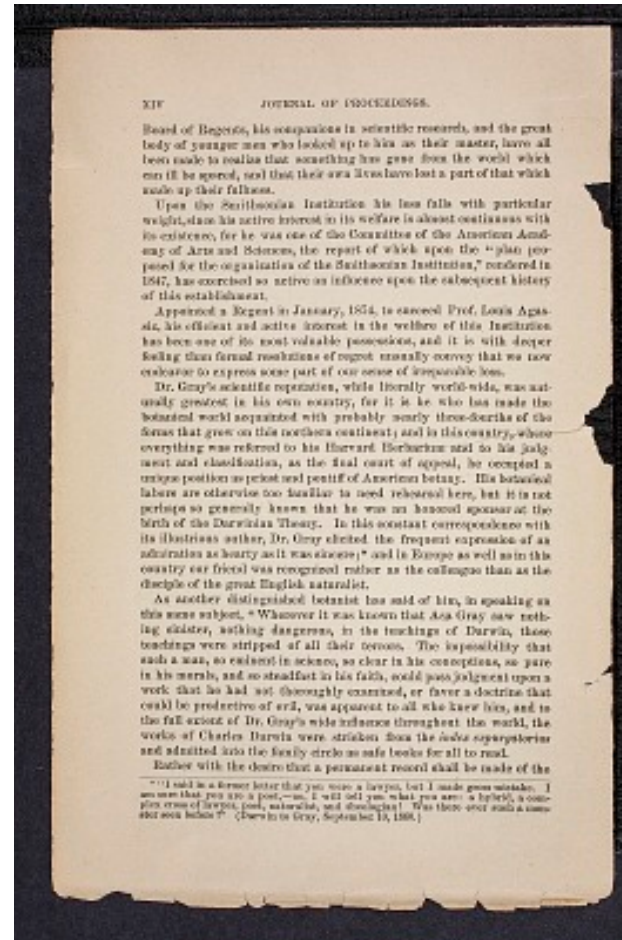
Appointed a Regent in January, 1874, to succeed Prof. Louis Agassiz, his efficient and active interest in the welfare of this Institution has been one of its most valuable possessions, and it is with deeper feeling than formal resolutions of regret usually convey that we now endeavor to express some part of our sense of irreparable loss.

Dr. Gray's scientific reputation, while literally world-wide, was naturally greatest in his own country, for it is he who has made the botanical world acquainted with probably nearly three-fourths of the forms that grow on this northern continent; and in this country, where everything was referred to his Harvard Herbarium and to his judgment and classification, as the final court of appeal, he occupied a unique position as priest and pontiff of American botany. His botanical labors are otherwise too familiar to need rehearsal here, but it is not perhaps so generally known that he was an honored sponsor at the birth of the Darwinian Theory. In this constant correspondence with its illustrious author, Dr. Gray elicited the frequent expression of an admiration as hearty as it was sincere;* and in Europe as well as in this country our friend was recognized rather as the colleague than as the disciple of the great English naturalist.

As another distinguished botanist has said of him, in speaking on this same subject, "Wherever it was known that Asa Gray saw nothing sinister, nothing dangerous, in the teachings of Darwin, those teachings were stripped of all their terrors. The impossibility that such a man, so eminent in science, so clear in his conceptions, so pure in his morals, and so steadfast in his faith, could pass judgment upon a work that he had not thoroughly examined, or favor a doctrine that could be productive of evil, was apparent to all who knew him, and to the full extent of Dr. Gray's wide influence throughout the world, the works of Charles Darwin were stricken from the *index expurgatorius* and admitted into the family circle as safe books for all to read.

Rather with the desire that a permanent record shall be made of the

* "I said in a former letter that you were a lawyer, but I made gross mistake. I am sure that you are a poet,—no, I will tell you what you are: a hybrid, a complex cross of lawyer, poet, naturalist, and theologian! Was there ever such a monster seen before?" (Darwin to Gray, September 10, 1860.)



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