

Science News a Century Ago

Warwickshire Natural History and Archæological Society

THE first anniversary meeting of the above Society was held on May 23, 1837, when the Council's report was read. Though some interesting addresses had been delivered, the Council regretted not having been favoured with communications so much desired by them and so easily furnished by observant naturalists, relating to the different branches of natural history. The collections in geology and mineralogy had been greater than had been anticipated. Most of the objects had come from the cabinets of members. The sole purchase was that of a series of mountain rocks from the British Isles collected by the late Dr. Rowley, late master of University College, Oxford. The zoological collection was daily increasing. It contained about 300 birds. The curators were extremely anxious to complete and classify the collection of British birds and quadrupeds. (*Analyst*, 7, 92).

Carl Ernst Adolf von Hoff (1771-1837)

ON May 24, the eminent German geologist, Carl Ernst Adolf von Hoff, died at the age of sixty-five years. Born on November 1, 1771, von Hoff was educated at Jena and Göttingen, and at twenty years of age became a secretary in the diplomatic service of the Government of Gotha, and during the Napoleonic era held various posts. In spite of the unrest of the times, he pursued the study of geology with great zest, in 1801 founded a geological journal and became acquainted with Werner, Goethe and Humboldt. In 1818, the Royal Society of Sciences in Göttingen, acting on a suggestion of the physiologist Blummbach, offered a prize for the best "investigation of the changes that have taken place in the earth's surface conformation since historic times, and the application which can be made of such knowledge in investigating earth revolutions beyond the domain of history". This led to the writing by von Hoff of his "History of the Changes in the Surface of the Earth", published during 1822-41, which placed him in the front rank as an original thinker. Carl von Zittel, speaking of this work, said: "The fact that von Hoff's meritorious work was not properly valued, and was put in the shade by Lyell's epoch making book, which appeared almost simultaneously, is easily explained by the circumstance that the modest German man of science derived his material mainly from books, that his position did not allow him to examine in the field the questions which he discussed, and that he enriched science by no new facts; he faced the problem as an historian, and not as an observer" (see NATURE, 72, 123, June 8, 1905).

The Royal Society

AT a meeting of the Royal Society on May 25, 1837, the concluding portion of Sir David Brewster's paper on the "Absorption of Light" was read, after which Thomas Andrew Knight (1759-1838) read a paper "On the Hereditary Instinctive Propensities of Animals", in which he referred to his observations on terriers, spaniels and retrievers; and Captain Beaufort communicated a paper entitled "On Meteorological Deductions from Observations made at the Observatory at Port Louis in the Mauritius, during the years 1833-34-35 by John Augustus Lloyd, Esq., Surveyor-General of that Island, F.R.S." The observations, from which the results recorded

in the paper were made, were nearly 50,000 in number, and were taken four times each day at the hours of 8 a.m., noon, 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. The observations were those of the barometer, hygrometer, rain gauge and the appearance of the atmosphere.

End of the Euphrates Expedition

ACCORDING to the *Annual Register* for 1837, "On May 28 the *Pembroke*, 74, arrived at Plymouth with the surviving officers and men of the Euphrates expedition. There appears no doubt, notwithstanding the disasters which have attended this preparatory expedition, that with steamers adapted for the purpose and when the navigation of the river is a little better known, that the passage from Bussorah to Beles may be made in twenty days; and when the river becomes known in fifteen days. Beles is about 100 miles from the Bay of Antioch over which distance the mail bags might be rapidly conveyed to a steamer. The passage from Bussorah to Bombay would take a good steamer 10 days. When the whole scheme was brought into existence, communication between Bombay and England might be fairly calculated at not exceeding fifty days."

John Ericsson's Screw Propeller

ON May 28, 1837, the packet sailing ship *Toronto* of 630 tons burthen and drawing 14 ft. 6 in. of water was towed down the River Thames by the experimental steamboat *Francis B. Ogden* fitted with Ericsson's screw propeller. The *Francis B. Ogden*, the largest boat built so far for trial with a screw propeller, was named after the United States Consul at Liverpool, and was 45 ft. long, 8 ft. beam and drew 2 ft. 3 in. It was fitted with an engine having two cylinders 14 in. diameter, 12 in. stroke working with steam at 50 lb. per sq. in. She had been built at Wapping. "The new propelling apparatus", said the *Mechanics' Magazine*, "consists of two short cylinders made of wrought iron, and supported by arms of a peculiar form, which are placed entirely under water at the stern; and made to revolve in contrary directions about a common axis. To the outer periphery of each cylinder, there is attached a series of spiral planes or plates, which may, we understand, be placed at any desired angle, according to the effect sought to be obtained, whether it be great speed or great propelling power."

Fires in London

ACCORDING to *The Gentleman's Magazine* of May 1837, of 564 fires which occurred in and around London in the previous year, the following were the causes so far as could be ascertained. Accidents of various kinds, scarcely avoidable, 11; apparel taking fire on the person, 2; bed curtains set on fire by accident, 71; accidents with candles, 57; cases of palpable carelessness, 18; charcoal fires, portable, 2; children playing with fire, 6; fires kindled on hearths, 5; defective or foul flues and chimneys, 72; fumigation, 9; sundry gas accidents, for the most part occurring from gas-fitters, during the progress of repairs, 38; gunpowder, 1; heating of hay, lime, etc., 7; sparks from lamps, 2; linen incautiously hung before fires, 31; ovens overheated, 6; loose shavings ignited, 13; sparks from fire, 7; defective setting of stoves, etc, 28; application of fire heat to various purposes of trades and manufactures, 34; tobacco smoking, 1; unknown, 95; wilful, 8; window curtains catching fire, 35.