

Science News a Century Ago

The Botanical Society

At a meeting of the Botanical Society on April 20, 1838, a paper by A. Wallis was read on the genus *Myosotis*. The *Myosotis arvensis*, he said, is most usually found in cornfields, or other highly cultivated land, where it sometimes reaches a considerable height. The *Myosotis sylvatica* is mostly found in shady places, where it assumes a stouter form than *M. arvensis*; the bristles of the leaves are shorter and the leaves will generally be found longer than those of *M. arvensis*. There is another distinction also, for which neither soil nor locality would account; it is that the calyx of *M. sylvatica* is more deeply cleft than *M. arvensis*, and the tube of the corolla is longer in the former than in the latter, but he was inclined to doubt whether these were sufficient to justify a specific distinction. Admitting that a difference of soil operates so powerfully in producing such varied and perhaps permanent distinctions of character, it would become a subject worthy of attention how this peculiar operation takes place, and whether by close observation of soil and locality, we may not be able to establish geological laws.

Exploration of the Coast of North America

THE *Athenæum* of April 21, 1838, under the heading "Arctic Discovery Expedition", gave an account of the exploration of the northern coast of North America in 1837-38 by Peter Warren Dease and Thomas Simpson (1808-40), two of the staff of the Hudson's Bay Company. The expedition had been organized by Sir George Simpson (1792-1860), the administrator of the company. "Just half a century had elapsed since Alexander Mackenzie, in 1789, first descended the great river which so justly bears his name and reached the waters of the Polar Sea. Thirty-seven years later, in 1826, Franklin and Back followed Mackenzie's course to the mouth of the same river and coasted 370 miles to the westward tracing the northern shore of America till within 160 miles of Port Barrow, which had been reached only four days after Franklin was obliged to return. The intermediate portion has remained a blank on our maps till the present week brought us the gratifying news of an expedition headed by Messrs. Dease and Simpson . . . having successfully traced the unexplored country between Point Barrow and Franklin's farthest; and thus a continuous line of 60 degrees in extent from Point Turnagain on the east to Behring's Strait on the west has been explored by British hardihood and perseverance." Point Barrow had been reached in 1826 by Elson during Beechey's expedition to the North Pacific in the *Blossom*. Dease and Simpson had spent the winter of 1836-37 at Fort Chipewayan on Lake Athabasca and on the opening of navigation had descended the Slave River and Mackenzie River and had reached the ocean by the most northerly mouth of the latter.

Harper and Joyce's Heating Stove

WHEN Dr. Neil Arnott's method of heating rooms was attracting attention, considerable interest was aroused by the exhibition at the Jerusalem Coffee House of a stove invented by Harper and Joyce designed to burn prepared charcoal which it was claimed gave out no smell and did not vitiate the atmosphere. It was the subject of a lecture by Prof.

Everitt before a well-attended meeting of the Westminster Medical Society on April 21, 1838, and it was also described before the Paris Academy of Sciences by Gay Lussac. In his report, Gay Lussac said: "Much has been said of the wonderful nature of this process that with an expenditure of fifty or sixty centimes [5d. or 6d.] in properly prepared charcoal, a vast apartment may be maintained at an agreeable temperature for twenty-four hours, and moreover that the carbonic acid produced by the combustion is not diffused in the apartment, being absorbed by the carbonate of soda with which the charcoal is impregnated, the danger of suffocation therefore no longer to be dreaded from this method of heating. This much boasted process has appeared to me to be deserving of my examination; and in making the results known, I believe I am doing a duty to the public and performing a duty incumbent on me. . . . The elegant apparatus in which the charcoal is burned, is a true brazier, diffusing all the products of combustion into the apartment where it is placed, and it is from these circumstances that the asserted economy rises. This economy cannot be disputed, but it should not be forgotten that it is gained at the expense of vitiating the air of the apartment."

Medical Biography

THE issue of the *Gentleman's Magazine* of April 1838 contains the following review of the first part of the "Medical Portrait Gallery" by Thomas Joseph Pettigrew which had recently appeared: "The author advances the claims of this work by stating the general deficiency of Medical Biography, and by remarking that the history of the Progress of Medicine cannot be more agreeably displayed than in a detail of the researches of the most celebrated professional men, who have successfully toiled in the pursuit of Science. That this range of view will be most comprehensive is shown by the subjects comprised in the first number: Esculapius (from an antique whole-length statue); Sir Henry Hallford; and Albinus, a very learned German of the last century. Of the engravings it is sufficient to say that the style of their execution is guaranteed, from being executed under the now well-experienced superintendence of Messrs. Fisher, of Newgate Street. In the accompanying Memoirs Mr. Pettigrew has added to his already well-earned fame as a medical historian and antiquary.

Medieval Mummy

THE *Gentleman's Magazine* of April 1838 contains the following information: "Among the curiosities recently added to the Museum of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquities at Copenhagen there is one of a singular nature and of great historical interest. It is the mummy of a female, found in a peat bog near Haraldskioer in Jutland, completely sunk in the soft ground, and fastened to a stake by means of clamps and hooks. The fragments of clothing that remain on the mummy enable the skilful antiquaries of the north to calculate with tolerable certainty that it belongs to the last period of paganism, and M. Petersen has endeavoured in an able historical essay to prove that the mummy is the body of Gunhilda, Queen of Norway, whom King Harald Bluetooth enticed by promises of marriage to come to Denmark in 965 where he put her to death by sinking her in a bog."