

Science News a Century Ago

Population of England and Wales

IN a paper read to the Statistical Society on May 15, 1837, entitled "On the Movement of the Populations of England and Sweden throughout seventy-five Years, ending with 1830", Mr. T. R. Edmonds made many observations of interest to statisticians and physiologists. In the course of his remarks, he said that in the majority of European nations the annual births amounted to 1 in 30 and the annual deaths to 1 in 40 of the total population. The highest birth-rate was about 1 in 23 and the lowest about 1 in 33. The highest rate of deaths observed had been 1 in 30, the lowest (in England), 1 in 50 of the population. The highest rate of increase of population observed was in the United States, where the increase for a long period had been at the rate of 32 per cent every ten years. In England, it had been 16 per cent every ten years. In Sweden and England, the proportion of marriages, births and deaths had been progressively diminishing. The annual loss in population in England and Wales through emigration was 4,000 persons in 1820, 9,000 in 1827 and 30,000 in 1832. Part of this loss had been made up by immigrants from Ireland.

The Electrical Society of London

IN *Sturgeon's Annals* (1, 415) is an article directing attention to the Electrical Society of London, which had just been formed, and for which all subscriptions were to commence on May 16, 1837. Members within twenty miles of London were to pay two guineas, members living beyond that distance one guinea. The article was accompanied by a copy of the rules signed by the honorary secretary, Thomas Patrick, of 11 Lowther Arcade, Strand.

"It gives us great pleasure," said the writer of the article, "to learn that Electricity is no longer to be left to the isolated exertions of individuals, or the chance notice of learned societies. . . . The labours of the Astronomer, Geologist and Chemist will now have for their aid a Body ready to pursue with effect and vigour any line of investigation which mutual pursuits may suggest; and there will thus, we trust, be another of those ennobling links of brotherhood, amongst mankind of all nations, drawing still closer the relationship of intellect."

Royal Geographical Society

THE seventh anniversary meeting of the Royal Geographical Society was held on May 16, 1837, Sir John Barrow, the president, being in the chair. In the course of his remarks, Barrow paid tributes to the memory of Horsburgh, Marsden, Murphy and Davidson, whose deaths within the last twelve months had been a great loss to science and the Society; referred with great satisfaction to the travels of Captain FitzRoy, Lieut. Wellsted, Dr. Andrew Smith, Major Mitchell and Colonel Chesney, and alluded to the expeditions then in progress under Back—who was exploring the coasts of North America—Alexander in South Africa and Schomburgk in British Guiana. He also spoke of Grey and Lushington who were due to sail in a few days for the coast of Western Australia, "with the hope of being able to penetrate some distance into the interior of that vast country and set at rest the question of the existence, or the contrary, of a great inland sea".

The English Medical Profession

AN editorial article in the issue of the *British Annals of Medicine* of May 19, 1837, contains the following remarks: "Besides many excellent anatomists this country possesses in Grant, Sharpey, Owen and others men who imitate the German physiologists and in their lectures take a large survey of the structures and phenomena of the organic kingdom in every stage of their development. Philosophical physiology is growing fashionable. Mr. Owen's lectures—clear, earnest, eloquent, beautifully illustrated—attract almost as many auditors to the theatre of the College of Surgeons as those of Cuvier did to the Garden of Plants in his best days. It is yet humiliating to reflect that England has not taken the initiative in those positive parts of medical science that have been cultivated with most success. In pathological anatomy our Hodgkins and Carswells were preceded by Dupuytren, Laennec, Cruveilhier, Andral and Louis; in physiology Treviranus, Burdaccch, Müller, Ehrenberg, Purkinje and Valentin had made immortal discoveries or written unrivalled works in the spirit of positive science before the new doctrines found an echo in our schools. . . . The ardent inquirer who wishes to devote himself to scientific investigations cannot count, as in Germany, on an asylum in the Universities; the endowments and fellowships of Oxford and Cambridge are the prey of rich, indolent men, and he is driven by necessity, as Liebig remarked, to serve Mammon. If a physician, he publishes a book upon new medicines, a treatise upon nervous affections, a book upon the diseases of females, or some other fortune-fraught theme, and is thus seduced, by corrupt institutions, from the path his genius might have illustrated under happier influences."

The Paris to Brussels Railway

IN the *Mechanics' Magazine* of May 20, 1837, it is stated that "The Railway which has long been projected for uniting the capitals of France and Belgium, at length bids fair to be commenced in good earnest. The king of the French has granted to Mr. John Cockerill the celebrated English iron-master of Liège, the 'concession' of the railway for fifty years. The French government is to advance 25 per cent of the cost on the distance from Paris to the Belgian frontier; and Mr. Cockerill is to be entitled to all tolls and profits for the first half century, when it is presumed, the works will become the property of the nation. . . . The terms of the concession were not agreed to until after the 'high contracting parties' Louis Philippe on one side and Mr. Cockerill on the other had had several interviews. The latter must be allowed to possess a most industrious spirit; he was a severe sufferer by the revolution in Belgium in 1830; and yet it seems is not deterred from adventuring his capital on a soil like that of France, which in fifty years may experience probably half as many revolutions."

John Cockerill (1799–1840) was the son of William Cockerill (1759–1832), the Lancashire mechanic who had worked first in Russia and then in Sweden before settling at Liège. It was John and his brothers Charles and James who founded the famous iron-works at Seraing, of which John became the sole proprietor in 1835.