

Science News a Century Ago

The Royal Geographical Society

THE meeting of the Royal Geographical Society held on December 11, 1837, was devoted to communications relative to Australia. Captain Maconochie had sent a paper "On the Soil and on the Natives, at Port Philip"; the Chief Justice, Sir John Jeffcott, in a letter to Sir John Barrow, had described the site chosen for the City of Adelaide, and Captain Vetch spoke "On the Political Geography and Geographical Nomenclature of Australia". Regarding nomenclature, he said, "This is a branch of geography usually left to chance or caprice; and it will not be easy to find any department so left, which has been more abused. Good taste, and even common sense, is concerned in rescuing Australia from a barbarous and nonsensical catalogue of names which nothing but a positive necessity should tolerate. Whenever native names exist, and when these names may have existed for ages, it appears something like sacrilege to disturb or change them; such names, too, are generally significant, and often contain in themselves useful information as to the migration of the human race, and the former connexion which existed between tribes, now far separate."

Outburst of η Argus Observed by Herschel

"TOWARDS the close of his residence at Feldhausen [Sir John] Herschel was fortunate enough to witness one of those singular changes in the aspect of the firmament which occasionally challenge the attention even of the incurious, and excite the deepest wonder of the philosophical observer. Immersed apparently in the Argo nebula is a large star denominated η Argus. When Halley visited St. Helena in 1677, it seemed of the fourth magnitude; but Lacaille in the middle of the following century, and others after him, classed it as of the second. . . . Herschel, on his arrival at Feldhausen, registered the star as a bright second, and had no suspicion of its unusual character until December 16, 1837, when he suddenly perceived it with its light almost tripled. It then far outshone Regel in Orion, and on the 2nd of January following it very nearly matched α Centauri. From that date it declined; but a second and even brighter maximum occurred in April 1843, when Maclear, then director of the Cape Observatory, saw it blaze out with a splendour approaching that of Sirius. In 1863 it had sunk below the fifth magnitude, and in 1869 was barely visible to the naked eye. . . . There is some reason to believe that its variations are included in a cycle of about seventy years. . . ."—(A. M. Clerke's "Popular History of Astronomy.")

The Collège de France

IN its column of Weekly Gossip, the *Athenæum* of December 16 had the following note: "The French Government", says a distinguished foreigner, by way of comment, on our correspondent's letter last week, 'has resolved to create three new professorships at the Collège de France, one to be added to Natural History, for it has been found that since the death of Cuvier the present establishment is insufficient to fully record the progress of the science; and another for the Coptic and Hieroglyphics, the professorship formerly held by Champollion being devoted to general antiquities. The Constitution of the Collège

de France (he observes) does not at all resemble our universities: its object is not to teach the elements of knowledge, but to keep progress with its advance, and to inform the well-informed. It is a noble institution, which we owe to Francis I. There is no similar institution in the world, that I am aware of; it is open to the public, in the most enlarged sense of the words; there is no payment required, no subscription, no obedience to authority, no registration—the doors are always open, and all persons, male and female, may there enter and obtain knowledge. Cuvier's lectures were always attended by many ladies of distinguished rank; and even the lectures of Abel Rémusat, on Chinese literature, were for years attended to by a lady, who made her Chinese book serve as a veil, for the strangeness of the thing excited some surprise and curiosity."

University Events

CAMBRIDGE.—Prof. E. Cartan, of the University of Paris, has been appointed Rouse Ball lecturer for the year 1937-38.

The Treasurer has received through the Professor of Zoology a gift of £500 for the Experimental Zoology Fund from a benefactor who wishes to remain anonymous. His gifts to the Fund now amount to £1,800, and he has intimated that he hopes to continue his support of the fund.

Prof. M. Siegbahn, of Stockholm, has been appointed Scott lecturer for the year 1938-39.

It is proposed that Dr. W. H. Thorpe and Dr. A. D. Imms, of Christ's College, be appointed delegates to the International Congress for Entomology to be held in Berlin on August 15-20, 1938.

H. C. Gilson, of Trinity College, Dr. F. S. J. Hollick, of St. John's College, J. W. S. Pringle, of King's College, and Dr. S. Smith, of St. Catharine's College, have been appointed University demonstrators in zoology.

The Royal Astronomical Society has appointed Prof. S. Chapman, of Trinity College, chief professor of mathematics in the Imperial College of Science and Technology, London, to be a member of the Committee for Geodesy and Geophysics.

It is recommended that the stipend of the Cavendish professor be £1,400, and that he be paid £200 a year, non-pensionable, for administration as head of the Department of Physics.

LONDON.—The title of emeritus professor of anatomy in the University has been conferred on Prof. Thomas Yeates on his retirement from the S. A. Courtauld chair of anatomy at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School.

OXFORD.—Dr. J. V. Harrison has been elected University lecturer and demonstrator in geology.

An inquiry by the University as to the number of students in receipt of financial assistance from sources other than relations and friends in the year 1936-37 was recently completed. Out of a total of 4,920 students, 2,646,—that is nearly 54 per cent—were in receipt of assistance. School exhibitions (915), local education authorities' grants (862), open scholarships (602), open exhibitions (405), and grants from colleges (320) were the principal forms of the emoluments.