

*DEATH OF MR. ALEXANDER  
MACMILLAN.*

WE much regret to record the death of Mr. Alexander Macmillan, one of the founders of this journal. This is not the place to give a long account of his career. We may limit ourselves to the statement that outside the field of scientific workers there were few who possessed a greater sympathy with scientific aims, few who had a keener insight as to the place science should occupy in our national life and in our educational systems. It was the hope that a more favourable condition for the progress of science might be thereby secured that led him to enter warmly into the establishment of this journal in 1869. Mr. Macmillan was born in 1818, and died on Saturday last, at his residence in Portland Place.

*NOTES.*

M. MAURICE LÉWY, the distinguished French astronomer, has been elected a corresponding member of the Berlin Academy of Sciences.

ELON COLLEGE, of North Carolina, has received an endowment of 100,000 dollars from a resident of New York City. The faculty will not reveal his name.

MME. W. HUBER has presented a sum of 20,000 francs to the Paris Geographical Society, in remembrance of her husband. The Society has made the donor a life member, and has devoted the money to establish, under the name "Prix William Huber," a silver medal to be awarded annually to the author of the best work on the structure of mountains and valleys, or on glaciers and mountain lakes.

ACCORDING to the *New York Nation*, Portugal is about to follow the example of some greater Powers, and celebrate a quarter-centenary of its own. At the request of the Geographical Society of Lisbon, the Government has just determined to celebrate, with much pomp, in 1897, the four-hundredth anniversary of the expedition which, on July 8, 1497, set out, under the command of Vasco da Gama, for the discovery of the route to India round the Cape of Good Hope. Few details of the celebration have as yet been settled upon, but it is expected that special expositions will be opened at Lisbon, and many scientific congresses held, to which the world will be invited.

WE have already referred to some of the honours given in commemoration of the centenary of the French Institute. How freely France distributes her decorations to men of science will be seen from the following list, given in the *Revue Générale des Sciences*, of the recent nominations to, and promotions in, the Order of the Legion of Honour. Grand Officer: M. J. Bertrand, Secrétaire Perpétuel of the Academy of Sciences. Commanders: MM. C. J. Bouchard, P. E. Duclaux, M. Lœwy, E. J. Marey, Members of the Academy of Sciences. Officers: MM. P. Appell, A. d'Arsonval, F. A. Fouqué, A. Gautier, E. Grimaux, H. Léauté, H. Moissan, E. Perrier, Members of the Academy of Sciences, and MM. A. Houzeau, R. Lépine, F. Raoult and E. Stephan, Correspondants of the same Academy. Chevaliers: MM. R. Blondlot, l'abbé A. David and G. E. Sire, Correspondants of the Academy of Sciences; and MM. Chappuis and Guillaume, of the Bureau international des Poids et Mesures.

WE have on several occasions called attention to the blunders which are made, and the disputes in which the country is involved from time to time, because of the unintelligent way in which the work of various Government departments is carried on. Each branch of the public service, instead of being advised by a scientific staff, is controlled by an officialdom which believes in its own omniscience; a condition of things as deplorable as it is derogatory to national honour and advancement. As we have before pointed out, administrators of departments in which questions involving scientific knowledge continuously arise are, to put the point mildly, *not* chosen on account of their scientific qualifications, and they have to pick up their information as best they can, the result being that they arrive at unsound decisions, and create dissatisfaction everywhere. The *Engineer* of January 17 has something to say which strongly supports our complaint of the neglect of scientific knowledge in the public service. Referring to Admiralty contracts, our contemporary says: "The duty of the Admiralty is to obtain the best possible ships, engines, guns, &c., that can be had; and that those who have to consider the tenders ought to know when a tender is too high or too low. In a word, they ought to know the value of what they propose to buy. Whether the knowledge does or does not exist in the Controller's department, we are unable to say; apparently it does not. The actual method of obtaining ships is strictly analogous to that adopted by a man who, totally ignorant of what a dwelling-house ought to cost, first gets drawings from an architect, and then advertises for tenders. Having obtained them, he proceeds to pit the tenderers against each other, assuming that in this way he will get the best value for his money. The mere mention of this method of doing business will be enough to condemn it in the eyes of our readers. But there is ample evidence available that the Whitehall people do not know what is the proper price to pay for work or materials, and to this ignorance on the one hand, and on the other to a fear of being cheated based on that ignorance, is no doubt due the bargaining and bartering which, during the last few years, have gone on at Whitehall, and have at last become so vexatious that it is matter of common talk among those firms who have laid themselves out to execute Admiralty orders." It is clear that if the relations between the Admiralty and the shipbuilding and engineering firms of the country are to be of a cordial description, the present system of conducting business will have to be greatly altered, and the sooner the alteration comes the better it will be for the country's welfare.

MR. F. E. WILLEY, of the Royal Gardens, Kew, has been appointed Curator of the newly-founded Botanic Station at Sierra Leone. Mr. J. M. Henry has retired from the post of Superintendent of the Baroda State Gardens. He was sent out from Kew in 1867, and after twelve years' service in Madras and Bengal was appointed to Baroda in November 1879.

DR. JOHN S. BILLINGS, Director of the Department of Hygiene in the Pennsylvania University, has been elected librarian of the new consolidated libraries of New York, representing the Lenox library, the Astor library, and the Tilden bequest. Dr. Billing's *Index Medicus*, and the *Index Catalogue of the Surgeon-General's Library at Washington*, furnish stupendous evidence of his capacity for cataloguing, and, with his experience in other directions, make him eminently fitted for the responsible post he has taken.

MR. A. G. CHARLETON presided on Friday, the 24th inst., at the Criterion Restaurant, over the twenty-third annual dinner of the old students of the Royal School of Mines. About a hundred and twenty guests were present, amongst these being the professors at the School and several distinguished visitors. In proposing the toast of "The Mining and Metallurgical Indus-