

500–1,000 million years, whilst the half-life period of rubidium is between 2×10^{11} and 4×10^{11} years.

An investigation of the isotopic constitution of the strontium from the mineral throws much light on its origin. This has been carried out by Mattauch (*Naturwiss.*, 25, 189; 1937), who finds the strontium to contain 99.97 per cent of the isotope of strontium of mass 87. It is therefore very probable that the β -radioactive disintegration of ^{87}Rb results in the formation of ^{87}Sr . This is in agreement with the rule that stable isobares of neighbouring elements do not exist. A rough estimate of the quantity of strontium produced during the life of the mica shows that the half-life period of radioactive rubidium is more nearly 2×10^{11} years than the upper limit mentioned above.

University Events

CAPE TOWN.—Prof. A. W. Falconer has been appointed to succeed Sir Carruthers Beattie as principal and vice-chancellor of the University. Sir Carruthers Beattie will retire at the end of the year. Prof. Falconer is at present professor of medicine in the University.

CAMBRIDGE.—T. R. C. Fox, of Jesus College, and J. Diamond, of St. John's College, have been appointed demonstrators in engineering.

Dr. R. A. Lyttleton and M. H. L. Price have been appointed Faculty assistant lecturers in mathematics.

J. Hart-Mercer has been elected to the Gwynaeth Pretty studentship and to the Nita King scholarship.

At St. John's College, a Strathcona exhibition for physics has been awarded to R. E. B. Makinson, University of Sydney, and a Hutchinson studentship for zoology to J. H. Sang, University of Aberdeen.

Science News a Century Ago

J. D. Forbes among the Dolomites

IN the course of his Continental tour of 1837, J. D. Forbes after leaving southern Germany explored the Tyrol and early in September entered the then little-known 'Dolomite' country, proceeding in the direction of the peak of Marmolata. In his journal, under the date September 14, he said: "This morning, whilst warming myself dreamily during the rain at the kitchen fire at Cavalese, I got an excellent geological lesson from the boiling of certain thin porridge made of Indian corn (polenta) and milk. The air-bubbles disengaged during the process formed the most beautiful elevation craters, often with little interior ones, formed by the immediate sequence of another bubble at the same point. . . . I walked from Cavalese to Vigo, in order to understand fully Von Buch's section of the adjacent beds of rock, and in this I succeeded beyond my expectations. But the strata of limestone and sandstone do not all dip towards the axis, as he has represented, but some from it, and with evident disturbance. I went in search of minerals to a dealer's, but only found some very indifferent specimens.

"The scenery from Vigo to Campedello, and from that to Canazea, is in the highest degree striking—in fact, I know nothing of its kind to compare with it: one is entirely surrounded by jagged peaks of

dolomite. The amazing crags of the Lang Kofel come into view near Campedello, and afterwards the magnificent outworks of the Marmolata and Sasso di Val Fredda are seen in all their majestic beauty. As I wished to examine the Lang Kofel more minutely, as well as Von Buch's sections between Gröden and Colfusco in the Abteier-Thal, I availed myself of a tolerable horse track which wound through the forest, and after passing close under the precipices of the Lang Kofel, entered the Grödener-Thal. . . ."

Prof. William Ritchie, F.R.S.

ON September 15, 1837, William Ritchie, the professor of natural philosophy at the Royal Institution and also in University College, London, died at the age of forty-seven years. Born in Scotland in 1790, he was educated for the ministry and became Rector of the Royal Academy of Tain, Ross-shire. Having saved money he went to Paris, where he attended the lectures of Thénard, Gay-Lussac and Biot and on his return to England became known to Sir John Herschel. Papers he contributed to the Royal Society on a differential thermometer and radiant heat brought him into notice, and in 1829 he was given the professorship at the Royal Institution and in 1832 that at University College. He published papers in the *Philosophical Magazine* and other periodicals and made researches in electricity and electric magnetism. He was also known as a skilful experimentalist, and at one time was engaged on experiments connected with the manufacture of glass for optical purposes.

Animal Magnetism

THE *Gentleman's Magazine* of September 1837 gives the following information: "At the North London Hospital, M. Duportet, the French professor of animal magnetism, lately performed some experiments before a party. He commenced his operations on a young girl, about 17 years old, an inmate of the hospital, who has been ill for some time, but who is at present almost convalescent. She was seated in a chair in the middle of one of the wards, and M. Duportet seated opposite to her commenced the operation of magnetizing, which is done by waving the hand up and down in a perpendicular line before the face and body, as closely as possible without almost actual contact. After these motions of the hand had been continued for some minutes without effect, the professor, nothing disconcerted, left off, and another patient was introduced, who, we understood, had been operated upon more than once, deriving, it is stated, some benefit in her health. She was a young woman named Lucy Clarke, who having for some time past been subject to epileptic fits, had been induced to come to the hospital from Tottenham, where she resided, that the experiment might be made upon her. As soon as she was seated Prof. Duportet commenced the wafting of his hands, and in a few seconds an appearance of extreme drowsiness became evident to all who stood around his chair, and she frequently rubbed her eyes as children do when sleepy. She at length ceased to have the power of opening her eyes. The magnetizer, however, who had placed her under the spell, had the power also of restoring her to a state of wakefulness. This he did by placing his fingers on the centre of the forehead and drawing them asunder towards the temples, and afterwards waving the hand to and fro before her face."