

Science News a Century Ago

Kew Gardens

THE botanic gardens at Kew were founded by Princess Augusta, mother of George III, who began the formation of an exotic garden in 1759 with William Aiton (1731-93) as gardener. The small temples in the grounds were designed by Sir William Chambers in 1760-62. From 1772 until 1819 the gardens were under the care of Sir Joseph Banks. After his death they were neglected, and on October 31, 1837, *The Times* published a communication "From a Correspondent", directing attention to the state of the Gardens. "The great fault in the management at Kew-gardens", said the writer, "appears to be the adherence to a system of niggardly expense and exclusiveness. There does not appear to have been the slightest progress in improvement for many years; the old conservatories and hot-houses seem crammed with plants, in a state of decay or stagnation; everything looks dingy and dirty. . . . There are not sufficient persons in the grounds to attend properly to the cultivation; it is understood that nine or ten men is the whole strength of the establishment, to look after the botanical-garden and also the 'Arboretum', which two divisions it is believed cover nearly six acres of ground. . . . It may as well be mentioned, that a little repair would not hurt one or two of the temples in the pleasure-grounds; and it would also be quite as well if the piece of water, once called the lake, but now an unseemly pond, were emptied of its mud and filth, or quite filled up."

The gardens were rescued from this state of neglect by the work of Sir William Jackson Hooker (1785-1865), who was appointed director in 1841.

The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal

IN October 1837 appeared the first number of the above monthly journal. In the prospectus printed in the first number, it was stated that the journal would contain descriptions and particulars of important buildings, manufactories, warehouses, railways, docks, bridges, piers, harbours, canals, rivers, water-works, gas-works, drainage, mining, steam navigation and machinery, together with notices of the transactions of British and foreign societies, new inventions, patents, books, parliamentary proceedings and "such other useful information connected with the Profession as may make it a work of general reference". The journal was published at 6d. a copy.

The Zoological Society

AT a meeting of the Zoological Society held on November 2, 1837, attention was directed to the falling off of the receipts for admission to the gardens, and suggestions were put forward for providing further attractions. Mr. Vigors, M.P., suggested that a suspension bridge should be built to communicate with the grounds of the Society on the opposite side of the Regent's Canal and that bands should be introduced occasionally. In replying to the discussion the chairman, the Rev. John Barlow, F.R.S., said the Council had appointed a committee to report on the deficiency in the garden receipts and that a spirited attempt was being made to introduce two living hippopotami into the collections.

Gresham College

UNDER the above heading, *The Times* of November 3, 1837, said: "Yesterday being the first day of term these lectures commenced in the lecture-room over the east side of the Royal Exchange, when Dr. Southey gave the first of his course on physic. The number of the auditory was 35 persons, or about half the number to which the room could afford accommodation, and which being greater than on previous occasions is to be attributed to the greater additional interest felt by the inhabitants of the city on the subject of this endowment from the steps which have recently been taken to render it more public and useful. The subject chosen by the learned lecturer was the history of medicine."

Dr. Henry Herbert Southey (1783-1865) was the younger brother of Robert Southey, the poet. He was physician to both George IV and Queen Adelaide. He was appointed to the chair of physic in Gresham College in 1834.

Baron Alibert (1768-1837)

JEAN LOUIS ALIBERT, the founder of modern dermatology in France, was born on May 26, 1768, at Villefranche-de-Rouergue in the Aveyron department of France, the son of a magistrate. He studied medicine in Paris, where his principal teachers were Pinel and Bichat, and qualified in 1799 with a remarkable thesis on pernicious fevers, of which several editions were published. His rise in the profession was very rapid, as two years after qualification he was made assistant physician and in the following year full physician to the Hôpital Saint-Louis, which he made the Mecca of dermatologists throughout the world. In addition to several books on diseases of the skin, of which the most important was published in parts between 1806 and 1814, and in which coloured plates appeared for the first time in the history of dermatology, Alibert deserves recognition for his works on therapeutics, of which he was the first professor in the Paris faculty, and a monograph on hydrology. He also won the Montyon prize for a work entitled "Physiology of the Passions", which was translated into German and Spanish. He was the recipient of many honours both at home and abroad. He was physician to Louis XVIII and Charles X, who created him a baron. His death, due to cancer of the stomach, took place on November 4, 1837.

Schönbein and Faraday

IN a long letter to Faraday dated November 5, 1837, Schönbein said: "The french papers have been talking for some time about a discovery (said to have been made by a certain Mr. Sorel a Frenchman) which if it should turn out to be something more than a mere news-papers' invention, would be indeed a most wonderful thing. By dint of god knows what sort of substance, the news-papers call it voltaic-powder, Mr. Sorel is said to be able of changing Iron and any other readily oxidable metal such as to give them (with regard to their chemical bearings to oxygen) the properties of the precious ones. Such a discovery, of course, cannot be made in our days without being turned to practical advantage and so, indeed, the papers tell us, that Mr. Sorel is going to enter into partnership with the well-known Mr. Cockerill in order to make use of his discovery in the large establishments of the latter gentleman."