

Science News a Century Ago

Captain Back's Voyage in H.M.S. *Terror*

At the opening meeting of the session of the Royal Geographical Society on November 13, 1837, many interested in Arctic exploration assembled to hear Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) George Back (1796-1878) give an account of his voyage in the *Terror*, made at the instance of the Society with the object of furthering knowledge of the North-West. Leaving England in June 1836, he passed through the Hudson Strait and shortly afterwards in exceptional circumstances was beset in the ice off Southampton Island. Speaking of his experiences off the Island he said: "The frost-smoke that allured us vanished as we drew near, and the dark lanes of water from which it originated closed firmly, to the utter impossibility of proceeding one yard farther. Left, therefore, to the influence of events, we were borne backwards and forwards, according to the eccentric movements of the ice, crowding sail when the least crack showed a probability of an opening, or with the aid of saws, axes and ice anchors, working a few paces, until the most closely packed ice finally arrested our progress twelve miles from Cape Bylot, when only fifteen more would have ensured a safe wintering place in Duke of York's Bay."

The ship remained fixed in the ice from September 1836 until June 1837, when owing to the damage done to her it was necessary to return home. On the way home she leaked so much as to need incessant pumping, and to secure the ship, said Back, "we were obliged to strap her together with the stream chain cable. . . ." The *Terror* arrived back in Lough Swilly on September 3, 1837.

The Royal Society's New Barometer

ON November 16, 1837, Francis Baily read a communication to the Royal Society, entitled "Description of a new Barometer recently fixed up in the Apartments of the Royal Society; with remarks on the mode hitherto pursued at various periods, and an account of that which is now adopted, for correcting the observed height of the mercury in the Society's Barometers". In the course of his paper, Baily referred to the height of the Society's barometer above the mean level of the sea, about which there appears to have been some uncertainty. Thus prior to 1823 the cistern of the barometer is said to have been 81 ft. above the level of low-water spring tides at Somerset House, but without any information how this was connected with the sea. From 1823 until 1825 inclusive, it was said to have been 100 ft. above the same level, and from 1826 until 1836 inclusive the height is said to have been 83 ft. $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. above a *fixed mark* on Waterloo Bridge or above the mean level of the sea (presumed about 95 ft.). The discordance between the 81 ft. and the 100 ft. was accounted for in as much as the old barometer prior to 1823 was fixed in the Council room while the Daniell barometer of 1822 was fixed in the closet adjoining the library on the floor above the Council room. With respect to the mark on Waterloo Bridge, the reference level was the surface of the granite pedestal at the base of the columns at the north abutment of the bridge and on the eastern side, a reference point "more durable, and more convenient than any mark that could have been inscribed by hands".

Taylor's Scientific Memoirs

ON November 18, 1837, the *Mechanics Magazine* under the above heading said: "The first volume of this collection of translations from the foreign scientific periodicals is now completed, and we are sorry to find the editor and proprietor has still to complain of a want of adequate patronage. He has suspended the continuation of the work for the present, to give an opportunity for men of science to come forward in its support, before he commits himself by commencing the second volume. As the great utility of such a publication is too manifest to admit a doubt . . . it is to be hoped that Mr. Taylor's appeal will not be in vain. Richard Taylor (1781-1858) was a printer and naturalist and a member of various scientific societies. He was the publisher of the *Annals of Philosophy* founded in 1813, which was incorporated in 1827 with Tilloch's *Philosophical Magazine* founded in 1797.

Cholera in Africa

THE *Lancet* of November 18, 1837, contains the following information: "The cholera has just broken out in the *Dey's Hospital* at Algiers. On the 14th of October seventeen cases and nine deaths were reported. At Bona, where the epidemic has been prevailing for some time, the number of cases on the 17th of October had amounted to 318, the deaths to 180. One of the most curious points in the history of the Asiatic Cholera is, perhaps, the steady proportion of deaths to cases which may be observed to have occurred in all parts of the world and in all climates. This fact proves how very little as yet has been done in the treatment of the disease!"

University Events

CAMBRIDGE.—The Vice-Chancellor has announced that the University has received from Mr. J. W. O. Hamilton, of Chesterfield House, 98 Great Tower Street, London, E.C.3, an album entitled "The Commercial Development of Radio-telegraphy, Telephony and Broadcasting", and a cheque for £500 to found a prize for the encouragement of radio research in the University. Mr. Hamilton wishes the prize to be associated with the names of James Clerk Maxwell and Sir Ambrose Fleming.

It is proposed that Prof. F. Debenham and J. A. Steers, of St. Catharine's College, be appointed to represent the University at the International Congress of Geography in Amsterdam on July 18-28, 1938.

LONDON.—The degree of Doctor of Literature *honoris causa* was conferred on H.M. the Queen in the presence of H.M. the King on November 10.

The following doctorates have recently been conferred: D.Sc. in chemistry on Mr. A. N. Dey (Imperial College—Royal College of Science); D.Sc. in statistics on Mr. M. S. Bartlett.

OXFORD.—The honorary degree of D.Litt. will be conferred on November 20 on Dr. R. R. Marett, rector of Exeter College since 1928 and reader in social anthropology since 1910.

K. A. H. Murray, of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute, has been elected fellow and bursar of Lincoln College.