

Science News a Century Ago

South African Exhibits

IN 1837, Smith Elder and Co. published "A Catalogue of the South African Museum now exhibiting in the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly", the property of a society entitled "The Cape of Good Hope Association for Exploring Central Africa". The Association had been formed in Cape Town on June 5, 1833, and its object was the acquisition of knowledge relative to the geography, natural history and commercial resources of the interior, and of the social condition of its inhabitants. £537 were subscribed within a few days, and an expedition left Graff-Reynet in June 1834. The zoological and ethnographical exhibits were one of the sights of London, and were afterwards sold by auction by Messrs. J. C. and S. Stevens on June 6-8, 1838, in pursuance of a resolution passed by the Association, over which Sir John Herschel occasionally presided. The sale included a number of models of Kaffirs and specimens of the arts and manufactures of the Bechuanas, zoological specimens and a geological collection.

Geographical Society of Berlin

UNDER its foreign correspondence, the *Athenæum* of June 9, 1838, said: "The Geographical Society of Berlin held an extra meeting last month to welcome the former President, Prof. Charles Ritter, on his return from the scientific tour which he had made in Greece and the Levant. Prof. Lichtenstein, the actual President, expressed on the part of the Society great satisfaction in their renewed connexion with one who had done so much to advance the science of Geography. Prof. Ritter then gave a hasty sketch of the interesting observations which he had made in Greece and the Ionian Islands, in European and Asiatic Turkey and in Maldivia and Wallachia."

Karl Ritter, who was once described as "the greatest geographer of modern times", was born at Quedlinburg on August 7, 1778, and at nineteen years of age became a tutor in the family of Bethmann-Hollweg at Frankfort-on-Main. With his pupils he travelled through Switzerland, Savoy, France and Italy, and studied at Göttingen. In 1819 he was called to the gymnasium at Frankfort as professor of history, but the next year was made an extraordinary professor of geography in the University of Berlin. The great work, "Die Erdkunde im Verhältniss zur Natur und zur Geschichte des Menschen", which had established his reputation, had appeared in two volumes in 1817-18. He died on September 28, 1859, at the age of eighty years.

Zusseh Silkworms of India

AT a meeting of the Asiatic Society on June 9, 1838, Dr. Geddes read a paper "On the Zusseh Silkworms of India". The moth of the Zusseh silkworm, he said, was the *Saturnia paphia*. The moth had been twice caught while depositing her eggs by Dr. Geddes—once in December 1826 and again in November 1830. The eggs deposited after that were, in each case, above 200; they were in small heaps, adhering together, and generally hatched in a little more than ten days. The interval between hatching and spinning was different in different larvæ from the same moth, being in some cases as long as 36 days and in others as much as 50. When fully grown, the

larva is about 4 inches long, its head is light brown, its body green with rows of spots, orange, red and blue. Dr. Geddes fed them upon the leaves of the Ber tree (*Zizyphus jujubus*) but he had also seen them on the Ahseen (*Terminalia alata glabra*) on which the insect is fed in the Nagpore territories. The natives place them on the tree when hatched; and as soon as the leaves are devoured, they chop off the branches, and place them, insects and all, upon another tree. When ready to spin, the insect first forms a thick ligature of an inch in length which it fastens to a twig, and at the extremity it spins its cocoon, which sometimes reaches the size of a pigeon's egg.

The Actonian Prize

EARLY in 1838 the Royal Institution received a donation of one thousand pounds from Mrs. Hannah Acton. The gift, which was made out of respect and regard for the memory of her late husband, Mr. Samuel Acton, architect, was to form an endowment fund, and the trust established, which the Managers of the Royal Institution undertook, was to award a prize of one hundred guineas, once every seven years, to the person who should be "the Author of the best Essay illustrative of the Wisdom and Beneficence of the Almighty in such department of Science as the said Committee of Managers for the time being of the said Institution shall in their discretion select". In June 1838 the conditions governing the award of the Actonian Prize were made known. The first award was to be made in 1844, and the subject was to be chemistry. In due course the prize of 1844 was given to George Fownes for his essay on chemistry. Every seven years since, in accordance with Mrs. Acton's pious intention, the prize has been awarded. The list of the recipients contains many distinguished names, including those of Sir George Stokes, Sir William Huggins, Madame Curie, Sir Charles Sherrington, Dr. George Ellery Hale and Prof. A. V. Hill. The prize was last given in 1935 to W. T. Astbury, for his paper on "X-Ray Studies of the Structures of Hair, Wool and Related Fibres".

Ornithological Society

THE *Gentleman's Magazine* for June 1838 contains the following account of the anniversary meeting of this Society held on May 18 with Mr. M. W. Colbourne in the chair. The Council in its report congratulated the members on the position which the Society had already obtained. The number of its members was stated to be 205, a number probably unprecedented in the first year of any other scientific society. Reference was then made to the great injury which the collection in St. James's Park at first sustained from the children and other frequenters of the Park; but the Council now had the pleasure of reporting that a marked improvement in this respect might be observed. Little more than a nucleus of the Museum and Library has as yet been formed, but the Council expressed a confident hope that with the valuable services of the curator, Mr. Blyth, a sufficiency of illustrations for the monthly lectures will be very shortly obtained. The accounts of the Society for the last year had been audited, and the balance in hand was £11 16s. The sums then owing by the Society were £36 17s. 9d. and the sums owing to the Society were £42.