

PRESENTATION

OF THE

G O L D M E D A L S,

AWARDED RESPECTIVELY TO CAPTAIN WILKES, U.S.N., AND
SIR JAMES BROOKE.

THE President, Mr. W. J. Hamilton, thus addressed the Meeting:—

“Gentlemen,—You have just heard the announcement that the Council has awarded the Founder’s Medal to Captain Wilkes, of the United States Navy, for the zeal and intelligence with which he carried out the scientific exploring expedition intrusted to him by the Government of the United States in the years 1838–1842; and for the volumes which he has published, detailing the narrative of that expedition.

“It therefore becomes my duty to endeavour to give you some account of the performances of the gallant officer, and of the services which he has rendered to the progress of geography. It must be remembered that this was the first expedition ever fitted out by the Government of the United States for scientific purposes. Greater difficulties must, therefore, be supposed to have attended its organization than would have been the case with more experience; on the other hand, the merit of success is proportionally increased.

“The expedition left the Hampton Roads on the 17th of August, 1838, and its first scientific operation was the establishment of an observatory at Orange Harbour, in Terra del Fuego; here some of the vessels remained while others were detached to the westward, and Captain Wilkes himself proceeded on the 25th of February to the S., for the purpose of exploring the S.E. side of Palmer’s Land. After reaching lat. 63° 25’ S., finding the season too far advanced to make any progress against the ice, he turned his ship’s head to the N., and the whole squadron was soon collected at Valparaiso. Here another observatory was established. A scientific party visited the bank of snow from which the city is supplied, on one of the outlying ranges of the Cordilleras, the principal heights of which rose nearly 4000 feet above them; others visited the mines of Chili. They then proceeded to the coasts of Peru, and thence, after a visit to the interior and to the ruins of Pachacamac, commenced their explorations in the Pacific.

“The Paumotu group of islands was first visited, for the purpose of completing its examination as recommended by Admiral Krusenstern,

and in the hope of settling the disputed point between the two distinguished English and French navigators, Captains Beechey and Duperrey, as to the geographical position of the island of Minerva or Clermont de Tonnerre; Captain Wilkes considers the statement of Captain Duperrey the most correct. After visiting Tahiti and the Samoan Group, respecting all of which Captain Wilkes' details are full of information, he proceeded to Sydney to refit before starting on his Antarctic cruise.

“ On the 26th of December, 1839, they left Sydney, and first fell in with the ice on the 10th of January, 1840, in lat. $61^{\circ} 8' S.$, and long. $162^{\circ} 32' E.$; and on the 11th some of the officers were confident they saw indications of land. Captain Wilkes does not rely much on this; but on the 16th these appearances became more positive, and on the 19th they distinctly saw land in long. $154^{\circ} 30' E.$, lat. $66^{\circ} 20' S.$ Captain Wilkes, however, only dates the discovery which he claims for his expedition from the land seen on the 16th. I mention this the more anxiously on this occasion, on account of the controversy which has arisen between him and Sir James Ross, who sailed over the spot where land was supposed to have been seen on the 11th; to this, however, I wish to allude as lightly as possible, convinced as I am that both these gallant officers have only been anxious to establish the truth, and to advance the cause of science. Undoubtedly, on the tracing which Captain Wilkes furnished to Sir James Ross, the land supposed to have been seen on the 11th of January is sketched in, and, as a measure of precaution, it was perhaps prudent in Captain Wilkes so to do; it would have been more satisfactory if he could have stated to Sir James Ross, as he has done in his published account, on what slight and imperfect evidence its existence in that position was laid down. After continuing his explorations of the Antarctic continent as far to the westward as long. $97^{\circ} E.$, Captain Wilkes, finding his provisions short, and the season far advanced, turned his ship's head to the N. and quitted these frozen latitudes. I cannot take leave of this portion of the narrative of Captain Wilkes without alluding to the high encomiums passed on his proceedings by Sir James Ross, who observes that ‘ the arduous and persevering exertions of this expedition, continued throughout a period of more than six weeks under circumstances of great peril and hardship, cannot fail to reflect the highest credit on those engaged in the enterprise, and excite the admiration of all who are in the smallest degree acquainted with the laborious and difficult nature of an icy navigation:’ he adds, ‘ that as yet they had not received the reward or approbation they merited.’

“ But I cannot dwell longer on the details of this interesting expedition. They subsequently proceeded to New Zealand, thence to the Feejee group of islands, where an observatory was established on Ovalau, and many interesting facts ascertained respecting the habits and manners of the natives, and the geographical features of the group. Hence they proceeded to examine the Hawaiian group, or Sandwich Islands, where we have an interesting account of the ascent of Mauna Loa and the Volcano of Kilauea. Thence stretching across to the American continent, they surveyed a portion of the coast of

California. Again crossing the whole extent of the Pacific, they visited and examined the Philippine Islands; and passing through the Sooloo Archipelago, proceeded to Singapore, and finally returned to America, touching at the Cape of Good Hope. I regret that it is impossible, within the limits of this address, to do justice to the contents of the five volumes in which Captain Wilkes has described the progress of the expedition; but I trust I have done enough to show that the exertions of Captain Wilkes, and the result of the expedition intrusted to him, have in every respect been such as to entitle him to the highest mark of distinction which it is in the power of this Society to bestow."

The President, now addressing himself to Mr. Bancroft, said—

"Mr. BANCROFT,—In addressing you for the purpose of placing in your hands the medal which has been awarded by the Council of the Royal Geographical Society of London to your distinguished countryman, Captain Wilkes, for the valuable work which he has published under the title of the 'United States Exploring Expedition,' I rejoice in being the organ of expressing to you the sentiments entertained on this side of the Atlantic of the merits of Captain Wilkes. This is the second occasion on which our medal has been awarded to one of our Transatlantic brothers, and I feel no small gratification in being thus enabled to give to the whole civilized world this additional proof that the pursuit of science operates as a powerful inducement in knitting the bonds of friendship still more closely together between the two great nations of the Anglo-Saxon race. May this union long exist, and may they in their continued harmony and good-fellowship continue to point out by their enlightened institutions the value of that sound practical common sense for which they are both so pre-eminently distinguished. May I request you to convey this medal to Captain Wilkes, with the expression of the best wishes of the Royal Geographical Society of London for his future prosperity and success."

The American Minister replied as follows:—

"Mr. PRESIDENT,—I have the greatest satisfaction in receiving on behalf of Commander Wilkes, of the United States Navy, the Founder's Medal awarded to him by the Royal Geographical Society. An Englishman discovered North America, and England has made the paths of the wilderness as familiar as accustomed haunts, and traced the currents of the ocean almost as carefully as the courses of her rivers. To obtain, therefore, from the body representing English geographical science this most honourable testimonial to the merits of an American expedition, is in every way grateful.

"Let me add my thanks for the affectionate words in regard to my country in its relation with your own. Every kindly wish of that nature uttered here has its response beyond the Atlantic; and on this occasion I will express the hope, that when the remote regions which our navigators have revealed or explored become enlivened by the colonies of civilized man, when the great ocean which so long remained

a solitude is rendered social by the peaceful fleets of commerce, your countrymen and mine may never meet but in friendship.

“ I shall immediately transmit this medal to Commander Wilkes, who graces a patriotic zeal in his profession by the successful culture of science.”

PATRON'S MEDAL.

The President then proceeding, observed—

“ It has already been announced that the Council have awarded the Patron's Gold Medal to Sir James Brooke, the Rajah of Sarāwak and Governor of Labuan.

“ The name of Mr. Brooke has been so frequently and honourably brought before the public in the course of the past winter, that it is almost unnecessary for me to occupy your time in detailing at any length the motives which have led the Council to make their present award. But I should be failing in my duty to this Society, to my distinguished friend, and, lastly, to myself, were I on the present occasion to omit all mention of the honourable and gallant deeds of our absent associate. When a very young man Mr. Brooke went to India as a cadet, and was distinguished for his gallantry in the Burmese war. Being wounded on that occasion, he left Calcutta for China in 1830, for the benefit of his health. During this voyage he first saw and was struck with the islands of the Asiatic Archipelago. Although hitherto neglected and scarcely known, Mr. Brooke soon became convinced that they offered a splendid field for enterprise and research. Henceforth, to carry civilization to the Malay races, to extend to them the benefits of commerce, and to open to us additional geographical knowledge, became the objects to which he determined to devote his energies and his means. Soon after his return to Calcutta he quitted the Indian service, and, full of zeal for his contemplated work, proceeded to England, working his way home before the mast, in order to acquire a practical knowledge of those duties and of that science to which henceforth he must trust so much.

“ He then became the owner of the Royalist yacht, and spent a twelvemonth cruising in the Mediterranean, trying his vessel and training his crew. During this time he prepared a short memoir on the Gulf of Syme, not yet surveyed by our Navy, and which was published in the eighth volume of our Journal.

“ He sailed from England on his gallant yet hazardous adventure on the 27th of October, 1838, and on the 1st of August, 1839, dropped his anchor off the coast of Borneo, near Tanjong Api. After visiting Sarāwak, exploring some of the rivers along the coast, and putting himself in communication with the Rajah, Muda Hassim, during which time he had become deeply interested in the future fortunes of Sarāwak, Mr. Brooke returned to Singapore, and determined on an excursion to Celebes during the probable continuance of the civil war in Borneo. To this visit to Celebes we are indebted for much information respecting the geography of the Gulf of Boni, a chart of which was prepared under the immediate eye of Mr. Brooke, who has also

given us, for the first time, the history of the great independent kingdoms of this fine island, whose princes are said to be desirous of forming commercial relations with the English nation.

“After his return to Sarāwak in August, 1840, struck with the miserable condition of a fine country and a fine people, Mr. Brooke entered into arrangements with the Rajah, Muda Hassim, which terminated in the discomfiture of the rebels, and finally in the cession of Sarāwak to Mr. Brooke, and of the island of Labuan to the British Government. For the details of the gallant enterprises by which these measures were brought about, I must refer you to the interesting volumes of Captain Keppel, and to those still more recently published, in which the full success of Mr. Brooke's plans has been developed, by my gallant friend Captain Mundy.

“In these will be seen the advantages gained to geographical science by the introduction of civilization and commerce amongst the Malays and Dyaks of Borneo. Many of the rivers of that island, admitting our steamers and men-of-war far into the heart of the country, were surveyed and examined, first by Mr. Brooke, and subsequently by the commanders of the different vessels who were induced to visit the coasts of Borneo, either from Mr. Brooke's representations, or in the exercise of duty for the purpose of putting down the lawless system of piracy and murder which had long prevailed on those inhospitable shores. By them the coasts have been still more accurately surveyed and laid down, but to Mr., now Sir J., Brooke will ever remain the credit and the praise of having, from his own energies and resources, evolved a plan of conduct, founded on the most enterprising and philanthropic views, which has led to such a vast increase of our geographical knowledge, and to the introduction of lawful commerce and enlightened civilization in regions hitherto known only by the kris of the Malay and the atrocious narratives of rapine, piracy, and murder.

“Captain MUNDY,—It is with the liveliest satisfaction that I request you to be the means of forwarding this medal to our mutual friend. It recalls to my memory those days when, myself a traveller on the classic shores of Ionia, I first became acquainted with yourself, and subsequently with Mr. Brooke in the Gulf of Smyrna. You will not fail to remind Sir J. Brooke of the warm interest entertained by the Royal Geographical Society for his success, and of the pleasure they have felt in conferring on him this mark of their admiration and esteem.”

Captain Rodney Mundy rising, replied—

“MR. PRESIDENT,—I can assure you that I receive with great satisfaction the Patron's Gold Medal which has been awarded by the Council of the Royal Geographical Society to Sir James Brooke, and, according to your request, I will take the earliest opportunity of forwarding it to him, either at the seat of his own native government in the province of Sarāwak, or at the seat of the government which he holds under the authority of our Gracious Majesty at the Island of Labuan. And now I should wish at once to convey to you my thanks for the kind and complimentary manner in which you have been

pleased to allude to me individually, when first we became acquainted on the shores of Ionia, and also as connected with Sir James Brooke's exertions in promoting the extension of geographical knowledge in the Indian Archipelago. I also am desirous of expressing how gratified I feel at having been invited to attend here to-day, as the representative of my friend the Rajah of Sarawak, on this interesting and important occasion.

"It was my good fortune to be much associated with that great man during the last two years of his unequalled career in the East; it was also my good fortune to be selected by Rear-Admiral Sir Thomas Cochrane, the Commander-in-Chief in the Indian Seas, to take possession, in the name of The Queen, of the Island of Labuan, over which Sir James Brooke now rules; an island which, though small and insignificant in itself, yet, from its position at the mouth of the river on which stands the capital of Borneo Proper; from its excellent harbour; from the large vein of coal which it contains in its bosom, and from other local circumstances, will, we may reasonably anticipate, ere many years pass over, form a valuable commercial establishment in that quarter of the globe. From that island, as a general centre, we may also predict that many expeditions will shortly set forth with the grand object of extending our geographical and geological knowledge of the neighbouring countries, and, under the guidance of the master mind of its founder and governor, we may surely look forward to the happiest results, and thus, by imperceptible advances, make ourselves acquainted with much that will be valuable to science in general.

"Mr. President, feeling enthusiastically as I do every thing connected with Sir James Brooke, it is difficult for me to resist the temptation, which the opportunity of speaking now offers me, of dwelling at some length on the many and great services performed by my distinguished friend for the benefit of his country and for the advancement of civilization; but I feel that it would be out of my province to do more on this occasion than express my admiration of the able and correct statement which you have yourself just given of the general character of Sir James Brooke's mission to Celebes and Borneo. As connected with the object for which I am here to-day, I may also state that I was engaged with Sir James Brooke in all those extensive operations which terminated in the total expulsion of the pirate communities from the N.W. coast of Borneo, and which placed the seaboard of that magnificent island in a state of security; the practical result of which has been, that on the same ground where, only two years since, that zealous officer Sir Edward Belcher met with every obstacle, and was obliged to hurry from station to station at the risk of the loss of his instruments and even of his life, there is now not only no opposition from the natives, but even a desire to afford every assistance to the officer employed on surveying duty in that quarter.

"It now only remains for me to add, that in frequent conversations held with Sir James Brooke, I have ever heard him express himself in terms of warmth and anxiety for the extension of geographical knowledge in the Indian Archipelago; indeed, with the exception of the

two leading and animating passions of his mind (if I may so express myself), namely, the gradual civilization of our semi-barbarous brethren in those seas, and the opening of a new field for the commercial enterprise of his own great country, the progress of geographical discovery has been one of the grand ideas which occupied him from the commencement of his hazardous voyage, and which he cherished with the same enthusiasm which has marked every other act of his extraordinary life.

“ You will then, Mr. President, easily comprehend how gratified Sir James Brooke will be when he receives this testimony of the feelings of this distinguished Society towards him. He will, I am assured, receive this valuable token of the estimation in which his services have been held by this Society with every sentiment of gratitude. It will be a proof to him, that although his labours have been carried on at the distance of half the globe, those labours on behalf of science have not been in vain ; he will know that the eye of a small but scientific body of his fellow-countrymen has been anxiously watching his proceedings through the many years of his voluntary exile, and, at the proper time and season, have offered to him the greatest reward it is in their power to bestow.

“ This gift will, indeed, be an earnest and still further encouragement to Sir James Brooke to continue those services so long as Providence continues to him the blessing of health, and the Patron's Gold Medal will, I am satisfied, ever remain in his family as a memorial of the honour now conferred on him by the Council of the Royal Geographical Society.”
