



Rear Admiral Sir FRANCIS BEAUFORT K. C. B.,
D. C. L., Corr. Mem. Inst. France, F. R. S.

Hydrographer of the British Navy, 1829 to 1855

From the original portrait in Greenwich Hospital.



A GREAT BRITISH HYDROGRAPHER FRANCIS BEAUFORT

By the President of the Directing Committee.

FRANCIS BEAUFORT was born at Collon in Ireland in 1774, his father being Vicar of that place and a direct descendant of a noble French family; he entered the Navy in 1787 and although his name was entered on the books of H. M. S. "Colossus", his first two years afloat were served in the "Vansittart", an East Indiaman; during a survey which was being made of the Strait of Gaspar in 1789, the vessel struck a rock and was run aground to save loss of life, but the survivors experienced considerable hardships for five days before reaching safety; this was BEAUFORT's first experience of surveying.

On his return to England BEAUFORT joined H. M. S. "Latona", afterwards being transferred to the "Aquilon", in which he was engaged in the memorable action on the 1st. June 1794 off Brest; his next ship was the "Phaeton"; in which again he saw a considerable amount of war service, being promoted to Lieutenant in 1796.

In October 1800, BEAUFORT distinguished himself in a boat expedition in capturing a Spanish vessel, the "San Josef" of 24 guns, which was lying under the fortress of Fuengirola near Malaga; BEAUFORT himself received no less than 19 wounds, and was promoted to Commander for his gallantry.

During the next two years, being incapacitated by his wounds from active service afloat, he devoted himself to establishing a line of "telegraphs" from Dublin to Galway, an object of great importance so long as the west coast of Ireland was liable to continental invasion; (*Note.* It is not known what these "telegraphs" consisted of, but it is presumed that they were a connected line of semaphores, similar to those already established in England between London and important naval centres. J. F. P.).

In 1805 BEAUFORT was given the command of H. M. S. " Woolwich ", in which vessel, in 1807, he was engaged in the survey of the Rio de la Plata ; during this period he introduced the scale for estimating the force of the wind at sea, which bears his name and is still in use at sea.

In 1809 he was transferred to the command of the " Blossom ", and after his promotion to Captain in 1810 was given command of the frigate " Frederickstein " ; in 1811 he was specially selected from the whole of the Mediterranean fleet to survey the coast of Karamania, a little known portion of Syria ; the result was not only an accurate survey, but a historical review of the country, and BEAUFORT's " Karamania " was the great book of its day ; he proceeded with the survey of the Syrian coast in 1812 until forced to discontinue it owing to being most dangerously wounded by a party of Turks ; during his enforced leisure he prepared such a set of charts of the coasts of Asia Minor, the Archipelago, the Black Sea and Africa as had never been seen before at the Admiralty, being in all respects fit for transference to copper without any further work being required.

During the following years BEAUFORT employed his energies in connection with many scientific societies and public works ; in 1829 on the retirement of Sir Edward PARRY from the office of Hydrographer of the Navy, Lord MELVILLE, First Lord of the Admiralty, offered the post to BEAUFORT who accepted it ; by those naval officers who knew him it was said that it was doubtful if any officer of the Navy could have been found better qualified than he was from his habits, attainments, and tact, for filling this important position.

BEAUFORT immediately applied his whole energies to the improvement of Hydrography and of the Hydrographic Office itself, endeavouring to model the latter on the lines of the Hydrographic Offices of Copenhagen, Paris, and St. Petersburg which he considered were the best examples of efficiency.

When he commenced his duties at the Admiralty, the Hydrographic Office was little more than a map-producing department, and it was owing indeed to the discouragement which Sir Edward PARRY had experienced in his endeavours to improve matters that he had retired ; marine surveying on an extended and organised scale was in its infancy, and even the results of most valuable work by many of the earlier surveyors had not been produced ; BEAUFORT did marvels in improving hydrographic matters both afloat and at the Admiralty, but in the latter portion of his time the progress of his work was greatly impeded by the want of adequate financial support which he felt most bitterly ; but even though BEAUFORT was unable to see all his ideas put into practice, he

initiated most valuable schemes in a variety of directions, which were the foundations on which the British hydrographic work of the future was very largely based.

BEAUFORT was always most willing to give his assistance in any manner possible to any explorer, geographical discoverer, or marine scientist, and his personal aid and counsel was much sought after, not only by his own countrymen but by those of other nationalities; among these latter who may be mentioned specially is Commodore Charles WILKES of the United States Exploring Expedition (1838-1842), who used to speak most gratefully of the valuable and friendly assistance which he had received from BEAUFORT.

The first Admiralty Tide Tables were published in the year 1832, and official Notices to Mariners were first issued from the Admiralty in 1834.

The number of important surveys, carried out under BEAUFORT'S direction in every part of the world is too great to allow of any detailed mention here, but it may be said that almost every part of the globe was covered; mention however must be made of the Arctic expedition under Sir John FRANKLIN in search of a North-West passage, which consisted of the "Erebus" and "Terror", and left England in 1845; the last despatches from the expedition were dated two months after their departure, and it was not learnt until many years later that FRANKLIN himself died in 1847, the two ships were deserted in 1848 and the entire crews gradually died; a large number of expeditions, public and private, were sent out in search of the missing ships and BEAUFORT took a most active part in this work.

In 1855, BEAUFORT'S last year as Hydrographer, six foreign, five colonial and ten home surveys were in progress.

BEAUFORT was a member of a very large number of important maritime and scientific committees, and was one of the founders of the Royal Geographical Society in 1831; he was also a Fellow of the Royal Society and of the Royal Astronomical and Royal Geological Societies, and a D. C. L. of Oxford; in 1837 he was awarded the diploma of a Corresponding member of the Royal Institute of France, and was an honorary Member of various foreign societies.

In 1846 BEAUFORT was promoted to the rank of Rear-Admiral, and in 1848 was made a K. C. B.

It is curious to learn that the enormous amount of work in connection with railway projects so increased BEAUFORT'S labours latterly that in 1855, at the advanced age of 81, he was forced to retire, dying two years later.

It is often considered that lengthy appointments are dangerous but there is no doubt whatever, that in the case of Sir Francis BEAUFORT, his tenure of the post of Hydrographer for 26 years was of inestimable benefit to the world generally and to that science of which he was such an able exponent.

