cyclonic depression, a destructive gale occurred in Ireland. At Valentia Observatory the pressure tube anemograph registered a gust of 96 miles an hour, which is the highest gust recorded there for at least sixteen years. Barometric readings in Iceland were unusually low during the three first days of 1933. On January 3, pressure at sea-level was less than 928 millibars (27·4 in.) near the centre of a depression lying off the south-west coast of Iceland, but it is not possible to say by how much it fell below that value. That depression was certainly among the deepest of which we have any record since daily synoptic weather charts of the North Atlantic were first begun. On those prepared and published by the Danish and German Admiralties, there is only one depression which looks to have had such a low reading, that of February 24, 1903, which had been preceded five days earlier by another only slightly less intense.

### Earthquake in South-East Africa

THE strong earthquake that occurred shortly after 8.30 A.M. on December 31 in south-east Africa possesses some interest as it visited a region in which destructive shocks are almost or quite unknown. Its epicentre seems to have been in Zululand, for damage to buildings was caused at Eshowe and other places. The shock was felt all over Zululand and Natal, in various parts of the Transvaal and the Free State, and from Lorenzo Marquez on the north to the Transkei on the south. Its disturbed area must therefore have contained about a quarter of a million square miles, which is more than that shaken by the great Japanese earthquake of 1923.

### Ancient Man in Palestine

IT is reported that Miss Dorothy Garrod, director of the Joint Expedition of the School of Archæology in Palestine and the American School of Prehistoric Research, has discovered further remains of Palestine man. A massive and powerful lower jaw has been found in the cave of the Oven at the foot of Mount Carmel. In an announcement of the discovery by Dr. Grant MacCurdy, of Yale University, director of the American School of Prehistoric Research, it is stated that the character of the newly discovered jaw fully conforms to the view, based upon the evidence previously discovered in the caves of Mount Carmel, that Palestine man, while presenting Neanderthaloid characters, is of a distinct type. It is also announced that a cap or veil made of dentalia shells has been discovered in an adjacent cave. It will be remembered that in the course of the excavations of 1931, Miss Garrod found a cap of dentalia shells still attached to a skull from a mesolithic series in one of the Mugharet el-Wad caves.

### Cave Paintings in the Pyrenees

FURTHER details of an interesting discovery of the prehistoric painting of a horse in a cave in the Pyrenees, briefly announced some weeks ago, are now supplied by Science Service, Washington D.C. The cave, to be known as La Grotte de la Bastide, is situated near the village of La Bastide, Hautes Pyrénées, and was discovered by M. Norbert Casterat, pupil of Count Bégouen. At the entrance of the cave were intact Magdalenian hearths, and on the walls were a number of engravings and polychrome paintings, including human figures, and as the central object, a polychrome painting of a horse. The horse is described as 'superb' and is an artistic production comparable with the famous horse of the Altamira cave at Santander. The figure is more than six feet long, and is executed in red with black muzzle. The mane is erect; the eye, ear and nostril being delicately engraved. High lights are indicated on shoulders, stomach and flanks. Judging from this description, the painting would appear in every way to be an exceptionally fine example of cave art.

### Lightning Investigation

MR. W. H. F. TREDRE, honorary technical secretary of the Educational Section of the South African Institute of Electrical Engineers, Kelvin House, 100 Fox Street, Johannesburg, has favoured us with some interesting particulars relating to the organisation which has been established for the study of lightning in South Africa. The movement was initiated by Mr. T. P. Pask in a paper read before the South African Institute of Electrical Engineers in April 1930; as a result a committee was formed under the chairmanship of Mr. Pask. The present organisation consists of a main committee and three subsidiary committees dealing with each of the subjects research, statistics and education. With regard to the research, the chairman is Dr. B. F. J. Schonland, of Capetown—the scope of the work it is proposed to undertake includes the collection of photographs of lightning strokes and their effects taken by means of revolving lenses of the type suggested by Prof. Boys, of klydonograms and cathode ray oscillograms of lightning waves, point discharge work, etc. The activities of the statistical section may be illustrated by the fact that there are 3,500 observers throughout the Union who are collaborating by making notes on the history of storms. These observers are working under the supervision of Mr. G. W. Cox, acting chief meteorologist of the Union. The educational section will disseminate information on protective measures through the medium of the Press, schools, pamphlets, etc. During the 1933 session it has been arranged for certain of the investigators to read papers on the subjects of their work before the South African Institute of Electrical Engineers. It is anticipated that interesting results will be obtained at the end of the present lightning season.

### Electrification of Railways in Britain

IN a paper by F. Lydall to the Institute of Transport read on December 12, the electrification of railways is considered under two headings, 'suburban passenger' and the 'general' electrification usually referred to as main line electrification. The main characteristics of the former type of traction are rapid acceleration and increased terminal capacity due to the elimination of locomotives and the ability

of the trains to run equally well in either direction. The practically universal adoption of the multiple unit system for suburban traffic, where several coaches throughout the train are provided with motors, proves that the flexibility this gives to the make-up of the train is of great value in practice. It is usual to divide the trains into units, each unit consisting of one motor coach and several trailer coaches. In the new express service from London to Brighton, the trains are made up of six or twelve coaches, two or four of which are motor coaches, each being equipped with four 225 horse power motors. Over a new portion of an American railway where the stops are 1·55 miles apart, the average speed including stops is 31 miles per hour; on another portion of the line where the stops are 2·9 miles apart the average speed is 40 miles per hour. The increase over the speed of steam trains in Great Britain is about 50 per cent. This speed could be easily increased; it is merely a question of cost. Mr. Lydall considers that on main lines it would be found advisable to work not less than one third of the passenger train mileage by multiple unit stock. By electrification the average speed of passenger trains in Britain could be raised by 25 per cent. The combination of greater comfort, higher speed, and more frequent service would attract many more passengers, and the latter two would also enable the railways to recover much of their goods traffic which at present goes by road transport.

### Motor Car Lights on the Road

WHEN motor cars pass each other at night time, there is often a blinding glare in the drivers' eyes. We learn from *Science Service* that, in the United States, the Bureau of Standards has been conducting an extended research on head-lights to discover how glare can be avoided. Dr. Dickinson of the Bureau of Standards concludes that the most important difficulty in obtaining safe head-lighting is the great disparity in brightness between beams from different lamps. One head-light beam is frequently ten times as intense as another. The driver with the dim lights experiences an almost complete lack of visibility when his car plunges into the bright light of the approaching car. Dr. Dickinson suggests that if the lights were kept so that no head-lamp was more than two or three times brighter than another, most of the glare problem would be solved. Most drivers rely on what they can see of the curb rather than what they see of the oncoming car. Hence the light is increased for a hundred feet in front of the car and the beam is widespread horizontally and slightly depressed. Few motorists realise that it is more dangerous to pass a car that is standing still than one that is running fairly fast. A driver in judging whether the road is clear relies on what he has seen during the past few seconds by the light of the oncoming car. But the road immediately at the back of a car at rest is not illuminated in this way and so danger may lurk there unseen. Exposed lights along the roads sometimes increase the risks of night driving. They often make objects almost invisible which could easily be seen by the head-lights alone.

### Early Days of the Turbine

IN his inaugural address as chairman of the North-Eastern Centre of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, Mr. C. Turnbull gave interesting reminiscences of some of the initial difficulties Sir Charles Parsons met in perfecting the steam turbine. His experiments with early forms of the turbine were in entirely new and unexplored regions of engineering. Everything had to be found out. Steel discs were run under stresses that no one could calculate and no one knew whether they were safe or not. The early high-speed turbines ran at 4,800 revolutions a minute. But thanks to the wonderful care always taken at Parsons's works, accidents were very rare. When driving dynamos at high speeds, the armature reaction caused great difficulty. Several solutions were adopted for turbo-alternators. In one way the brushes were moved automatically with the load by steam pressure and the variation of the strength of the field was counteracted by special windings. A further difficulty was that owing to the springing of the shaft, the connexions between the armature and the commutator used to give trouble. This was overcome by the use of flexible connectors, a device first proposed by Parsons. It has proved of the greatest value. Details are given of the famous *Turbinia* and the heartbreaking experiences with the destroyers *Viper* and *Cobra*. Mr. Turnbull tells how Parsons refused to give up and how his perseverance ultimately led to success. Another great invention that came from Parsons's works was the invention of means for balancing high-speed machinery. The early days of the steam turbine were hard days and the labour expended seemed to lead to nothing. At one time it was doubtful if the steam turbine would ever become practical. The story of Parsons's life should prove very encouraging to young and old inventors.

### The New Helm or Steering Orders

THROUGH the work of the International Safety at Sea and Load Line Convention, and the passing of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1932, and in accordance with the subsequent instructions of the Board of Trade, on January 1 the 'direct' system of helm orders came into use on all British vessels. For centuries the order to "Starboard the helm" or "Port the helm" has caused the ship's head to go in the opposite direction, the practice having come down through the centuries when tillers were in use. Under the new regulations the order "Starboard" will be given, when it is intended that the wheel, the rudder blade and the head of the ship should go to starboard, and the order "Port" will be given when it is intended that the wheel, the rudder blade and the ship's head should go to port. Though it is expected that little difficulty will be experienced in changing over from the 'indirect' system to the 'direct' system, for a time the orders will be given in the words "Wheel to Starboard" and "Wheel to Port", thus enabling the helmsman to adapt himself gradually to the new system. Like most innovations of the kind, the change in