

## Science News a Century Ago

### The Royal Geographical Society

AT a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society held on January 25, 1836, presided over by Sir John Barrow, accounts were read of the Laccadive Islands and of the English Settlement at Cape Coast Castle. The account of the Laccadive Islands was from the private journal of Lieut. Wood of the East India Company's Marine. There were, he said, about fifty islets all told with a total population of less than 7,000. The islands were of coral formation, the larger ones being generally well planted with coco-nut trees, the manufacture of coir from the outer husk of the nut, into ropes, being the chief source of employment to the natives, beyond fishing, cultivating rice and a few vegetables and gathering cowrie shells, which were found in considerable abundance. The inhabitants were poor and inoffensive, carried no arms and lived in stone-built, thatched houses kept very low as a security against the violent gales by which the islands were often swept.

### Records of Halley's Comet

IN a long letter published in *The Times* of January 26, 1836, the Rev. George Cornelius Gorham gave a review of the observations made of Halley's comet from 1456 until 1835, as recorded in various scientific publications, and referred especially to an article which had recently appeared in the *Quarterly Review*. "From these recorded appearances of Halley's comet during its last six visits in about four centuries," he said, "it would seem to be a rash conclusion that this body is gradually wasting away in space, or that the trains and luminous envelopes of comets decrease every time they return to our system (*Quart. Rev.*, Dec. 1835, p. 207), for the train of Halley's was only 4 deg. long as seen in Europe in 1759; it was 40 deg. in 1835, and the comet itself was brighter in the last return than in the preceding. . . . It was perhaps most splendid in 1456—most obscure in 1607—and more conspicuous in 1835 than in 1759. In short, it appears to have waxed and waned in brilliancy, by irregular alternations, during each of its last six perihelion journeys; while its small oblong nucleus has been accompanied by a train of variable colour and magnitude, but is so far from dispersing, that it is considerably longer at present than it was 200 or 300 years ago." Gorham, who was born in 1787 and died in 1857, was third wrangler and second Smith's prizeman in 1808. He took the degree of B.D. in 1820, and his letter was addressed from Maidenhead Parsonage. From 1847 until his death, he was vicar of Brampford Speke, Devonshire, his appointment to this living leading to the famous ecclesiastical case *Gorham v. the Bishop of Exeter*.

### The Institution of Civil Engineers

AT a meeting of the Institution of Civil Engineers held on January 26, 1836, Bryan Donkin being in the chair, Mr. C. Bourns read a paper giving a historical account of legislative measures for the jurisdiction of the Port of London, and the regulation of its commerce, from the earliest period, and suggested other enactments for the better regulation of steam vessels in the pool. After the reading of the paper some conversation took place on the effects produced by the new London Bridge. It was stated

that the current of the river was much increased, particularly in the middle of the stream, and that a great alteration had taken place in the tide, which ran out much lower, while there was a greater deposition of mud on the shores. It was agreed that correct observation of the height of the tides, above and below the bridge, would be desirable, and some of the members promised to present tables of them constructed with considerable attention.

### The Tides at Liverpool

KEPLER, Galileo, Newton, Daniel Bernoulli, Euler, Maclaurin and Laplace had all contributed to the theory of the tides, a subject which in the first half of the nineteenth century engaged the attention of Whewell, J. W. Lubbock and Airy. On January 28, 1836, Lubbock read a paper to the Royal Society entitled "Discussion of Tide Observations made at Liverpool". A report of this paper said: "The chief purpose which the author has in view in presenting the tables accompanying this paper, which are a continuation of those published in the *Philosophical Transactions* for 1835, and are founded on the observations instituted by Mr. Hutchinson at Liverpool, is to exhibit the diurnal inequality in the height of high water, which is scarcely sensible in the river Thames, but which at Liverpool amounts to more than a foot. The diurnal inequality in the interval appears to be insensible. The author has further ascertained that Bernoulli's formulæ expressing the height of the tide, deduced from the theory of the tides, present a very remarkable accordance with observation."

## Societies and Academies

### DUBLIN

Royal Dublin Society, December 17, 1935. H. H. DIXON: Sap movement in the bast. M. J. GORMAN and THOMAS TURPIN: An ineffective strain of nodule organism on red clover. This strain was isolated locally and is one of those which produces numerous small nodules distributed over the finer roots. In culture the ineffective strain did not grow in the sugar broths used. An effective strain studied concurrently grew well on the sugar media and produced, as is usual, a slight amount of acid. Other differences between the strains were noted. D. A. WEBB: The nitro-chromic reaction and its application to the estimation of small quantities of alcohol. By a modification of Agulhon's reagent (potassium dichromate in nitric acid) the strength of alcoholic solutions of the order of 100 mgm. per litre can be estimated to within two per cent, and more approximate estimations made down to 2.5 mgm. per litre. The method may be applied to blood serum, urine, milk, coloured fluids and expired air.

### PARIS

Academy of Sciences, December 23 (*C.R.*, 201, 1301-1444). The president announced the death of Victor Grignard. MARCEL DELÉPINE and ALAIN HOREAU: The hydrogenation of some carbonyl compounds by nickel and platinised nickel. In the presence of small quantities of alkali, the velocity of hydrogenation