

interests rather than by the traditional division of subjects. It is hoped by this means to "fortify the university as a whole in contrast to its separate parts or departments". It is sought to obtain for each chair an endowment of half a million dollars to provide not only an adequate salary, but also an allowance for assistants, both for instruction and for investigations. In thus safeguarding itself against departmentalism—that insidious disease incidental to the growth of specialisation in universities—Harvard has given a lead that may prove to have very far-reaching results. It stands for a movement the very antithesis of the tendency, exemplified in Russia, to abandon the ideal of a great community of scholars working in all fields in the best environment in which to promote breadth of understanding, and to substitute that of separate schools or research institutes each concentrating upon its own field in isolation. The other scheme is for "national scholarships" intended to open the door of opportunity for study at a great endowed university to more of the most promising youth from every part of the country. They are to provide "as much as may be needed up to \$1000 in the first year and \$1200 thereafter" and will not carry an implication that all the recipients are poor.

## Science News a Century Ago

### The British Museum

*The Times* of April 13, 1836, commenting on a return dealing with the British Museum issued in April 1836, said: "The receipts of the British Museum last year were £19,603 8s. 0½d., of which the public money voted by Parliament amounted to £19,076 4s. 6½d., leaving a balance of £527 3s. 6d. The estimated expenditure for the present year is £23,600. . . . There is in the present estimate a special item of £2,000 for the purchase of manuscripts, and another of £500 towards making moulds of the Elgin marbles. The principal item in which there is an increase this year is in salaries to the minor officers and servants . . . and to a provision for an increased number of copyists for the purpose of furnishing the public in the reading-rooms with a complete catalogue of the printed books within the current year. . . . The number of visitors to the general collection last year was 289,104."

### Airy's Lectures at Cambridge in 1836

WHEN Airy was appointed Astronomer Royal, he stipulated that he should be allowed to give a final course of lectures at Cambridge. Lord Auckland, the First Lord of the Admiralty, agreed to this, but his successor Lord Minto refused the necessary permission. When this was known in Cambridge, a petition was sent to Lord Minto, who then yielded. Referring to this in his "Autobiography", Airy wrote: "On April 18 I went to Cambridge with my wife, residing at the Bull Inn, and began Lectures on April 21st: they continued [apparently] to May 27th. My lecture room was crowded [the number of names was 110] and the lectures gave great satisfaction. I offered to the Admiralty to put all the profits in their hands, and transmitted a cheque to the Accountant General of the Navy: but the Admiralty declined to receive them."

### The Royal Society

AT a meeting of the Royal Society held on April 21, 1836, Murchison being in the chair, a communication from Prof. J. F. Daniell was read entitled "Additional Observations on Voltaic Combinations". "The author," the report said, "has found that the constant battery, described in a former communication, might be rendered not only perfectly steady in its action, but also very powerful, as well as extremely efficacious and convenient for all the purposes to which the common voltaic battery is usually applied. With this view he places the cells which form the battery in two parallel rows, consisting of ten cells in each row, on a long table, with their siphon-tubes arranged opposite to each other and hanging over a small gutter, placed between the rows, in order to carry off the refuse solution when it is necessary to change the acid. Having observed that the uniformity of action may be completely maintained by the occasional addition of a small quantity of acid, he is able to dispense with the cumbrous addition of the dripping funnel; an arrangement which admits with facility of any combination of the plates which may be desired."

### Bichat's Theory of Life

"EVERYTHING around human beings, according to M. Bichat, tends constantly to their destruction, and to this influence they would necessarily yield, were they not gifted with some permanent principle of reaction. This principle is their life, and a living system is necessarily always engaged in the performance of functions, whose object it is to resist death. Life, according to Bichat, is the state of being produced by the possession and exercise of what he calls the vital properties; yet he does not always adhere with logical strictness to this definition; but rather uses the term sometimes to designate the vital properties collectively, and this is perhaps the best and most convenient sense. His essential doctrine, however, is that there is no one single individual presiding principle of vitality, that animates the body, but that it is a collection of matter gifted for a time with certain powers of action combined into organs, which are thus enabled to act, and the result is a series of functions, the connected performance of which constitutes a living being." (*Lancet*, April 22, 1836.)

### Scientific Lectures in Ealing

IN an interesting contribution to *The Times* of April 23, 1836, a correspondent said: "The beautiful village of Great Ealing, Middlesex, has been kept in a most pleasing state of excitement during the last week by the opening of an institution patronized by the principal of the nobility, clergy and gentry of the neighbourhood and entitled 'The Union for the Moral and Intellectual Improvement of the Industrious Classes of Great Ealing and its Vicinity.'" The opening of the institution took place in the Great Hall of Messrs. Nicholas's Ealing School on April 11, the Rev. Mr. Smith, the vicar, presiding. "Mr. Bird, lecturer at Eton College, Harrow School, Messrs. Nicholas's School, etc. was appointed to open the institution with a course of three lectures on astronomy, he having risen from the working class by his own exertion and perseverance to the high honour of lecturing before royalty. . . ."