

Comets
#1947C - Between club
of Orion and
Gemini - Oct. Ang
center

THE
NOTTINGHAM ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY.
BULLETIN.

NO. 9.

APRIL, 1947.

COMMENT.

Congratulations to Mr. R.F.T. Granger for an extremely interesting and well spoken discourse on astronomy as a hobby in the broadcast in the series 'Is this your hobby, too?' on 17th. March.

All who heard his talk agreed that Mr. Granger covered his subject with remarkable thoroughness in the short time at his disposal. A well deserved vote of thanks was accorded Mr. Granger at the last meeting.

Regardless of the expense and inconvenience involved in going to Birmingham (at the time of the worst floods), he also very generously donated the entire fee received from the B.B.C. to the Society, a highly appreciated kindness.

Mr. Lake Aske's talk on 'The Stars and the Poets' proved to be quite a refreshing change from 'calculations and technicalities' dealing, as it did, with the poets' references to astronomical subjects.

Perhaps there are many of our members (your Secretary is one) who share Mr. Aske's reasons for being attracted to astronomy - more aesthetical and romantic than because of the practical possibilities of the subject.

Two fine poems, specially written by Mr. Aske himself, will be reproduced in the May issue of 'The Bulletin'. Space restrictions have, unfortunately, made it necessary to spread his talk over two issues. The first part will be found in this issue while the second part will be published next month.

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THE SKY IN MAY

The Julian Date for May 0 is 243 2306. For other dates add the date.

The Sun

Rotation No. 1252 began 13th. April.

Rotation No. 1253 begins on 10th. May.

The South pole is still in view nearly its maximum distance over the limb. Careful sketches of spots on a two-inch disk will be welcomed; care must be taken to fit the east-west line, or the horizontal line, as accurately as possible. Good observations were obtained of pronounced activity in January and February by one observer.

The Moon

Full on 5th. May. At the best altitude between first quarter and full, with Mare Nubium and Copernicus areas near the Sun-rise terminator.

Planets

Saturn sets soon after midnight; now moving slowly towards Delta Cancri. Titan is at East elongation on May 13th and 29th, North, West and South elongations at four-day intervals after.

Jupiter reaches opposition in mid-month and is up, but always low, all night. The shadow of the planet is now right behind it and eclipses of satellites take place very near the edge of the planet.

Uranus is disappearing in the evening twilight; Neptune is up nearly all night near Gamma Virginis.

Occultations

None of note.

Variable Stars

T. Cephei, for which charts have been drawn, is very bright. A further chart for the fainter stages is being prepared for three-inch telescopes, which can follow the star through its minimum.

A.W. LANE HALL

Director, Observing Section.

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GLOSSARY.

CAMERA OBSCURA

A small optical instrument for viewing external objects from indoors. A rotating, pivoting flat mirror reflects light rays from the selected object through a fixed objective lens which projects the image on to a viewing board or screen inside the room.

COELOSTAT.

A fixed telescope in a horizontal or vertical position in which light rays are reflected by an external adjustable mirror to the objective lens. Used chiefly for solar physics work.

CORONA.

A phenomenon consisting of a pearly light, usually in the shape of streamers radiating from the Sun's edge, seen without a spectroscope only at total eclipses of the Sun. It is subject to periodic modification according to the degree of sunspot activity.

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THE STARS AND THE POETS.

by

Lake Aske

Vice-President, Nottingham Astronomical Society
Secretary, Poetry Society (Nottingham)

To try to mix astronomy and poetry is like trying to mix oil and water. One is a science and the other an art. But Man comprises the whole, and since there is a little poetry even in astronomers, and a little astronomy even in poets, it might be worth while to give the two subjects a good shake and see what kind of a cocktail we get. So let us put aside for twenty minutes or so our instruments and records and turn and look through those "magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn" - the land of poetry in fact.

This talk will be on astronomy - the heavenly bodies chiefly - from the literary point of view. Many of you may not be interested in such a point of view. But I suspect I am not the only one here who, while doing no practical field work in astronomy and unable to follow calculations very far, yet is very attached to what we might call the romantic side of astronomy. Those people will perhaps enjoy my remarks. To the others, I apologise. We shall soon get back to our observations and statistics, shan't we?

While most folk are not interested in astronomy as such, the more obvious features of the sky, like the Sun, Moon and the stars, have of course, entered very much into our common language and thought. Rather more than we should have expected, I think, seeing what poor clouded skies we have in this country for observation. The stars in

particular are very difficult to observe in this English climate, as we found out in our few attempts at actual field observation as a Society. I think there's an explanation of the fact that we talk and think sun and stars a good deal more than our climate seems to justify. It is that our culture, our literature, comes largely from the East, from Greece, Egypt and Italy, where the pageant of the sky is seen at its best, and very often; not, as in England, only at an occasional 'Royal Command' performance.

Our language, as I say, is full of references to the principal heavenly bodies. The word 'star' in particular has grown a new meaning, so that if we were to give one of these up-to-date intelligence tests to a group of young people of both sexes, where they had to write down the first word that comes into their minds after hearing the word 'star', it is quite possible we should get one or two references, not to Sirius and Aldebaran, but to James Mason and Ginger Rogers!

We use such phrases as 'sun of my soul' 'top star' 'Sun Insurance Co.', not to mention 'Moon of my delight' which I admit is Eastern. We say a person is 'mooning about' or is 'loony' which is a corruption of 'lunatic' but is nevertheless directly connected with the moon-'luna'-and its supposed influence on mad people. We speak of 'starry' eyes, and of a 'sunny' disposition, and so on.

The modern newspaper cult of astrology is naturally increasing the use of astronomical terms. Folk who don't know the difference between a 'star' and a 'shooting star', know they were born under Saturn and that they must not make love or go to the bank when Venus is around! But this astrology business does make use of the terms and ideas of astronomy and so brings them into literature. And poetry is literature. Don't let us forget that in the past astrology has played a major part, and since most of our great poets lived in the past they were much concerned with astrological ideas. For instance Shakespeare says -

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
But in ourselves, that we are underlings".

He is referring of course, to the influence that stars were then supposed to have had on the destiny of men. Similarly, when in the same play he says-

"When beggars die, there are no comets seen"
he is speaking as an astrologer.

In my few researches for this paper, I have been struck by the fact that poets rarely write about astronomical phenomena, I mean eclipses, novae stellae and so on. Longfellow wrote a poem called "The Occultation of Orion" but it is little more than a dream. How Orion could be occulted is a puzzle anyway. I am surprised that poets have not been more inspired by happenings in the sky, because I think an eclipse, even of the moon, is a thrilling and beautiful spectacle, just the kind of thing which makes one feel 'poetic'. In an eclipse for instance, one can see although 'as in a glass darkly', how the wheels of the universe go round. I think an eclipse is pretty nearly as good, from the poetic inspiration point of view, as a daffodil. But whereas we have a number of fine poems on daffodils, we have (as far as I know) none on eclipses. I must write one! Again, I am moved whenever I see, even in binoculars, the mountains on the moon. This is looking into another world. But while we have many poems about the mountains on the earth, I know of none about the Lunar Apennines.

Of course, many of the astronomical ideas, and some of the most thrilling, are comparatively new. I mean such ideas as new stars, dwarf suns, light years and so on. These things are knowledge but not common knowledge. When they have sunk into the mass-mind they will be written about. In fact, if I dare take a leaf from the astrologers' book and make a forecast, I will prophesy that poets will write more and more about astronomical subjects. After all, the world we know is shrinking. We used to speak of the mysterious East and the Golden West. Both the mystery and the gold seem to be disappearing before such innovations as the radio and the aeroplane. Hence the mind of man, and especially the mind of poets, always in the van of imaginative work, will seek further for the mystery and romance on which poetry thrives, and will find them, I believe, in the sublime spectacle of the universe outside us. From Heaven as a theme for much of their work, poets will turn to the Heavens, a still greater theme.

--End of Part One--

NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.

NEW MEMBER

A cordial welcome is extended to Miss B. Stainfield, who was elected a member on 3rd. April.

JUNIOR SECTION

As a result of some friendly criticism of the Society for not catering sufficiently for its numerically strong junior section, it has been decided to precede the main subject matter of future general meetings with a short 'popular' talk on astronomy designed to be of particular interest to young astronomers and potential astronomers.

It is thought that most of the adult members will find these short sessions at least of interest if not of value.

QUIZ

At the next meeting, another experiment will be made in the form of something entertaining - if not so educational - a quiz.

The idea is to select two teams at random and fire general astronomical questions at each member of each team in turn. Your Secretary will be Question-Master and it is hoped to have the services of Mr. Lane Hall as referee - in case of dispute!

VISIT TO RUGBY SCHOOL OBSERVATORY.

An excursion has been arranged to visit Rugby School Observatory on Saturday, 10th. May, 1947.

A special coach will depart Nottingham at 3.00 p.m. arriving Rugby about 5.00 p.m. when tea will be available.

The return journey will commence at 8.00 p.m. arriving back in Nottingham at about 10.00 p.m. leaving sufficient time to catch buses to the suburbs.

Final details will be given at the next meeting and it is expected that this trip will prove quite an enjoyable as well as interesting venture.

As accommodation is limited, will all members who wish to go, either singly, or with their friends and relations, please intimate their intentions to the Secretary without delay.

The fare will be 7s/6d. return and may be paid to the Secretary either by uncrossed postal order (no cheques, please) per post or in cash at the next meeting.

It is hoped to reserve accommodation for tea at a good cafe but it is felt that the members will prefer to select and buy their own items from the menu, and accordingly, no payment is required for tea by the Society.

ADDRESSES

All communications for the Director of the Observing Section should be addressed as follows:

Mr. A. W. Lane Hall,
Devon Lodge,
19, Hartington Road,
Sherwood,
NOTTINGHAM. Tel:66587.

All other correspondence should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary as follows:

Mr. A. J. Ashmore,
97, Danethorpe Vale,
Sherwood,
NOTTINGHAM.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held in the Mechanics Institute, Burton Street, Nottingham, on Thursday, 1st. May, 1947, at 7.30. p.m.

The principal attractions are Mr. Lane Hall's talk on 'The Night Sky in May,' and the quiz referred to above.

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