T H E

NOTTINGHAM ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

B U L L E T I N

NO. 10 MAY, 1947

COMMENT.

The Society's first tour of inspection of an astronomical observatory occurred on 10th May, when a party of members spent a pleasant afternoon in travelling down to Rugby for a visit to Temple Observatory there. The almost inevitable clouds at the crucial moment prevented a view through the 8" refractor but the but the party were able to spend an interesting hour in the observatory seeing the various instruments and exhibits and learning something of the routine of an observatory.

The opportunity was taken of seeing the famous school and among the interesting facts learnt was the origin of Rugby football!

Altogether it proved a successful excursion and it is hoped that it will be the fore-runner of other equally successful visits to places of astronomical interest.

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THE SKY IN JUNE

The Julian Date for June 0 is 243 2245. For other dates add the date.

The Sun.

Solar rotation No. 1253 began on 10th May. Rotation No. 1254 begins on 6th June.

Spot activity continues at a very high level, and the Aurora should be looked for about 24 hours after any very large active group has passed the central meridian.

On 6th June both Solar poles are on the limbs of the Sun and the equator shows as a straight line. After that date the North Solar Pole comes further into view and the South Pole disappears until December.

Summer Solstice (Sun farthest North) on 22nd June.

Twilight all night from 16th May to 28th July in latitude 53°.

The Moon.

Moonlight interfers at the beginning and end of the month.

Full moon on 3rd June and 3rd July.

Occultation of Phi Sagittarrii (mag. 3.3) on 5th June at 13 h. 32 m. GMAT very low in the sky.

The moon is highest during the thin crescent phase and the Mare Crisium and the Petavius-Langrenus region are at their most favourable altitude, and the Moon is also well North of the Ecliptic.

Close conjunction with Jupiter on 1st June at 12 hrs. GMAT.

The partial eclipse on 3rd June finishes just before moonrise.

Mercury.

There is a chance to see Mercury, but in strong twilight, about 9 hrs. GMAT 9th - 15th June. Search should be made on a previous night for Gamma Leonis on the dark sky about 12 hrs. GMAT. when it occupies the same position relative to the horizon, which should be carefully noted.

Jupiter.

Jupiter is up nearly all night, very low in the South.

Saturn.

Saturn can still be seen in the evening twilight through most of the

(contd.)
month, but the bright sky will obliterate the satellites. The rings will be closed substantially when the planet reappears in the morning sky at the end of the year.

Comets.

Several are on view and better information for June will be given at the June meeting. At the beginning of the Month 1946h. will be near Delta Cygni (12th mag.) and 1947a. near Iota Pegasi ($11\frac{1}{2}$ mag.).

Fixed Stars.

Some of the richest parts of the Milky Way are best placed during the short summer nights, and the Aquila-Scutum-Sagittarius region will repay sweeping with field glasses and an atlas.

Time.

Note that all times are given GMAT (0 hrs = Noon) and for Double Summer Time values add TWO hours. When observing, set watches or clocks two hours back to avoid mental arithmetic, and never record any time except GMT or GMAT.

A. W. LANE HALL.
---oOo--- Director, Observing Section.

THE STARS AND THE POETS.

by

Lake Aske
Vice-President, Nottingham Astronomical Society,
Secretary, Poetry Society (Nottingham).

(Part Two)

It is exciting to try and imagine what Shakespeare would have written had he possessed our knowledge of astronomy. You know the passage from Romeo and Juliet: 'Look how the floor of heaven is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold'. This is a burst of lovely poetry, alive with imagination. But it is plain Shakespeare was seeing the heavens as a flat expanse - 'Look how the floor of heaven'. Copernicus, with his radical ideas, died only a few years before Shakespeare's time and the poet could hardly have heard of the new theories. But what would Shakespeare have written if he could see the night sky in depth as we see it today, at least in imagination, and gazed with his mind's eye into the profundities of space? What if he could have known that the nearest star is millions of miles away, some so far that their rays travelling at the speed of light, take thousands of years to reach us. That the Milky Way so far from being just a smear of stars across the sky, forms the frontiers of a universe, our universe, in which our Sun is a humble member and our earth a speck of dust! Even the famous passage about 'the cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces' must surely have been surpassed.

To come to some actual poems. One of the most notable for our purpose is Addison's piece 'The Spacious Firmament':-

The Spacious Firmament on high
With all the blue ethereal sky,
and spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Their great Original proclaim.
The unwearied Sun, from day to day
Does his Creator's power display;
and publishes to every land
The work of an Almighty hand.
Soon as the evening shades prevail,
the Moon takes up the wondrous tale;
And nightly to the listening earth,
repeats the story of her birth;
Whilst all the stars that round her burn,
and all the planets in their turn,
comfirm the tidings as they roll,
and spread the truth from pole to pole.
What though in solemn silence all
move round the dark terrestrial ball;
What though no real voice nore sound,
amid their radiant orbs be found?

(Contd.)

In reason's ear, they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice;
For ever singing as they shine
'The hand that made us is divine'.

I think that captures the feeling of awe and wonder many of us feel when looking at a starry sky. It is a noble piece of verse and perhaps it is outrageous to judge factually, as though poetry can be tested in a tube or on a micro-balance. Nevertheless, as astronomers, we may be allowed to wonder if Addison had completely accepted the Copernican ideas. 'What though in solemn silence all move round the dark terrestrial ball'? Is the poet speaking figuratively or no? I wonder.

A very interesting reference to astronomy occurs in the famous sonnet by Keats, 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'. Keats has been inspired by reading a translation of Homer and he looks round for something by which to tell us how thrilled he was. He says: 'Then felt I like some watcher of the skies, when a new planet swims into his ken'. I toyed for some time with the idea that Keats was referring here to the sensational discovery of Neptune by Adams and LeVerrier but this cannot be, as Keats died before Adams was born.

To come to more modern times, there is a delightful little poem by James Thomson called 'As we rush in the Train'. It specially interests me because it not only deals with stars but also with trains. Even Walt Whitman couldn't deny that stars are rather poetic things, but few folk would say the same things about trains. My theory is that all things are poetic to the poetically minded. Here is the poem:-

As we rush, as we rush in the train
The trees and the houses go wheeling back
But the starry heavens above the plain
Come flying on our track.
Oh, the beautiful stars in the sky,
The silver doves of the forest of night
Over the dull earth swarm and fly
Companions of our flight.
We will rush ever on without fear
Let the goal be far, the flight be fleet
For we carry the heavens with us, dear,
While the earth slips from our feet!

I think you will agree that is a pretty conception, cleverly carried out. You will notice stars are compared to 'doves'. I wonder how many things they have been compared to? Sequins, patines, gems, jewels, diamonds, eyes, lamps, dust, spangles, fire-flies, etc.

Now I'd like to read you a sonnet by Blanco White which contains an idea that should interest astronomers: 'To Night'

Mysterious Night! When our first parent knew
Thee from report divine, and heard thy name,
Did he not tremble for this lovely frame,
This glorious canopy of light blue?
Yet neath a curtain of translucent dew
Bathed in the rays of the great setting flame,
Hesperus with the host of heaven came,
And lo! Creation widened in man's view,
Who could have though such darkness lay concealed
within thy beams, O Sun! or who could find
whilst fly and leaf and insect stood revealed
That to such countless orbs thou madst us blind!
Why do we then shun death with anxious strife?
If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life?

It is striking, don't you think, that Night, which we are inclined to look on as a negation, a closing down of life's activities, should be really a revelation of true grandeur and complexity of our universe?

I have said that when the new knowledge about the celestial universe has soaked into men's minds, we shall have poems inspired by it. Here is one which, I think, already has the modern outlook. Which is not surprising, perhaps, for it was written by a man, George Meredith, who was living as late as 1909. 'Lucifer in Starlight':-

On a starr'd night Prince Lucifer uprose,
Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend
Above the rolling ball in cloud part screen'd,
Where sinners hugg'd their spectre of repose,

(Contd.)

Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those
And now upon his western wing he leaned,
Now his huge bulk o'er Afric's sands careen'd,
Now the black planet shadowed Arctic snows,
Soaring through wider zones that prick'd his scars
With memory of the old revolt from Awe,
He reached a middle height, and the Stars
which are the brain of heaven, he look'd, and sank,
Around the ancient track march'd rank on rank
The army of unalterable law.

That ending: 'Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank, the army of unalterable law' is XXth Century feeling, I think.

Perhaps I can conclude by quoting two of my own pieces of verse which deal with astronomy to some extent. I apologise to the shades of the great men whose poems I have already quoted, but I feel I should like to let you see that at least I am trying to practise what I preach, namely, to write poems on astronomical subjects. The first is called 'The Boy Gods':-

The Sun Gods (the boy gods)
Whipped the toy-top earth;
Along celestial playgrounds
swept their golden mirth.
"Fast!" they cried, "And faster!",
"Let's see your colours mix!",
The Sun-gods, bent on scourging
The driven earth with sticks,
Saw jungles green, and grain-bright
Yellows of the Wheat,
Ocean blues, vulcan reds,
Fade and change and meet.
The spinning earth sways outwards,
Blanches and grows numb....
Young boy-gods shout in triumph:
Old men say: "Winter's come".

And lastly, a piece called 'Orion Bearing Sou-South West', which deals with Spring and naturally follows the poem I've just read.

20 hours, and Orion bearing Sou-South West,
Mighty Hunter, turn you homeward for your Summer's rest?
Heel-true, steel-blue, pads the Dog-Star down your gem-set belts,
Dragged with weight of jewelled dagger and a prince of pelts,
Trapper in the cosmic tundra, take your homeward way
Rich! For skins of Ursa, Leo, pack your starry sleigh,
Turn from these G actic spaces, seek what summers bring,
Turn your constellated face, as mine I turn to Spring!

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NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.

AUTUMN LECTURES.

I have been asked if I could arrange another course of lectures under the auspices of the W.E.A. In order to obtain Ministry of Education approval to a special syllabus, early arrangements must be made. Will any likely supporters indicate to me by postcard during June, their preference among the following subjects (or suggest others)?
(a) Organised astronomical work, and its results, by amateurs with moderate equipment. (b) Stellar astronomy (expanding the last four lectures of last session into twelve). (c) The Sun. (d) A history of astronomical discovery. The expression of a preference will not in any way commit the sender to attendance, which will probably be 6 Mondays before Christmas and 6 after, unless another day is strongly preferred. (A.W.Lane Hall, 19 Hartington Road, Sherwood, Nottingham).

NEXT MEETING.

The next meeting will be held in the Mechanics Institution on Thursday, 5th June, 1947.

FOR SALE. - Astronomical Telescope. 3" Refractor on table stand. 2 Day and 4 Night eye-pieces, 2 Suncaps. Complete in Mahogany case. New condition. Offers over £20 to Mr. W.L. Healey, 47 St. Ann's Hill Road, Cranmer Street, Nottingham.

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