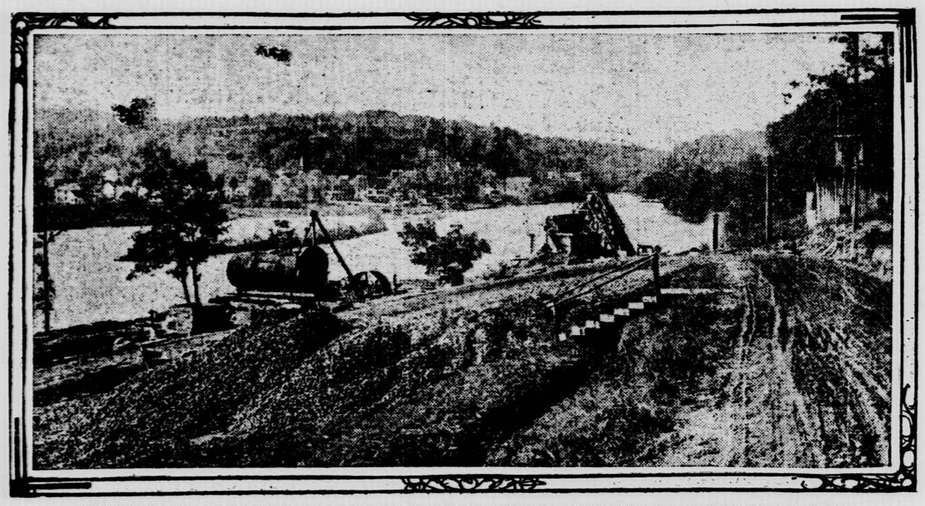
In Two Years District Workhouse at Occoquan Has Become Model Institution



STONE CRUSHING PLANT WITH VILLAGE OF OCCOQUAN IN DISTANCE ACROSS THE CREEK.

ALREADY Within Striking Distance of Being Self-Supporting—Story of the Founding of Occoquan Workhouse Has Romantic Interest—Increasing the Plant's Commercial Productivity—The New Brick Kilns—Amendment of Penal Code Planned—To Provide an Indeterminate Sentence Not to Exceed Two Years, So That Prisoners May Be Detained Until They Are Prepared to Return to Society as Self-Supporting—Only Prison of Its Kind in the United States.

A RECORD in engineering progress, industrial achievement and penological reform probably but rarely ever equaled by an institution of its kind has marked the development of the District of Columbia workhouse, located in Fairfax county, near the village of Occoquan, Va. Established less than two and a half years ago, the plant already is within striking distance of being self-supporting.

The material progress made has not been more remarkable than the success attained in the inauguration of a new plan of disciplining society's unfortunate members sentenced by the courts—a plan that is concerned with trying to re-equip them for useful citizenship.

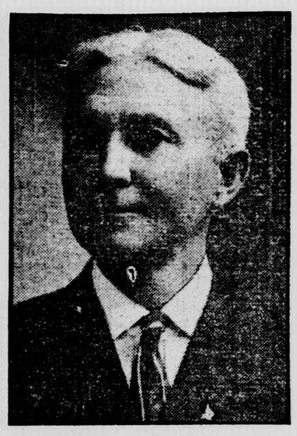
While appealing directly to the economist and social reformer, the story of the founding of the Occoquan workhouse is not without romantic interest. A wilderness had to be reclaimed and the men to whom the task was assigned were prisoners. Within four months they had built and equipped the nucleus of an institution which today is capable of housing and providing employment for nearly a thousand persons.

* * *

With the building program nearing completion attention now is being directed toward increasing the plant's commercial productivity. Rapid progress in this direction was made during the fiscal year that ended June 30 last, when the earning capacity reached $103,698, as compared with a total expenditure of $152,517.80 for maintenance and construction. District of Columbia officials anticipate the time when the Occoquan kilns will be able to supply the local government with all the brick needed by it for construction work. They believe that the institution will be more than self-supporting within five years.

A further development of the penological system is planned for the immediate future. Much of the success accomplished thus far is attributed to the fact that bars and cells have practically been eliminated and the workhouse inmates quartered in dormitories that are well ventilated and conform to every sanitary requirement. The next step planned is an amendment of the penal code providing an indeterminate sentence not to exceed two years, so that prisoners may be detained until they have been prepared to return to society as self-supporting and law-abiding citizens.

With the exception of a similar establishment at Toronto, Canada, and one at Berne, Switzerland, the Occoquan workhouse is in a class by itself. The success with which it has met is due to the prison commission, which recommended the general plan for its establishment and operation, the District of Columbia Commissioners and Supt. William H. Whittaker. The latter has been on the grounds from the day operations were commenced. In conjunction with District Engineer Commissioner William V. Judson and the engineer department of the



WILLIAM H. WHITTAKER, Superintendent of workhouse at Occoquan, Va.

local government, he has worked out the details of many of the engineering problems encountered, while the administration of the institution, supervised by the board of charities and the District Commissioners, has fallen on his shoulders.

To one familiar with the topography of the country lying between Lorton, Va., a station on the Washington Southern railway, and Occoquan village, a distance of about three and a half miles, as it appeared less than three years ago, the transformation that has taken place through the clearing of a large forest tract and establishment of a thriving industrial plant, built almost entirely by prison labor, must appear as bordering on the miraculous.

The purchase of a large tract of undeveloped farm land for the purposes of a workhouse was one of the recommendations contained in the report of the prison commission, which consisted of Justice Wendell P. Stafford of the District of Columbia Supreme Court, John Joy Edson and Robert V. La Dow.

* * *

Congress, in the District of Columbia appropriation bill for the fiscal year 1910, authorized the purchase of not less than a thousand acres of land as a site for a workhouse, stipulating that a commission, consisting of not less than three members, should be appointed by the District Commissioners to prepare plans for temporary buildings. It was provided that one of the District heads should be a member of the commission, and Engineer Commissioner William V. Judson was selected. The other members appointed were Justice Stafford and Mr. Edson, both of whom had served on the prison commission.

A workhouse site of 1,150 acres, lying between Lorton, Va., and the village of Occoquan, on Occoquan creek, was purchased, and William H. Whittaker appointed superintendent of the institution which yet was to be constructed. Mr. Whittaker had been prominently identified with penal and correctional work in Indiana and, at the time of his selection for the position, was secretary of the Prisoners' Aid Association of Maryland, with headquarters in Baltimore. The suggestion that he be placed at the head of the workhouse was made by District Commissioner Cuno H. Rudolph.

Mr. Whittaker went to Occoquan with twenty-seven prisoners in July, 1910. This force shortly was increased to 300 men, the prisoners having been transferred from the jail in Washington. Tents were provided for their temporary accommodation, and the first piece of construction work started was the building of a road a mile and a quarter long from Occoquan creek to the site selected for the institution buildings.

* * *

The road was finished in sixty days. It was built with a grade of not more than 5 per cent, although its terminus is 250 feet above the level of the creek.

The next task undertaken was the construction of a dining room, officers' quarters and two dormitories to be occupied by prisoners. These buildings were completed by December 8. On that date an eight-inch snow fell and the Occoquan colony moved from the tents into more comfortable quarters.

During the five-month period, from July to December, a sawmill had been erected so that timber on the tract could be utilized in the various building projects and numerous minor improvements made. While the nucleus of the institution was being established Mr. Whittaker and his wife lived in a small one-room frame structure which also served as the administration building. In the two years that have elapsed since the dining room, officers' quarters and two dormitories were built the plant has grown at a rapid rate. It now consists of two distinct departments for male and female prisoners. The latter is provided with two dormitories with accommodations for 120 prisoners, two dining rooms, a laundry capable of furnishing employment for thirty women; a tailor shop of similar capacity and a hospital.

* * *

Composing the equipment of the male department are two dormitories with sleeping quarters for 400 colored prisoners, one dormitory with accommodations for 175 white prisoners, a tailor shop with bath facilities, a large recreation room, hospital, officers quarters and administration building. In addition, residences have been built for Supt. Whittaker, Assistant Supt. Manuel Ream and Chief Clerk Carl Lewis. A modern hennery, with capacity for 400 chickens, also has been constructed, while a blacksmith shop and large barn are among other improvements that have been added.

It is planned to build in the immediate future a new administration building, a new dining room for the female department and a large dairy barn capable of housing fifty cows.

While the work of providing the institution with the buildings needed has been in progress, improvement along other lines has not been overlooked. A plant for furnishing heat and light has been provided, sewers have been laid, an up-to-date water supply system installed and several hundred acres of land fertilized, so that much of the food consumed by the inmates of the workhouse could be produced at home.

The first sewer built for temporary use consisted of a 12-inch pipe leading from the institution to a ravine, one-half mile distant. There is now being completed a permanent sewer which empties into Occoquan creek, a mile and a half away. This has been constructed so that it can be tapped at different parts and the sewerage used for fertilizing purposes.

* * *

The power plant provides each building with light and heat. Steam pipes are laid in a cement tunnel which leads from the laundry building, in the female department, to the male department, a distance of 1,200 feet. Construction of this tunnel was one of the first projects completed.

The water plant, which is valued at $50,000, represents an expenditure of only about $20,000. The water used comes from the race above the village of Occoquan, being brought of its own force to the pumps on the banks of the creek, where it is pumped into a large tank of 50,000 gallons capacity. From this point it is forced through a filter. Before it reaches the pumps, however, it is filtered through a rock and sand bank which was built by Mr. Whittaker, so that much of the sediment carried may be eliminated.

Early attention was given to the question of making the workhouse self-supporting and was followed by the installation of machinery for the manufacture of from 35,000 to 40,000 brick a day. Six new kilns, in addition to the two now in operation, are being constructed, and, as a result, it is believed that the plant's output of brick will range from 8,000,000 to 10,000,000 annually.

* * *

A stone-crushing plant has been in operation for several months and is now being enlarged. The institution's output of stone in the future will, it is expected, produce an annual revenue of $35,000 for the District government, while it is estimated that the revenue produced by the brick kilns, if operated at full capacity, will amount to from $80,000 to $100,000 annually.

Progress has been made in the development of the agricultural resources of the property. Forty acres of ground have been fertilized and put under cultivation. During the first year there was raised $3,500 worth of products. This amount increased to $5,900 the second year and $7,600 the third. As a result Supt. Whittaker has asked that the item of $75,000 for maintenance carried in the current appropriation bill be reduced to $70,000 next year. It is believed that this item can be reduced at the rate of $5,000 annually for the next six years, the difference being made up by an increased output of farm products.

Ultimately it is planned to have 660 acres of land under cultivation, which will leave 500 acres of timber land in reserve. In order to make the soil productive it is the superintendent's intention to put twenty-five bushels of lime and seventy-five tons of street sweepings on each acre of ground. Ground has been prepared for orchards, vines, etc., and already there have been planted 1,500 apple trees, 200 cherry trees, fifty plum trees and 5,000 grape vines.

* * *

Whether the institution is to be put on a self-supporting basis within five years depends on how readily a market for the disposal of its products can be established. According to Engineer Commissioner Judson, the District government probably will be able to use all the brick and crushed stone manufactured. Negotiations may be undertaken with the view of disposing of some of the material to the federal government.

The Commissioners' estimates for next year include an item for the purchase of a $25,000 tugboat and additional barges to be operated between Washington and Occoquan. It is planned to man the boats with prisoners. Cargoes of workhouse products will be unloaded at the District's new sand and gravel wharf, and, in all probability, additional wharves will be built along the river front here.

The workhouse, at present, is provided with sixty horses and mules. Supt. Whittaker has recommended that when the District purchasing officer buys horses for the various departments a certain per cent of his purchases be mares, so that when the animals have been condemned and are of no further use to the departments they may be transferred to Occoquan, where they can be used for breeding purposes. In this way the workhouse plant may furnish the local government with all the mules needed by it. The street cleaning department would be especially benefited by the carrying out of such a plan.

Supt. Whittaker also has recommended the building of an industrial railroad from the wharf on the bank of Occoquan creek to the institution and thence to Lorton, a distance of three and a half miles. Such a road, he believes, would mean a tremendous saving in the time consumed in marching prisoners back and forth to their work and would be worth approximately $9,000 a year to the District.

The application of new penological principles has been one of the most interesting features connected with the development of the institution. Formerly Washington's population of workhouse prisoners was quartered in cells, securely barred. No occupation was provided, while little or nothing was done to improve the condition of the inmates. This is a condition that prevails in many municipal institutions of the kind.

Dormitories instead of cells are provided at Occoquan. The buildings, built of wood, are but one story in height. They are well lighted and heated, while proper ventilation is afforded. The bunks are built on raised platforms running the entire length of each building. The plan for frame structures of the type erected was advocated by Commissioner Judson. While there was some opposition to this plan at first, it is now generally indorsed by the members of the workhouse commission and the officials in charge of the institution. The buildings, many of which were sketched by Commissioner Judson himself, will last for many years, it is believed, and meet all anticipated needs.

* * *

Surrounding the dormitories is a stockade, the need of which is now questioned. The stockade consists of tall poles set at regular intervals and surrounded with barbed wire. Under the treatment accorded them, the prisoners have responded readily to discipline, and while guards constantly are on duty, the inmates, with few exceptions, have not attempted to escape or cause the workhouse authorities trouble.

The penological system in vogue is practical and just to the individual in so far as the laws and regulations will permit the management to go. Prison "trusties" have been permitted to take squads of laborers to remote parts of the farm. This plan almost invariably has met with success. Every effort is made to prepare the inmates for useful citizenship.

Although the system provides healthy and practical employment for the prisoners during the time they are serving sentence, the greatest benefits cannot be derived, it is believed, until provision is made for the retention of prisoners until they can be thoroughly conditioned for returning to society. For this reason, the indeterminate sentence has been recommended by Supt. Whittaker.

* * *

In his report to the Commissioners containing the recommendation the workhouse official said:

"No greater injustice can be meted out to an individual who is 'down and out' than to give him a short sentence of from fifteen to thirty days, at the end of which time he is discharged, with no money, with a suit of clothes that 50 per cent of the time is a disgrace to him and a detriment in his effort to procure a job, with no opportunity in view and with no friends to assist him. Such treatment only means for the individual another sentence on the same old charge of vagrancy.

"Until we have a law giving us time to study the crimes and causes for which prisoners are sentenced we will not be able to use the best methods to correct and return to society at least 60 per cent of those who come to us as self-supporting and law-abiding citizens. With the indeterminate sentence we will be able to steadily and persistently apply the method until we will be able to determine just when the individual is ready for parole.

* * *

"It is far better to inspire and encourage them, and, with the indefinite sentence, we will have time to give them a few months of wholesome diet, with regular habits, honest work, sanitary buildings in which to be housed and clean clothing which to wear, and many of these apparently hopeless subjects can be made into better men and women. It is possible through proper discipline and constant work to arouse in the lowest type of humanity confidence and self-respect."

In urging amendment of the penal code to provide for the indeterminate sentence, Mr. Whittaker states that before a prisoner is released on parole a position should be provided for him for at least six months, during which time he would be under the supervision of an officer of the institution to see that he honestly and faithfully performs the labor that he agreed to do at the time that he is discharged from the institution, and, also, that the employer gives the man a square deal.

Life at the workhouse is made as pleasant as possible for the inmates. Substantial food is provided, while recreation is part of the daily routine. The men are permitted to gather in a large lounging room capable of accommodating 500 prisoners, while assemblages of the women are held in the tailor shop. The hour for taps is 8 o'clock.

Although Congress has failed to provide an appropriation for the employment of a religious instructor, religious services are frequently conducted by volunteers. Singing is a feature of the services, and there has seldom been a time when either the male or female department was not provided with a quartet.

* * *

The female department was opened July 1, 1911. From twenty to thirty women are employed in the laundry, while the sewing room employs a force of similar size. Household work also is provided for the female prisoners.

During the fiscal year that closed June 30 3,641 male prisoners were received and 3,447 discharged. During the same period 977 female prisoners were received and 876 discharged. The average number of prisoners received and discharged daily was about fifteen.

The health of the institution has been remarkably good. The workhouse maintains a physician and all hospital accessories. Supplies are drawn from a general storehouse by means of requisitions. The financial administration has been placed on a sound basis and the element of waste reduced to a minimum.

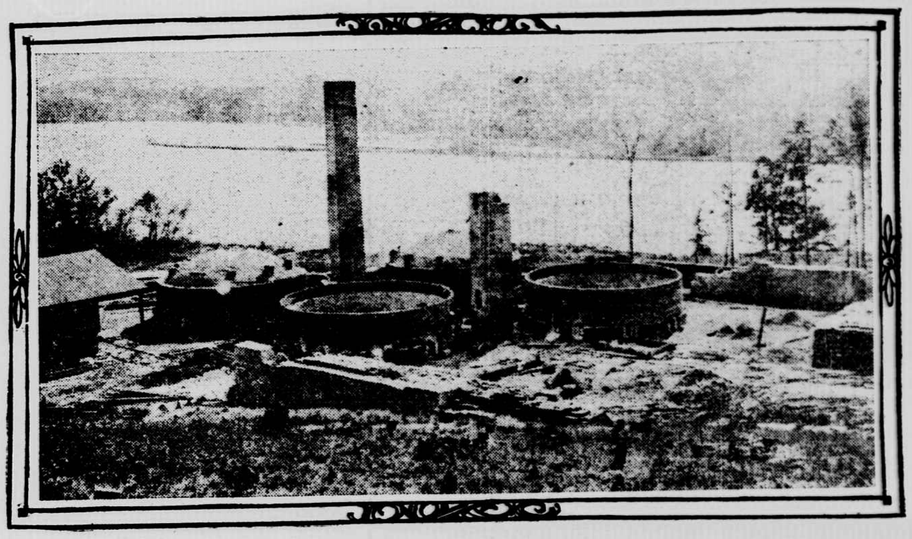
Supt. Whittaker's experience in correctional and reform work commenced when he obtained a position as a clerk in the Indiana state prison at Michigan City, Ind., in 1895. He remained with this institution six years, resigning to organize a fuel company in Indianapolis. Subsequently he was selected by Gov. Durbin to head the reformatory at Jeffersonville, Ind. There he organized a school of letters and trades. During the last year of his connection with the institution there were graduated 150 boys, 50 per cent of whom could neither read nor write at the time they were admitted.

In 1905 Mr. Whittaker was chairman of the committee on penal reform of the national conference on charities and corrections. He also has been prominently identified with other prison reform organizations and movements.

* * *

During the entire time he has been at Occoquan Mrs. Whittaker has been with him. Their first home was a one-room frame house, which, as has been mentioned, served as an administration building. At present they reside in a bungalow built near the brick kilns on Occoquan creek. A new residence is being constructed for them near Lorton.

Property values near Occoquan have advanced since the establishment of the workhouse, and residents of the neighborhood, it is stated, have no fear of the escape of prisoners, so satisfactory has been the management of the institution. Mr. Whittaker has recommended to the Commissioners that he be given authority to sell products of the institution to farmers and others living adjacent to the farm.



BRICK KILNS AT OCCOQUAN.

SUPERINTENDENT'S NEW RESIDENCE.

PRISONERS AT WORK ON A ROADBED.

THE HEAVENS IN NOVEMBER THROUGH A TELESCOPE

MANY Shooting Stars From November 14 to 16 After Midnight—Mars Enters the Morning Sky November 4—The Fluctuations of Capella.

By Prof. Eric Doolittle of the University of Pennsylvania.

IT is in this month that the most beautiful constellations of Orion and the Twins both enter our evening sky, and already the eastern part of the heavens begins to present the brilliant appearance which is characteristic of the winter stars. If the observer will face due east he will now see the wonderful Taurus, with its Hyades and Pleiades, already mounted nearly half way to the zenith; to the left of these are the two stars which mark the extreme tips of the Bull's horns, of which the pure white star, at A, figure 1, is a great double sun in almost the same condition as our two dog stars, while the second, at B, is a fainter, yellowish star whose influence in the days of astrology was for some reason believed to be particularly malign. It is at the point C, a very short distance above and to the left of this star, that there is found the singular Crab Nebula, often mistaken by amateur observers for a new comet.

* * *

To the right and above the tips of the horns we see the very brilliant Capella, while below there are the two bright Twin stars, Castor and Pollux, just emerging from the ground. But most interesting of all is the beautiful Orion, whose brightest star at H has now fairly entered our evening sky. This wonderful orange-red sun is one of the most

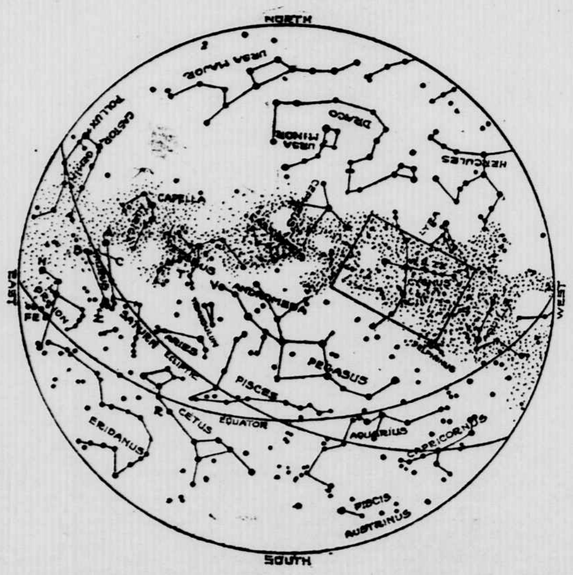


Figure 1—The constellations at 9 p.m. November 1. (If facing south hold the map upright; if facing east hold "east" below; if facing west hold "west" below; if facing north hold the map inverted.

interesting variable stars of the heavens. Seventy-six years ago Sir John Herschel discovered that its light was fluctuating; in the year 1849 another fluctuation began, its light increasing until in 1852 it was actually the brightest star in the northern heavens. A lesser brightening was witnessed in 1894. What is occurring in this great sun is wholly unknown to us, nor can we tell when a variation in its light is to be looked for.

The three nearly equidistant stars, D, E and F, which form the Belt of Orion and add so much to the beauty of this constellation, are now just arising from the ground. As might be expected, this striking line of bright stars has been noticed and named by people of all ages and in all countries. The Chinese called them a Weighing Beam; the Hindus, an Arrow; the Scandinavians, a Distaff, and the Greenlanders, three Seal Hunters who were lost at sea. To the native Australians they were young men, dancing before a group of maidens, who, represented by the Pleiades, were playing for them. The careful observer will notice that the star F is decidedly more yellow than those at D or E. The lower star is an interesting triple; the upper is not only a double star, but its brightness also varies irregularly.

* * *

It happens that one of the most remarkable and interesting variable stars of the heavens is expected to reach its greatest brightness during this month while it is in excellent position for observation in the evening sky. This star will be found at the point K in figures 1 and 2, a very little to the left of the straight line passing through the stars L, N, P and S. It can readily be identified by its position a little below and to the left of the star at N.

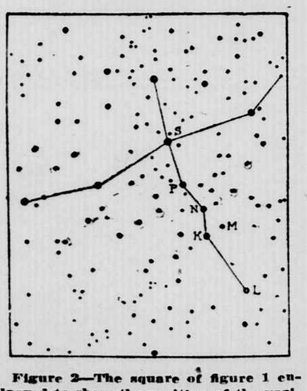


Figure 2—The square of figure 1 enlarged to show the position of the variable star at K.

This wonderful object is usually very much too faint to be seen with the naked eye, but at a somewhat irregular interval it begins to pour out more and more light until its brightness has increased many thousandfold. It usually remains thus bright for about two months and then it fades rapidly away.

It is predicted that this star will be brightest November 5. It should then be more than twice as bright as the nearby star at M, figure 2, and will probably so remain throughout the month. It will reach its greatest faintness next May, when it will shine as a star of the 13.2 magnitude, only visible in the largest telescopes. Thus the changes in this distant sun are even more remarkable than those of the celebrated Mira, at R, figure 1. We know that its wonderful blazes of light are partly caused by outpourings of luminous hydrogen, and its spectrum clearly indicates the agitation and violent motions of its heated materials at these times, but of the real cause of the periodic disturbances we are still ignorant.

Not only should the observer watch this star from time to time during the coming weeks, to observe its gradual fading away, but he may also be interested in examining the well known Mira, at R, figure 1, and the eclipsing variable at T. The former of these, which last May was nearly as bright as the North Star, is now barely visible to the eye, though it will not reach its great faintness of 9.6 magnitude until next December. The latter is the celebrated demon star, Algol, whose light is periodically cut off by the passage of its dimmer companion between itself and us. This star will reach its greatest faintness November 2, at 7 hours 22 minutes p.m.; November 20, at 0 hours 16 minutes a.m.; November 22, at 9 hours 5 minutes p.m., and November 25, at 5 hours 54 minutes p.m. The observer must not expect to see the light of the star suddenly cut off; the companion moves before the brighter star so gradually that four and one-half hours elapse between the beginning of occultation and the time of greatest faintness. By looking at the star at intervals of perhaps an hour its light changes are, however, easily observed.

* * *

From a study of the stars of this kind we cannot only ascertain the nature of these double sun systems, but we can also find approximately how dense the two bodies are. And it is found that many of them are remarkably rare and tenuous—merely nebulous masses which are still very far from having attained the compact condition of our sun. Thus the average density of all of the Algol variables is probably not far from one-third of that of our sun, while recent computations show that one of the fainter stars of this kind in the Southern Cross is actually less than one-hundredth part as dense as our air. Yet this body appears to us as a bright and non-transparent star; when passing before its companion star it hides the light of this body from us exactly as if it were opaque, for the light of the hidden star is unable to penetrate the many millions of miles of tenuous matter of which its attendant star is composed. Remarkable and surprising as such a suit is, it is to be remembered that the material of our own sun formed an equally rare cloud when this had not yet contracted far within the present orbit of the planet Venus.

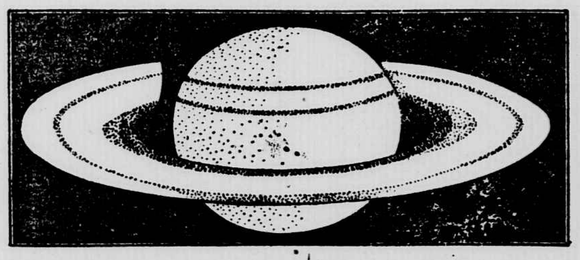


Figure 3—Appearance of Saturn and its rings. At present we see the ring even more widened than here shown, but there is little trace of the shadow of the ball on the rings because Saturn's shadow now extends almost directly away from the earth.

* * *

Mercury reaches its greatest distance east of the sun the morning of November 19. The planet is then far below the celestial equator, and so if seen at all can only be detected in the extreme southwest for a short while after sunset.

Venus is rapidly moving out from the sun's rays, passing Jupiter in its eastward motion on the evening of November 7. By the end of the month it sets two and one-half hours after sunset and may readily be detected in the southwest, low in the twilight glow.

Mars enters the morning sky November 4; Jupiter is drawing rapidly nearer the sun, though it does not pass to the east of this body and become a morning star until December 18. Both of these planets are in an unfavorable position for observation during this month.

Saturn is high in the east, nearly midway between the Hyades and the Pleiades, and presents a beautiful object for study in a telescope of moderate power. It is exactly opposite the sun (and so is due south at midnight) November 23.

The November Shooting Stars may best be seen after midnight from the 14th to the 16th of the month. They dart outward in all directions across the sky from the constellation Leo, which is then well up from the ground in the east.

A fainter shower of reddish, very slowly moving stars is to be looked for from November 17 to 23. These are the Andromids, which move outward from near the star at V, figure 1, usually leaving luminous trains behind them. And toward the end of the month, the Taurids appear near the bright star Aldebaran, at Z, figure 1. These also move but slowly over the sky, and fireballs are said to occasionally appear among them.

The Commission.

ROBERT HENRI at a Halloween supper in New York talked of his student days in Paris.

"Then there was L'Oignon, dear old L'Oignon," said Mr. Henri, smiling pensively at a decoration of pumpkin jack-o'-lanterns. L'Oignon was always in hard luck.

"One day the poor fellow was pacing up and down in front of Jouvin's restaurant, in the Boule Mich', hoping, you know, that some acquaintance would happen along and invite him in to dejeuner—of course, he hadn't a sou—when a superb limousine darted out of the Boulevard Raspail, drew up and disgorged Milliard, the famous picture dealer of the Place Vendome.

"Milliard rushed up to L'Oignon, seized him by both hands, and cried:

"'A commission for you, my dear L'Oignon! I have a commission for you. Can you attend to it at once?'

"'I can indeed, cher patron,' said L'Oignon, in a tremulous voice, and a tear of joy trickled from his eye; but he brushed it away hurriedly. "What is your commissioin, sir?'

"The picture magnate consulted his magnificent gold repeater.

"'In fifteen minutes,' he said, 'the train from Pont Aven arrives at the Gare Montparnasse. My old housekeeper—Marcelle, you know—will be on it. She's deaf and almost blind, and I want you to run up to the station, meet her and bring her home.'"

Another General Rule.

GEN. SIR JOHN FRENCH of the British army talked to a reporter about aviation.

"Its mortality is dreadful," he said. "Such sacrifices, however, attend every human advance."

With a grim smile he added:

"On an aviation field an aeroplane inventor said one day to me, complacently: "'See the aeroplanes looking down on the plodding motor cars! That is the general rule now. Aeroplanes everywhere are looking down on motor cars.'

"'Yes, and falling down on them, too,' said I."