

MEASURING THE STARS.

The Part That Photography Has Played in Astronomy.

A Million Observations With a Single Instrument—Magnitudes of Some Familiar Planets—Some Delicate Work Done by Scientists.

One of the most important and interesting departments of astronomy—as well as one of the least known popularly—is the measurement and recording of the comparative magnitude of the stars—a task which has been carried on, doubtless, since the very beginning of astronomical science. In this recording of magnitude, which is known as photometry, the measurement that is of starlight—it is interesting to note that an American astronomical establishment stands among the first, if not as the very first, in the world, photometry having been for years one of the principal subjects taken up by the Harvard Observatory, both in Cambridge and at Arequipa, Peru, and the results of the work which it has accomplished having been accepted as standard all over the world.

The first star catalogue, giving 1,080 stars, was published by Hipparchus in the year 125 B. C. It has come down to us through Ptolemy of Alexandria, who nearly 300 years later, in 149 A. D., produced his "Megale Syntaxis"—the "Almagest," of the Arabian and Moorish astronomers—which, either directly or through the corrected catalogue that was based on it by the Persian astronomer, Abd-alrahman al-Sufi, was the world's standard until Ulugh Beigh brought out a new catalogue at Samarkand about 149 A. D. The famous catalogue of Bayer—the last of the medieval, or the first of the modern, astronomers—in 1598, was the last important catalogue produced without the aid of the telescope.

Hipparchus and Ptolemy arranged the stars in six classes, the first class comprising the brightest—about 20 in all—while the sixth class contained those which could just be made out by the naked eye. After the telescope came into general use magnitudes were extended downward as fainter stars were brought into view by the increasing power of the instruments employed. For many years each astronomer used his own scale, Herschel at the Cape of Good Hope especially using very high numbers—a tendency that has been so reduced since his time that his 20th magnitude is very nearly the 14th on the scale now generally employed. This scale more closely corresponds with that of Argelande, the great German author of the "Durchmusterung," or catalogue of the stars in the Northern heavens, which enumerates over 324,000 stars; the largest number yet catalogued.

Each magnitude, of course, has its typical stars to which the others may be conveniently referred. The stars which do not exactly correspond in magnitude with a typical star are expressed in fractional terms of the nearest magnitudes, decimals being usually employed, although Ptolemy and even Argelande used thirds. Employing the decimal system, a star of 5.4 magnitude will be a shade brighter than a star of 5.5 and so on. An exception to this certain stars, such as Arcturus and Sirius, and the planet Jupiter when at his brightest, are more than a magnitude brighter than stars of the first magnitude, Aldebaran, for example, and are therefore expressed in "negative magnitudes," that is to say, they are preceded by the minus sign. Jupiter, for instance, approaches almost the second negative magnitude—minus 2—or is 15 times brighter than a star of the first magnitude.

It is significant of the great accomplishment of American astronomy that there was no universally accepted system of photometry until the publication of what is now known as the Harvard photometry—the "H. P." as it is familiarly called by astronomers. This was contained in Volume XIV of the Annals of the Harvard Observatory, under the title of "Observations with the Meridian Photometer during the Years 1878-1887"—a massive volume giving a list of 4,300 stars in the Northern sky visible to the naked eye. In the latitude of Cambridge, and intended to include all stars not fainter than the sixth magnitude south of the celestial equator. To this original list an addendum, Volume XXIV of the Annals, has since been added. Technically such a piece of work is called a Uranometria, or catalogue of "naked-eye stars."

The similar work produced by Prof. Fritchard at Oxford, for example, containing the magnitudes of 2,780 stars sky visible to the naked eye, in the latitude of Cambridge, and intended to include all stars not fainter than the sixth magnitude south of the celestial equator. To this original list an addendum, Volume XXIV of the Annals, has since been added. Technically such a piece of work is called a Uranometria, or catalogue of "naked-eye stars."

As would be supposed, it takes a trained eye to notice the finer differences in star magnitudes. On the modern scale a first magnitude star would be expressed as ranging from 0.50 to 1.50, a second magnitude star from 1.50 to 2.50, and so on. For instance, Castor which was measured as 1.56 in the "H. P." would be called of the second magnitude, while its twin star, Pollux, the brighter of the Gemini, is a first magnitude star, measured as 1.12. The Pole star itself is a star of the second magnitude, its measurement being 2.15. The six brighter stars in the Pleiades are all of the second and third magnitudes, as are those in the Dipper. The upper star of the two "Pointers" in the Dipper—that is to say, the star on the left—opposite the handle—has a measurement of 1.96 in the Harvard photometry. The pointer below has a measurement of 2.69, which would carry it into the third magnitude. The other bottom star of the Dipper has a measurement of 2.65, and the star at the junction of the handle approaches the fourth magnitude, having a measurement of only 2.41, while the star next to it draws near the first magnitude, with a measurement of 1.85. The next star in the Dipper, the second from the end, is

really a double star, but the measurement of the two together gives 2.85, while the end star of all is almost a measurement of 2.63. Of the better known stars no less than six are of the magnitude zero—Capella, with a measurement of 0.18; Rigel, 0.32; Procyon, 0.46; Arcturus, 0.93; Vega, 0.19, and Sirius, minus 1.42. Other well-known stars with their measurements are Alcol, 2.31; Aldebaran, 1.29; Betelgeuse, 0.91; Regulus, 1.12; Altair, 0.97; Deneb, 1.47; Antares, 1.05; and Spica, 1.24.

There are comparatively few stars of the first four magnitudes; only 478, according to an estimate by Prof. Simon Newcomb. It would take the light of 1,916 stars from the fifth to the sixth magnitude to equal 12.7 stars of the first magnitude. When it is remembered that the sixth magnitude star is the smallest that can be seen with the naked eye one can better appreciate the magnitude of the sun, especially when it is compared with the stars thus visible. It would take no less than 4,000,000,000 stars of the sixth magnitude to give us the equivalent of sunlight. Yet the sun itself, if seen from Alpha Centauri, probably the nearest of the fixed stars of the seventh magnitude become visible, and with a telescope with an inch aperture, stars of the ninth magnitude come into the field. With a four-inch telescope the twelfth magnitude may be noted, and with a 10-inch telescope, the fourteenth. Theoretically, it would require a telescope with an aperture of 62.10 inches to discern a star of the 15th magnitude, but on account of the increased thickness necessary in lenses of the larger telescopes they never quite equal their theoretical capacity, as compared with the smaller instruments. On the other hand stars of the 20th and even fainter magnitudes have been discerned by means of photographic telescopes, the great Bruce having enormous increased the number of stars recorded, but to faint to be made out through the telescope.

The meridian photometer with which the observations for the Harvard photometry were made is still in nightly use in Cambridge. Over 100,000 observations have been made with it up to the present time. It is composed of two telescopes so arranged that the star which it may be desired to measure and another star which is taken as a standard are thrown into the same field by a common eyepiece. By means of a mirror in front of the object glass one of the telescopes is set upon the Pole star—the Alpha Ursae Minoris or Polaris—which is used as the standard not only because it is always visible, but also because it always has nearly the same altitude, its motion being practically imperceptible. Another mirror is adjusted to bring into view the star to be observed, which may thus be easily compared with the standard. Since such comparison is made by a common eyepiece, by means of a graduated circle, and thus the method employed by Hipparchus of Ptolemy, a system of prisms is used by means of which four pencils of light, two from each star, are obtained. Two of these are then eliminated and one from each star reduced to the same size; after which, for the purpose of checking the first result, the process is reversed by using the other two pencils of light. When this point is reached the observer notices an assistant, who is able to read the result in figures by means of a graduated circle, and thus the light of the star under observation is expressed in terms of the Polaris. In all photometry the light is thus cut off to afford an equal basis of comparison. Different forms of prisms are used as the case requires; and sometimes what is called a "wedge," as by Prof. Pritchard of Oxford and by Prof. Pickering, the director of the Harvard Observatory. In the 12-inch horizontal telescope which Prof. Pickering is now using the observer sits enshrouded in a cylindrical house of felt. In the telescope is used a standard for comparison, but in order that no variations in the brightness of the light may affect the results the mirror at the aperture is from time to time set upon some star whose magnitude has already been measured so that by means of later computations it is possible to get the magnitude of the stars under observation irrespective of the condition of the artificial light since the standard stars will vary from the accepted scale in the same degree as the stars being observed, and the error which is allowed for in one case may be reckoned in another.

The amount of labor required in any extended photometric work is remarkable. At least four observations are made of each star on three nights and in many cases more. The total number of stars in the northern skies which have been measured by the 12-inch meridian photometer at Harvard is 9,223. On 140 nights Prof. Pickering personally made 73,724 observations, or "settings," of the stars in the instrument, and on 29 nights following July 27 of last year no less than 17,821 settings were obtained on 29 clear nights. Since it takes at least a minute to each set of four settings some idea of the sheer amount of time and labor thus involved may be obtained; but the mere observing, while the most important, is by no means the most laborious part of photometry. All observations must be "photographed"—that is to say, computed and finally reduced to the common scale—so that each one of these thousands of settings had required its special series of calculations.

As in so many departments of science, photography, as has been indicated, plays a part in photometry also, although the chief work is still done by the eye as in the days of the first astronomers. In photography the comparative size and clearness of the photographs of the stars on a plate furnish the means of judging the comparative magnitude. At Harvard especially such determinations are an important part of the work of the Observatory where photographing the stars, both in Cambridge and at Arequipa, has been carried to an extent previously unknown to astronomers. On account of the differences in the color of the stars, however, producing various effects on the plate, photography does not always give results directly comparable with those obtained by the eye alone. On the

other hand, astronomers are using photographs of the spectra of stars more and more in photometric work, this method having been employed, for instance, by Mrs. Fleming, of the Harvard Observatory, in her studies in Nova Persei, the new star discovered last February at Edinburgh. Here, of course, the advantage of photography in noting stars too faint to be made out visually, even with the strongest telescopes, has none of the disadvantages arising from the confusion caused by color. It seems unlikely that America, which has now gained the lead in photometry, will relinquish a position that has been so hardily won. Even more extensive work is planned for the future than has been done in the past. By the aid of a recent appropriation from the Rumford Fund of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, for example, the derelict Johnes Observatory, which has been purchased by the Yerkes, Lick, Lowell, and Harvard Observatories, Telescopes of 49, 26, 35, 15, and 12 inches aperture are being used—the most complete equipment, probably, that has ever been brought to bear on a single piece of astronomical work. The faintest stars visible have been selected and their light measured with the largest telescopes, while to the larger telescopes has been assigned the duty of selecting and measuring brighter stars with which they are to be compared. As Prof. Pickering says in his last report "the friendly spirit in which the directors of these observatories have co-operated argues well for the future of American astronomy."

WAGING WAR ON MALARIA

Known Facts About Mosquitoes as Carriers of Disease.

What the Scientists Hope to Accomplish Toward Eradicating a Great Evil—A Novel Theory Advanced Regarding Camps of Laborers.

BOSTON, Sept. 28.—A paper of much popular interest, soon to appear in the "Journal" of the Massachusetts Association of Health, upon the relation of mosquitoes to malaria, has been prepared by Dr. Theobald Smith, of Harvard University, who, under the direction of the State Board of Health, has given much of his time to the study of malaria as it has prevailed in Massachusetts during the past six years. Through the kindness of the officers of the association, it has been made possible to present in advance some of the more important passages of the paper. The author's object is to present a "brief connected survey" of recent discoveries regarding malaria and mosquitoes, it nevertheless brings out a number of points which will be entirely novel to the general reader. Coming at a time, when the mosquito's rigorous campaign against the mosquito is closing, with the advent of cooler weather, Dr. Smith's article may be taken as a resume of what has been done, and what needs to be done, in the warfare against malaria—especially that which may be accomplished by smaller communities and by individuals when mosquitoes and malaria come round again another year.

Dr. Smith, it will be remembered, was the discoverer of the parasite that is borne by the bovine and the human bacillus of tuberculosis, as has recently been pointed out in connection with Dr. Koch's address in London. In the matter of malaria, too, whatever he may say in regard to the nature and transmission of the disease has been the subject of much discussion. It is largely based upon the investigation of animal malaria which he undertook, with the assistance of F. L. Kilborne, some ten years ago, and which revealed the nature of the parasite, as well as the "intermediate host," as it is called, or general medium, as it may be less technically termed, which carried the disease to healthy cattle of the so-called Texas fever that has so often ravaged the West. The parasite, which is a minute animal, is called the malarial parasite, and the paper begins by pointing out that malaria and the part of the mosquito in spreading it have been studied by four classes of men. The first step was the study of the disease itself from the standpoint of the patient, the second, the study of the malarial parasite, to which the medical biologist and the zoologist have devoted themselves; the third, the study of the mosquito, undertaken by the zoologist and entomologist; and the fourth, the investigation of the host which the malarial parasite, which is the work of the entomologist and the sanitary engineer. The fact, which is well established, and on which the whole warfare is based, is that the malarial parasite is not transmitted from the red corpuscles of the blood, and partly in the stomach and the stomach walls of the mosquito, so that both mosquito and man are required to enable it to complete its life cycle. The malarial parasite, which is a minute animal, is called the malarial parasite, and the paper begins by pointing out that malaria and the part of the mosquito in spreading it have been studied by four classes of men. 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