SCIENCE

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CELESTIAL PHYSICS.[1]

(Continued from p. 234.)

BESIDES its more direct use in the chemical analysis of the heavenly bodies, the spectroscope has given to us a great and unexpected power of advance along the lines of the older astronomy. In the future a higher value may, indeed, be placed upon the indirect use of the spectroscope than upon its chemical relations.

By no direct astronomical methods could motions of approach or of recession of the stars be even detected, much less could they be measured. A body coming directly towards us or going directly from us appears to stand still. In the case of the stars we can receive no assistance from change of size or of brightness. The stars show no true disks in our instruments, and the nearest of them is so far off that if it were approaching us at the rate of a hundred miles in a second of time, a whole century of such rapid approach would not do more than increase its brightness by the one-fortieth part.

Still it was only too clear that so long as we were unable to ascertain directly those components of the stars' motions which lie in the line of sight, the speed and direction of the solar motion in space, and many of the great problems of the constitution of the heavens, must remain more or less imperfectly known. Now the spectroscope has placed in our hands this power, which, though so essential, appeared almost in the nature of things to lie forever beyond our grasp: it enables us to measure directly, and under favorable circumstances to within a mile per second, or even less, the speed of approach or of recession of a heavenly body. This method of observation has the great advantage for the astronomer of being independent of the distance of the moving body, and is therefore as applicable and as certain in the case of a body on the extreme confines of the visible universe, so long as it is bright enough, as in the case of a neighboring planet.

Doppler had suggested as far back as 1841 that the same principle on which he had shown that a sound should become sharper or flatter if there were an approach or a recession between the ear and the source of the sound, would apply equally to light; and he went on to say that the difference of color of some of the binary stars might be produced in this way by their motions. Doppler was right in that the principle is true in the case of light, but he was wrong in the particular conclusion which he drew from it. Even if we suppose a star to be moving with a sufficiently enormous velocity to alter sensibly its color to the eye, no such change would actually be seen, for the reason that the store of invisible light beyond both limits of the visible spectrum, the blue and the red, would be drawn upon, and light-waves invisible to us would be exalted or degraded so as to take the place of those raised or lowered in the visible region, and the color of the star would remain unchanged. About eight years later Fizeau pointed out the importance of considering the individual wave-lengths of which white light is composed. As soon, however, as we had learned to recognize the lines of known substances in the spectra of the heavenly bodies, Doppler's principle became applicable as the basis of a new and most fruitful method of investigation. The measurement of the small shift of the celestial bodies from their true positions, as shown by the same lines in the spectrum of a terrestrial substance, gives to us the means of ascertaining directly in miles per second the speed of approach or of recession of the heavenly body from which the light has come.

An account of the first application of this method of research to the stars, which was made in my observatory in 1868, was given by Sir Gabriel Stokes from this chair at the meeting at Exeter in 1869. The stellar motions determined by me were shortly after confirmed by Professor Vogel in the case of Sirius, and in the case of other stars by Mr. Christie, now astronomer-royal, at Greenwich; but, necessarily, in consequence of the inadequacy of the instruments then in use for so delicate an inquiry, the amounts of these motions were but approximate.

The method was shortly afterwards taken up systematically at Greenwich and at the Rugby Observatory. It is to be greatly regretted that, for some reasons, the results have not been sufficiently accordant and accurate for a research of such exceptional delicacy. On this account probably, as well as that the spectroscope at that early time had scarcely become a familiar instrument in the observatory, astronomers were slow in availing themselves of this new and remarkable power of investigation. That this comparative neglect of so truly wonderful a method of ascertaining what was otherwise outside our powers of observation has greatly retarded the progress of astronomy during the last fifteen years, is but too clearly shown by the brilliant results which within the last couple of years have followed fast upon the recent masterly application of this method by photography at Potsdam, and by eye with the needful accuracy at the Lick Observatory. At last this use of the spectroscope has taken its true place as one of the most potent methods of astronomical research. It gives us the motions of approach and of recession, not in angular measures, which depend for their translation into actual velocities upon separate determinations of parallactic displacements, but at once in terrestrial units of distance.

This method of work will doubtless be very prominent in the astronomy of the near future, and to it probably we shall have to look for the more important discoveries in sidereal astronomy which will be made during the coming century.

In his recent application of photography to this method of determining celestial motions, Professor Vogel, assisted by Dr. Scheiner, considering the importance of obtaining the spectrum of as many stars as possible on an extended scale without an exposure inconveniently long, wisely determined to limit the part of the spectrum on the plate to the region for which the ordinary silver-bromide gelatine plates are most sensitive,— namely, to a small distance on each side of

[1] Inaugural address at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, at Cardiff, August, 1891, by William Huggins, president of the association (Nature, Aug. 20).

G, — and to employ as the line of comparison the hydrogen line near G, and recently also certain lines of iron. The most minute and complete mechanical arrangements were provided for the purpose of securing the absolute rigidity of the comparison spectrum relatively to that of the star, and for permitting temperature adjustments and other necessary ones to be made.

The perfection of these spectra is shown by the large number of lines, no fewer than 250 in the case of Capella, within the small region of the spectrum on the plate. Already the motions of about fifty stars have been measured with an accuracy, in the case of a large number of them, of about an English mile per second.

At the Lick Observatory it has been shown that observations can be made directly by eye with an accuracy equally great. Mr. Keeler's brilliant success has followed in great measure from the use of the third and fourth spectra of a grating 14,438 lines to the inch. The marvellous accuracy attainable in his hands on a suitable star is shown by observations on three nights of the star Arcturus, the largest divergence of his measures being not greater than six-tenths of a mile per second, while the mean of the three nights' work agreed with the mean of five photographic determinations of the same star at Potsdam to within one-tenth of an English mile. These are determinations of the motions of a sun so stupendously remote that even the method of parallax practically fails to fathom the depth of intervening space, and by means of light-waves which have been, according to Elkin's nominal parallax, nearly two hundred years upon their journey.

Mr. Keeler, with his magnificent means, has accomplished a task which I attempted in vain in 1874, with the comparatively poor appliances at my disposal, of measuring the motions in the line of sight of some of the planetary nebulæ. As the stars have considerable motions in space, it was to be expected that nebulæ should possess similar motions, for the stellar motions must have belonged to the nebulæ out of which they have been evolved. My instrumental means, limiting my power of detection to motions greater than twenty-five miles per second, were insufficient. Mr. Keeler has found, in the examination of ten nebulæ, motions varying from two miles to twenty-seven miles, with one exceptional motion of nearly forty miles.

For the nebula of Orion, Mr. Keeler finds a motion of recession of about ten miles a second. Now this motion agrees closely with what it should appear to have from the drift of the solar system itself, so far as it has been possible at present to ascertain the probable velocity of the sun in space. This grand nebula, of vast extent and of extreme tenuity, is probably more nearly at rest relatively to the stars of our system than any other celestial object we know; still it would seem more likely that even here we have some motion, small though it may be, than that the motions of the matter of which it is formed were so absolutely balanced as to leave this nebula in the unique position of absolute immobility in the midst of whirling and drifting suns and systems of suns.

The spectroscopic method of determining celestial motions in the line of sight has recently become fruitful in a new but not altogether unforeseen direction, for it has, so to speak, given us a separating power far beyond that of any telescope the glass-maker and the optician could construct, and so enabled us to penetrate into mysteries hidden in stars apparently single, and altogether unsuspected of being binary systems. The spectroscope has not simply added to the list of the known binary stars, but has given to us for the first time a knowledge of a new class of stellar systems, in which the components are in some cases of nearly equal magnitude, and in close proximity, and are revolving with velocities greatly exceeding the planetary velocities of our system.

The K line in the photographs of Mizar, taken at the Harvard College Observatory, was found to be double at intervals of fifty-two days. The spectrum was therefore not due to a single source of light, but to the combined effect of two stars moving periodically in opposite directions in the line of sight. It is obvious that if two stars revolve round their common centre of gravity in a plane not perpendicular to the line of sight, all the lines in a spectrum common to the two stars will appear alternately single or double.

In the case of Mizar and the other stars to be mentioned, the spectroscopic observations are not as yet extended enough to furnish more than an approximate determination of the elements of their orbits.

Mizar especially, on account of its relatively long period, — about 105 days, — needs further observations. The two stars are moving each with a velocity of about fifty miles a second, probably in elliptical orbits, and are about a hundred and forty-three millions of miles apart. The stars, of about equal brightness, have together a mass about forty times as great as that of our sun.

A similar doubling of the lines showed itself in the Harvard photographs of β Aurigæ at the remarkably close interval of almost exactly two days, indicating a period of revolution of about four days. According to Vogel's later observations, each star has a velocity of nearly seventy miles a second, the distance between the stars being little more than seven and a half millions of miles, and the mass of the system 4.7 times that of the sun. The system is approaching us at the speed of about sixteen miles a second.

The telescope could never have revealed to us double stars of this order. In the case of β Aurigæ, combining Vogel's distance with Pritchard's recent determination of the star's parallax, the greatest angular separation of the stars as seen from the earth would be one two-hundredth part of a second of arc, and therefore very far too small for the highest powers of the largest telescopes. If we take the relation of aperture to separating power usually accepted, an object-glass of about eighty feet in diameter would be needed to resolve this binary star. The spectroscope, which takes no note of distance, magnifies, so to speak, this minute angular separation four thousand times; in other words, the doubling of the lines, which is the phenomenon that we have to observe, amounts to the easily measurable quantity of twenty seconds of arc.

There were known, indeed, variable stars of short period, which it had been suggested might be explained on the hypothesis of a dark body revolving about a bright sun in a few days, but this theory was met by the objection that no such systems of closely revolving suns were known to exist.

The Harvard photographs of which we have been speaking were taken with a slitless form of spectroscope, the prisms being placed, as originally by Fraunhofer, before the object-glass of the telescope. This method, though it possesses some advantages, has the serious drawback of not permitting a direct comparison of the star's spectrum with terrestrial spectra. It is obviously unsuited to a variable star like Algol, where one star only is bright, for in such a case there would be no doubling of the lines, but only a small shift to and fro of the lines of the bright star as it moved in its orbit alternately towards and from our system, which would need for its detection the fiducial positions of terrestrial lines compared directly with them.

For such observations the Potsdam spectrograph was well adapted. Professor Vogel found that the bright star of Algol did pulsate backwards and forwards in the visual direction in a period corresponding to the known variation of its light. The explanation which had been suggested for the star's variability, that it was partially eclipsed at regular intervals of 68.8 hours by a dark companion large enough to cut off nearly five-sixths of its light, was therefore the true one. The dark companion, no longer able to hide itself by its obscureness, was brought out into the light of direct observation by means of its gravitational effects.

Seventeen hours before minimum, Algol is receding at the rate of about 24½ miles a second, while seventeen hours after minimum it is found to be approaching with the speed of about 28½ miles. From these data, together with those of the variation of its light, Vogel found, on the assumption that both stars have the same density, that the companion, nearly as large as the sun, but with about one-fourth his mass, revolves with a velocity of about fifty-five miles a second. The bright star, of about twice the size and mass, moves about the common centre of gravity with the speed of about twenty-six miles a second. The system of the two stars, which are about three and a half millions of miles apart, considered as a whole, is approaching us with a velocity of 2.4 miles a second. The great difference in luminosity of the two stars, not less than fifty times, suggests rather that they are in different stages of condensation, and dissimilar in density.

It is obvious that if the orbit of a star with an obscure companion is inclined to the line of sight, the companion will pass above or below the bright star, and produce no variation of its light. Such systems may be numerous in the heavens. In Vogel's photographs, Spica, which is not variable, by a small shifting of its lines reveals a backward and forward periodical pulsation due to orbital motion. As the pair whirl round the common centre of gravity, the bright star is sometimes advancing, at others receding. They revolve in about four days, each star moving with a velocity of about fifty-six miles a second in an orbit probably nearly circular, and possess a combined mass of rather more than two and a half times that of the sun. Taking the most probable value for the star's parallax, the greatest angular separation of the stars would be far too small to be detected with the most powerful telescopes.

If in a close double star the fainter companion is of the white-star type, while the bright star is solar in character, the composite spectrum would be solar with the hydrogen lines unusually strong. Such a spectrum would itself afford some probability of a double origin, and suggest the existence of a companion star.

In the case of a true binary star the orbital motions of the pair would reveal themselves in a small periodical swaying of the hydrogen lines relatively to the solar ones.

Professor Pickering considers that his photographs show ten stars with composite spectra; of these, five are known to be double The others are: τ Persei, ζ Aurigæ, δ Sagittarii, 31 Ceti, and β Capricorni. Perhaps β Lyræ should be added to this list.

In his recent classical work on the rotation of the sun, Dunér has not only determined the solar rotation for the equator but for different parallels of latitude up to 75°. The close accordance of his results shows that these observations are sufficiently accurate to be discussed with the variation of the solar rotation for different latitudes which had been determined by the older astronomical methods from the observations of the solar spots.

Though I have already spoken incidentally of the invaluable aid which is furnished by photography in some of the applications of the spectroscope to the heavenly bodies, the new power which modern photography has put into the hands of the astronomer is so great, and has led already, within the last few years, to new acquisitions of knowledge of such vast importance, that it is fitting that a few sentences should be specially devoted to this subject.

Photography is no new discovery, being about half a century old: it may excite surprise, and indeed possibly suggest some apathy on the part of astronomers, that though the suggestion of the application of photography to the heavenly bodies dates from the memorable occasion when, in 1839, Arago, announcing to the Académie des Sciences the great discovery of Niepce and Daguerre, spoke of the possibility of taking pictures of the sun and moon by the new process, yet that it is only within a few years that notable advances in astronomical methods and discovery have been made by its aid.

The explanation is to be found in the comparative unsuitability of the earlier photographic methods for use in the observatory. In justice to the earlier workers in astronomical photography, among whom Bond, De la Rue, J. W. Draper, Rutherfurd, Gould, hold a foremost place, it is needful to state clearly that the recent great successes in astronomical photography are not due to greater skill, nor, to any great extent, to superior instruments, but to the very great advantages which the modern gelatine dry plate possesses for use in the observatory over the methods of Daguerre, and even over the wet collodion film on glass, which, though a great advance on the silver plate, went but a little way towards putting into the hands of the astronomer a photographic surface adapted fully to his wants.

The modern siver-bromide gelatine plate, except for its grained texture, meets the needs of the astronomer at all points. It possesses extreme sensitiveness; it is always ready for use; it can be placed in any position; it can be exposed for hours; lastly, it does not need immediate development, and for this reason can be exposed again to the same object on succeeding nights, so as to make up by several instalments, as the weather may permit, the total time of exposure which is deemed necessary.

Without the assistance of photography, however greatly the resources of genius might overcome the optical and mechanical difficulties of constructing large telescopes, the astronomer would have to depend in the last resource upon his eye. Now we cannot by the force of continued looking bring into view an object too feebly luminous to be seen at the first and keenest moment of vision. But the feeble light which falls upon the plate is not lost, but is taken in and stored up continuously. Each hour the plate gathers up 3,600 times the light-energy which it received during the first second. It is by this power of accumulation that the photographic plate may be said to increase, almost without limit, though not in separating power, the optical means at the disposal of the astronomer for the discovery of the observation of faint objects.

Two principal directions may be pointed out in which photography is of great service to the astronomer. It enables him within the comparatively short time of a single exposure to secure permanently with great exactness the relative positions of hundreds or even of thousands of stars, or the minutest features of nebulæ or other objects, or the phenomena of a passing eclipse, a task which by means of the eye and hand could only be accomplished, if done at all, after a very great expenditure of time and labor. Photography puts it in the power of the astronomer to accomplish in the short span of his own life, and so enter into their fruition, great works which otherwise must have been passed on by him as a heritage of labor to succeeding generations.

The second great service which photography renders is not simply an aid to the powers the astronomer already possesses. On the contrary, the plate, by recording light-waves which are both too small and too large to excite vision in the eye, brings him into a new region of knowledge, such as the infra-red and the ultra-violet parts of the spectrum, which must have remained forever unknown but for artificial help.

The present year will be memorable in astronomical history for the practical beginning of the photographic chart and catalogue of the heavens, which took their origin in an international conference which met in Paris in 1887, by the invitation of M. l'Amiral Mouchez, director of the Paris Observatory.

The richness in stars down to the ninth magnitude of the photographs of the comet of 1882 taken at the Cape Observatory under the superintendence of Dr. Gill, and the remarkable star charts of the Brothers Henry which followed two years later, astonished the astronomical world. The great excellence of these photographs, which was due mainly to the superiority of the gelatine plate, suggested to these astronomers a complete map of the sky, and a little later gave birth in the minds of the Paris astronomers to the grand enterprise of an international chart of the heavens. The actual beginning of the work this year is in no small degree due to the great energy and tact with which the director of the Paris Observatory has conducted the initial steps, through the many delicate and difficult questions which have unavoidably presented themselves in an undertaking which depends upon the harmonious working in common of many nationalities, and of no fewer than eighteen observatories in all parts of the world. The three years since 1887 have not been too long for the detailed organization of this work, which has called for several elaborate preliminary investigations on special points in which our knowledge was insufficient, and which have been ably carried out by Professors Vogel and Bakhuyzen, Dr. Trépied, Dr. Scheiner, Dr. Gill, the astronomer royal, and others. Time also was required for the construction of the new and special instruments.

The decisions of the conference in their final form provide for the construction of a great photographic chart of the heavens with exposures corresponding to forty minutes' exposure at Paris, which it is expected will reach down to stars of about the fourteenth magnitude. As each plate is to be limited to four square degrees, and as each star, to avoid possible errors, is to appear on two plates, over twenty-two thousand photographs will be required. For the more accurate determination of the positions of the stars, a *réseau* with lines at distances of five millimetres apart is to be previously impressed by a faint light upon the plate, so that the image of the *réseau* will appear together with the images of the stars when the plate is developed. This great work will be divided, according to their latitudes, among eighteen observatories provided with similar instruments, though not necessarily constructed by the same maker. Those in the British dominions and at Tacubaya have been constructed by Sir Howard Grubb.

Besides the plates to form the great chart, a second set of plates for a catalogue is to be taken, with a shorter exposure, which will give stars to the eleventh magnitude only. These plates, by a recent decision of the permanent committee, are to be pushed on as actively as possible, though as far as may be practicable plates for the chart are to be taken concurrently. Photographing the plates for the catalogue is but the first step in this work, and only supplies the data for the elaborate measurements which have to be made, which are, however, less laborious than would be required for a similar catalogue without the aid of photography.

Already Dr. Gill has nearly brought to conclusion, with the assistance of Professor Kapteyn, a preliminary photographic survey of the southern heavens.

With an exposure sufficiently long for the faintest stars to impress themselves upon the plate, the accumulating action still goes on for the brighter stars, producing a great enlargement of their images from optical and photographic causes. The question has occupied the attention of many astronomers, whether it is possible to find a law connecting the diameters of these more or less over-exposed images with the relative brightness of the stars themselves. The answer will come out undoubtedly in the affirmative, though at present the empirical formulæ which have been suggested for this purpose differ from each other. Captain Abney proposes to measure the total photographic action, including density as well as size, by the obstruction which the stellar image offers to light

A further question follows as to the relation which the photographic magnitudes of stars bear to those determined by eye. Visual magnitudes are the physiological expression of the eye's integration of that part of the star's light which extends from the red to the blue. Photographic magnitudes represent the plate's integration of another part of the star's light — namely, from a little below where the power of the eye leaves off in the blue to where the light is cut off by the glass, or is greatly reduced by want of proper corrections when a refracting telescope is used. It is obvious that the two records are taken by different methods in dissimilar units of different parts of the star's light. In the case of certain colored stars the photographic brightness is very different from the visual brightness; but in all stars, changes, especially of a temporary character, may occur in the photographic or the visual region, unaccompanied by a similar change in the other part of the spectrum. For these reasons it would seem desirable that the two sets of magnitudes should be tabulated independently, and be regarded as supplementary of each other.

The determination of the distances of the fixed stars from the small apparent shift of their positions when viewed from widely separated positions of the earth in its orbit is one of the most refined operations of the observatory. The great precision with which this minute angular quantity — a fraction of a second only — has to be measured, is so delicate an operation with the ordinary micrometer, though, indeed, it was with this instrument that the classical observations of Sir Robert Ball were made, that a special instrument, in which the measures were made by moving the two halves of a divided object-glass, known as a heliometer, has been pressed into this service, and quite recently, in the skilful hands of Dr. Gill and Dr. Elkin, has largely increased our knowledge in this direction.

It is obvious that photography might be here of great service, if we could rely upon measurements of photographs of the same stars taken at suitable intervals of time. Professor Pritchard, to whom is due the honor of having opened this new path, aided by his assistants, has proved by elaborate investigations that measures for parallax may be safely made upon photographic plates, with, of course, the advantages of leisure and repetition; and he has already by this method determined the parallax for twenty-one stars with an accuracy not inferior to that of values previously obtained by purely astronomical methods.

The remarkable successes of astronomical photography, which depend upon the plate's power of accumulation of a very feeble light acting continuously through an exposure of several hours, are worthy to be regarded as a new revelation. The first chapter opened when, in 1880, Dr. Henry Draper obtained a picture of the nebula of Orion; but a more important advance was made in 1883, when Dr. Common, by his photographs, brought to our knowledge details and extensions of this nebula hitherto unknown. A further disclosure took place in 1885, when the brothers Henry showed for the first time in great detail the spiral nebulosity issuing from the bright star Maia of the Pleiades, and, shortly afterwards, nebulous streams about the other stars of this group In 1886, Mr. Roberts, by means of a photograph to which three hours' exposure had been given, showed the whole background of this group to be nebulous. In the following year Mr. Roberts more than doubled for us the great extension of the nebular region which surrounds the trapezium in the constellation of Orion. By his photographs of the great nebula in Andromeda he has shown the true significance of the dark canals which had been seen by the eye. They are in reality spaces between successive rings of bright matter, which appeared nearly straight owing to the inclination in which they lie relatively to us. These bright rings surround an undefined central luminous mass. I have already spoken of this photograph.

Some recent photographs by Mr. Russell show that the great rift in the Milky Way in Argus, which to the eye is void of stars, is in reality uniformly covered with them. Also, quite recently, Mr. George Hale has photographed the prominences by means of a grating, making use of the lines H and K.

The heavens are richly but very irregularly inwrought with stars, the brighter stars cluster into well-known groups upon a background formed of an enlacement of streams and convoluted windings and intertwined spirals of fainter stars, which becomes richer and more intricate in the irregularly rifted zone of the Milky Way.

We, who form part of the emblazonry, can only see the design distorted and confused; here crowded, there scattered, at another place superposed. The groupings due to our position are mixed up with those which are real.

Can we suppose that each luminous point has no relation to the others near it than the accidental neighborship of grains of sand upon the shore, or of particles of the wind-blown dust of the desert? Surely every star, from Sirius and Vega down to each grain of the light-dust of the Milky Way, has its present place in the heavenly pattern from the slow evolving of its past. We see a system of systems, for the broad features of clusters and streams and spiral windings which mark the general design are reproduced in every part. The whole is in motion, each point shifting its position by miles every second, though from the august magnitude of their distances from us and from each other, it is only by the accumulated movements of years or of generations that some small changes of relative position reveal themselves.

The deciphering of this wonderfully intricate constitution of the heavens will be undoubtedly one of the chief astronomical works of the coming century. The primary task of the sun's motion in space, together with the motions of the brighter stars, has been already put well within our reach by the spectroscopic method of the measurement of star motions in the line of sight.

From other directions information is accumulating: from photographs of clusters and parts of the Milky Way, by Roberts in this country, Barnard at the Lick Observatory, and Russell at Sydney; from the counting of stars, and the detection of their configurations, by Holden and by Backhouse; from the mapping of the Milky Way by eye, at Parsonstown; from photographs of the spectra of stars, by Pickering at Harvard and in Peru; and from the exact portraiture of the heavens in the great international star chart which begins this year.

I have but touched some only of the problems of the newer side of astronomy. There are many others which would claim our attention if time permitted:—the researches of the Earl of Rosse on lunar radiation, and the work on the same subject and on the sun by Langley: observations of lunar heat with an instrument of his own invention by Mr. Boys; and observations of the variation of the moon's heat with its phase by Mr. Frank Very: the discovery of the ultra-violet part of the hydrogen spectrum, not in the laboratory, but from the stars: the confirmation of this spectrum by terrestrial hydrogen in part by H. W. Vogel, and in its all but complete form by Cornu, who found similar series in the ultra-violet spectra of aluminum and thallium: the discovery of a simple formula for the hydrogen series by Balmer: the important question as to the numerical spectral relationship of different substances, especially in connection with their chemical properties; and the further question as to the origin of the harmonic and other relations between the lines and the groupings of lines of spectra (on these points contributions during the past year have been made by Rudolf v. Kövesligethy, Ames, Hartley, Deslandres, Rydberg, Grünwald, Kayse and Runge, Johnstone Stoney, and others): the remarkable employment of interference phenomena by Professor Michelson for the determination of the size, and distribution of light within them, of the images of objects which when viewed in a telescope subtend an angle less than that subtended by the light-wave at a distance equal to the diameter of the objective,—a method applicable not alone to celestial objects, but also to spectral lines, and other questions of molecular physics.

Along the older lines there has not been less activity; by newer methods, by the aid of larger or more accurately constructed methods, by greater refinement of analysis, knowledge has been increased, especially in precision and minute exactness.

Astronomy, the oldest of the sciences, has more than renewed her youth. At no time in the past has she been so bright with unbounded aspirations and hopes. Never were her temples so numerous, nor the crowd of her votaries so great. The British Astronomical Association formed within the year numbers already about six hundred members. Happy is the lot of those who are still on the eastern side of life's meridian!

Already, alas! the original founders of the newer methods are falling out,—Kirchhoff, Angström, D'Arrest, Secchi, Draper, Becquerel,—but their places are more than filled:

the pace of the race is gaining, but the goal is not and never will be in sight.

Since the time of Newton our knowledge of the phenomena of nature has wonderfully increased, but man asks, perhaps more earnestly now than in his days, What is the ultimate reality behind the reality of the perceptions? Are they only the pebbles of the beach with which we have been playing? Does not the ocean of ultimate reality and truth lie beyond?

METEOROLOGICAL NOTES.

FOR many years the United States government has assiduously gathered up the meteorological conditions from many stations scattered far and wide over the surface of our great continent, and having collated the facts sent in to the central office, has deduced therefrom certain forecasts known as probabilities. These forecasts are made out twice per day, and then telegraphed broadcast over the country, to be disseminated among the people as widely as possible for the benefit of their commerce, their agriculture, their shipping, and even their lives. For many years I have been on the "volunteer" roster of the United States Weather Service, and as such have been the recipient of weather telegrams once per day. For several years I went to the trouble and expense to supply the usual flags, and faithfully made the proper display of them (at Fayette, Mo.).

In 1889 I saw in the St. Louis *Republic* a brief notice of a "whistle code" in use at Seymour, Ind., and I determined to introduce the whistle in place of the flags, and for the following considerations: (1) The flags could not be seen to any advantage beyond one mile; (2) in foggy weather or during snow-storms the flags could not be seen at all; (3) the whistle could be heard in any kind of weather and to distances reaching from six to eight miles in all directions, and by using a more powerful whistle the distance could be made greater still.

Accordingly I sent to Indiana and obtained the code in vogue there. It was a combination of short and long blasts, the "shorts" sometimes preceding and in other cases following the "longs." I concluded it would be more systematic to have the longs refer to the weather and come first, and the shorts refer to temperature and come last. The chief advantage in having shorts come last was that any one hearing a prolonged blast of the whistle might be sure that no short ones had preceded and been lost. I therefore adopted the following plan. Shorts refer to the temperature, one short meaning colder (the column in the thermometer gets shorter with cold), and two shorts meaning warmer. Longs refer to the weather, one long meaning fair (clear, or cloudy without precipitation), two longs meaning rain or snow. This much being decided upon, it is easy to blow "fair and warmer," or "snow and colder," or "fair and warmer followed by rain," — in the last the shorts come in the middle to separate the one long (fair) and the two long (rain), — or any other combination necessary. For the announcement of cold waves, three longs; and for frosts in the frosty seasons or for severe storms in summer, four longs, were used at Seymour, Ind., and the same were adopted in my code. In September, 1889, the first signal was blown, being preceded by four short blasts as a warning that the "weather" was about to be blown. From that date to this the people for miles around have been daily warned of the probabilities for the succeeding twenty-four hours, and they have shown much interest in the matter, being willing to put up at the mill, if necessary, a more powerful whistle than the one now employed.

One of our merchants had the code printed on his advertising cards, and they may be seen tacked up in stores or homes, or in the hands of citizens near and far. Many people soon commit the code to memory and have no need for the key. Persons have reported hearing the whistle at the distance of ten miles; but, as a rule, it is not regularly heard beyond five or six miles.

During the summer of 1890 I tried to get some of our railroads to adopt the code, and whistle the weather at intervals of five or six miles as the trains sped through the country. One road replied that they had too much whistling to do already, there were so many crossings along the way. But I still do not see why the weather whistle could not be used instead of the customary two longs and two shorts usually blown at crossings.

In the chief signal officer's report for 1890, p. 235, I am credited with the introduction of the whistle code now in use in many places in the State. In recent circulars sent out by Chief Harrington, I see that the code has been still further modified, the three longs being used to indicate "local rains," and three shorts meaning a "cold wave." As a cold wave comes rather under the head of temperature, it is doubtless more appropriate to include it among the shorts.

I have written thus at length about the whistle code because I think it should be widely introduced, entailing no expense for flags to be whipped out by the wind, and reaching more people than flags can. Moreover, by having the dispatch blown at the same hour every day, it becomes a time signal by which the people can set their clocks and watches. The noon hour is a good one where the morning forecasts can be delivered before twelve o'clock.

For several years, by the courtesy of the government, I was permitted to use a set of maximum and minimum thermometers. But they entailed the necessity of observation and adjustment every day, and this duty bound the observer to be at home or to intrust the instruments to other hands, or to break the continuity of his record. So last May one year ago I purchased a Draper self-recording thermometer, regulated it by comparisons with the standard instruments for several weeks, and then gave up these standard instruments.

For twelve months I replaced the charts week by week, and filed away the "red-lined" ones, with dates, etc., properly filled in the blanks therefor. On the first of July of this year (1891) I began to put those charts through again, using purple ink instead of red in the pen. Comparison of temperatures for 1890 and 1891, day by day, hour by hour, is both easy and interesting. I think I shall change the ink to green, or some other color, and use again another year. It is certainly a great comfort to wind up the clock, put in another chart, refill the pen, once per week (say Monday morning), and then go about one's business or on a journey, perhaps, and to know that there is to be no break in the record though away for days at a time. I would not like to go back to the old method again.

T. BERRY SMITH.

NOTES AND NEWS.

THE Brooklyn Institute announces a series of "Institute Extension Courses," consisting of lectures on astronomy, by Mr. Garrett P. Serviss, president of the department of astronomy. The first course will be on the solar system, embracing "The Sun, Its Distance, Size, Motions, and Gravity;" "The Sun, Its Nature