

SCIENCE

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VARIABLE STARS¹

THE speaker before such a gathering as this, in this eventful year, faces a dilemma in his choice of a subject. The topic which is foremost in all our minds is, beyond a doubt, the share which our comrades in science have had in carrying to a triumphant close the great work of the war—and an account of this would in some respects be the most suitable subject for a vice-president's address. But most of this work can not be described yet, if at all, for reasons of military secrecy; and it is still too early, in any event, to collect and correlate the records of the work of men who are still in the service, especially when almost the whole of the narrator's time has been spent in attempting, in a very humble way, to aid in the universal effort.

I have therefore chosen the opposite horn of the dilemma, and propose to speak to you to-day upon a topic of pure science—removed perhaps as far as anything could be from the theater of war, trusting to whatever intrinsic interest the subject may possess to atone for the lack of timely interest, and the defects incident to hurried preparation.

Variable Stars have been the objects of human wonder since the appearance of the Nova of Hipparchus led to the preparation of the first catalogue of the positions and magnitudes of the stars. The period of scientific observation of these changes may be dated from Tycho Brahe's observations of the Nova of 1572 and Fabritius' discovery of the periodic variation of *Mira Ceti* in 1596.

For two and a half centuries after this date the number of known variables remained so small that they could almost have been

¹ Address of the vice-president and retiring chairman of Section A—Astronomy—of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Baltimore, December 27, 1918.