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DISTANCE OF THE STARS.

How Astronomers Set About the Task of Measuring It.

With the exception of a hundred stars at most, we know nothing of the distances of the individual stars.

What is the cause of this state of things? It is owing to the fact that we have two eyes that we are enabled not only to perceive the direction in which external objects are situated, but to get an idea of their distance, to localize them in space. But this power is rather limited. For distances exceeding some hundreds of yards it utterly fails. The reason is that the distance between the eyes as compared with the distance to be evaluated becomes too small. Instruments have been devised by which the distance between the eyes is, as it were, artificially increased. With a good instrument of this sort distances of several miles may be evaluated. For still greater distances we may imagine each eye replaced by a photographic plate. Even this would be quite sufficient for one of the heavenly bodies—viz, for the moon.

At one and the same moment let a photograph of the moon and the surrounding stars be taken both at the Cape observatory and at the Royal observatory at Greenwich. Placing the two photographs side by side in the stereoscope, we shall clearly see the moon "hanging in space" and may evaluate its distance.

But for the sun and the nearest planets, our next neighbors in the universe after the moon, the difficulty recommences.

The reason is that any available distance on the earth, taken as eye distance, is rather small for the purpose. However, owing to incredible perseverance and skill of several observers and by substituting the most refined measurement for stereoscopic examination, astronomers have succeeded in overcoming the difficulty for the sun. I think we may say that at present we know its distance to within a thousandth part of its amount. Knowing the sun's distance, we get that of all the planets by a well-known relation existing between the planetary distances.

But now for the fixed stars, which must be hundreds of thousands of times farther removed than the sun. There evidently can be no question of any sufficient eye distance on our earth. Meanwhile our success with the sun has provided us with a new one distance, 24,000 times greater than any possible eye distance on the earth, for now that we know the distance at which the earth travels in its orbit around the sun we can take the diameter of its orbit as our eye distance. Photographs taken at periods six months apart will represent the stellar world as seen from points the distance between which is already best expressed in the time it would take light to traverse it. The time would be about sixteen minutes.

However, even this distance, immense as it is, is, on the whole, inadequate for obtaining a stereoscopic view of the stars. It is only in quite exceptional cases that photographs on a large scale—that is, obtained by the aid of big telescopes—show any stereoscopic effect for fixed stars. By accurate measurement of the photos we may perhaps get somewhat beyond what we can attain by simple stereoscopic inspection; but, as we said a moment ago, astronomers have not succeeded in this way in determining the distance of more than a hundred stars in all.—Scientific American.

Lazy Birds.

The "mound fowls" of Australia and New Guinea construct mounds of decayed leaves for their nests. In these the eggs are laid and covered over with the same material. The warmth engendered by the decomposition of the leaves causes the eggs to hatch, and the young in due time burrow their way out to life and the open air. These birds are regarded as the laziest of all the feathery kingdom. Next to them come the common blackbirds of America for laziness. These blackbirds never build nests of their own, but lay their eggs in the nests of other birds and leave them to be hatched by foster mothers. This is an unfortunate imposition on the smaller birds, as the blackbird's young is so large when first hatched that he soon crowds the smaller birds out of the nest and has it all to himself.

Woman's Rights.

"Madam, do you believe in woman's rights?" asked the man standing in the car.

"I do," she replied shortly. "Excuse me," he went on. "I am but an ignorant male seeking light. May I ask if you construe these rights to include the privilege of spreading your really becoming skirts over three seats?"

Thereupon she condensed herself, he took a seat, and conversation flagged.—Philadelphia Ledger.

VARIETY ON HIS TABLE.

He Had Four Kinds of Meat and Four Kinds of Bread.

Old man Wowton, the meanest citizen in all the blue grass country, drove up to the market place in Lexington, where an army of negroes stood about or lay basking in the early morning sun waiting for some man to hire them. The old man was so stingy that he usually had great difficulty in engaging negroes to do extra work on his farm. But this time he struck a bargain immediately with big Bill Saunders and the half dozen powerful but lazy blacks who follow at his heels. All the others were greatly surprised to see this gang ambling out on the big road toward Mr. Wowton's place. Next morning they were mystified to see big Bill and his cronies again in the market place.

"Whadja doin' hyuh, Bill?" asked Hannibal Harrison Tyler.

"Lookin' fo' wuk," Bill replied sadly.

"Thought you all wuz wukkin' for Mistuh Wowton?"

"Yaas, we suthin' wuz wok'in fo' Mistuh Wowton. He come to me yistiddy mawnin' an' say: 'Come on out an' make hay fo' me. I ain't ginter pay you-all enny mo' dan one dolluh a day, but I jes' tell you dis—ev'ry meal you-all sits down ter yo' ginter have fo' kin's o' meat an' fo' kin's o' bread.' So we all tuk our foot in our han' an' went out ter make his hay rap."

"Well, den' hucome you-all is come back?" Hannibal inquired.

"I gwine tell yuh," William replied, with an injured air. "Yistiddy mawnin' we all wukked in de fiel', cuttin' hay an' rakin' hay an' spreadin' hay, ontwell de dinnuh ho'n blew at 12 o'clock. Den we goes inter de kitchen, an' all we sees on de big table is a lot o' miz-z'bl' po'k an' greens an' bread. So I goes up to de big house an' ax Mistuh Wowton ter come down, please, suh, an' look at dat dinnuh. I say, 'Mistuh Wowton, whar dem fo' kin's o' meat you done promised, please, suh?'"

"Mistuh Wowton he say: 'W'y, daiah dey is—fat meat, lean meat, skin an' bone. Daiah you fo' kin's o' meat?'"

"Den I sez ter him, 'Mistuh Wowton, whar dem fo' kin's o' bread you done promised us?' En he say: 'W'y, William, daiah dey is—white bread, co'n bread, crus' an' crumb. Daiah yuh fo' kin's o' bread.' An' dat's why we all come back hyuh."—Harper's Weekly.

The Clever Weaver Bird.

An interesting bird is the "weaver." It seems to be fond of making enormous nests merely for the purpose of exercise in the art of construction. Supply these birds with strings and straw, and they will use them up rapidly, and their fabric is woven with a perfectness that is astonishing. In some countries it is the custom of the weaver birds to colonize and build one big flat topped platform, two or three yards across, which is so admirably put together as to shed the rain as well as any roof could do. Under this roof they make individual pocket shaped nests, bringing up under this unique structure a large and interesting family of little weavers. There is another bird, called the "tailor," which, instead of weaving its nest, incloses it in big leaves and stitches the latter together with plant fibers, just as one would sew a piece of cloth.

The Power of Enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm is one magnet of power. You must fire every event with it, touch thoughts and acts with it. It will transmute dross into gold, drudgery into delight. What matters if the soul which lives beside you is cold and selfish? Set him a good example! Joy is sunshine, and he will feel it. Every irksome task is a chance for power, for the qualities which they bring out are God's gifts which fit us to enjoy better things. Easy things will come if you have spent your heart's blood on gaining strength, for the very goal of power is the ease which comes from strength. We laugh at things and people who used to cow or annoy us. We do gracefully and swiftly the tasks once so hard. One by one we have unriveted our chains. We are free!—Nautilus.

Good News For the Editor.

When Kitty sings my muse takes flight. I sit entranced; I cannot write.

Such was the refrain of the budding poet's latest production, and when it reached the hands of the weary editor, who had been bombarded by bushels of unavailable outpourings from the same source, he promptly sent it back, with the following terse and businesslike indorsement:

"Glad to hear it! Keep Kitty right on the job! Any time that she strikes for higher wages let me know, and I will make up the difference myself rather than have her stop."—New York Times.

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