### GREAT SOLAR ECLIPSES.

From the Cornhill Magazine.

The first important eclipse whose records have reached us is that which occurred in the year 584 B. C. It took place, Herodotus relate, while the Medes and Lydians were engaged in battle. He thus describes the occurrence:-"The war had continued between the two nations with balanced success for five years. In the sixth year of the war another battle took place; and after both sides had fought without advantage, and when the engagement was growing warm, the day was suddenly turned into night. This had been foretold to the Ionians by Thales the Milesian, who predicted the time of the year in which it would happen. The Lydians and Medes, seeing that day had given place to night, desisted from combat, and were equally anxious to make peace." Astronomers and historians had for a long time been in doubt respecting the date of this remarkable eclipse. The astronomical difficulty of the question is connected with an interesting peculiarity of lunar motios, into which we need not now enter. Until this peculiarity had been mastered, which has only happened quite recently, Baily's supposition that the eclipse must have occurred in the year 609 B. C., was accepted as the best solution of the difficulty. But the Astronomer Royal has now proved beyond a doubt that the eclipse took place on May 28, in the year 581 B. C., the very year assigned to the event by Cicero and Pliny.

Xenophon mentions a remarkable eclipse which led to the capture of Larissa by the Per which led to the capture of Larissa by the Persians. During the retreat which was so ably conducted by Xenophon, the Greeks passed a large deserted city called Larissa, formerly inhabited by the Medes. Its walls were twenty-five feet thick and 100 feet high; its circumference two parasangs; it was built of burnt brick, on a foundation of stone twenty feet high. When the Persians tion of stone twenty feet high. When the Persians conquered the Medes, the Persian king besieged this city, but was unable to capture it till a cloud hid the sun wholly from view, when the inhabitants withdrew in great fear, and the city was captured." Xenophou mentions that the Greeks, after passing Larissa, reached another deserted city called Mespila. Layard has identified Larissa with the modern Nimroud, where there still exist the very ruins described by Xenophon; Mespila he identifies with the modern Mosul. Of course it is impossible to doubt that a total eclipse of the sun, and not the mere concealment of the sun under a cloud, was the cause of the city's capture. The Astronomer Royal has shown that this interesting event occurred on May 19, 556 B. C.

Another eclipse has been examined by the Astronomer Royal, which had given great trouble to historians. This is the eclipse which took place when Xerxes was advancing with his army from Sardis to Abydos. Herodotus relates that just as the army was setting forth the sun suddenly disappeared from its place in the heavens, though there were no clouds, and the sky was perfectly clear; "thus," says he, "the day was turned into night." Mr. Airy, however, refers this description to the total eclipse of the moon which took place on March 13, 478 B. c. No total eclipse of the sun appears to be reconcilable with the account of Herodotus, and therefore it seems reasonable to infer that there is an error of some sort in his narrative.

It is singular how often the occurrence of a total eclipse is connected with the military and naval undertakings of ancient nations. Most of our readers must remember the narrative of the total eclipse which seriously threatened the success of the expedition of the Athenians under Pericles against the Lacedemonians. 'The whole fleet was in readiness, and Pericles on board his own galley, when there happened an eclipse of the sun. The sudden darkness was looked upon as an unfavorable omen, and threw the sailors into the greatest consternation. Pericles, observing that the pilot was much astonished and perplexed, took his cloak, and having covered his eyes with it, asked him if he found anything terrible in that, or considered it as a bad presage? Upon his answering in the negative, Pericles said, 'Where is the difference, then, between this and the other, except that something bigger than my cloak causes

But, perhaps, the most interesting of all the problems with which audient eclipses have uppried our modern astronomers, is that which is connected with what is termed the eclipsejot Agathocles. After his defeat by the Carthaginians, Agathocles was besieged by them in But taking advantage of tion in the vigilance of the blockading fleet, occasioned by the approach of a fleet which had been sent for his relief, he quitted Syracuse, and passing over into Africa, waged for four years a successful war against the Carthaginian forces. It is related by Diodorus Siculus that the voyage to Africa occupied six days, and that on the second day of the journey an eclipse occurred, during which the darkness was so great that stars became visible in all directions. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the eclipse was a total one. But it has been found difficult to reconcile this account with the calculated path of the moon's shadow during the total eclipse which corresponds with the historical and chronological details of the Baily's calculation of the eclipse threw the shadow about two hundred miles from the most southerly position which can possibly have been attained by Agathoeles on the second day of his journey from Syracuse. The labors of the Astronomer Royal, founded on improved tables of the lunar motions, have been more successful; and he has shown that the northern limit of the zone of total shadow must have passed some seventy or eighty miles south of Syraguse-a distance which might readily have been traversed by Agathocies within the time

It is related by Philostratus, in his "Life of Apollonius," that a singular phenomenon preceded and announced the death of the Emperor Domitian. "A certain crown, resembling Iris, surrounded the sun's disc and hid his We cannot doubt that reference is here made to a total college of the sun, and calcula-tion shows that such an eclipse occurred in the year ninety-five of our Lord. We pass to the record of eclipses which have

occurred more recently. William of Malmesbury relates that the eclipse of August 2, 1133, presuged the death of Henry I. "The elements showed their grief," he says, "at the passing away of this great king. For on that day the sun hid his respientent face at the sixth hour, in fearful darkness, dis-turbing men's minds by his eclipse."

Seven years later another remarkable eclipse occurred, which is thus referred to by the same writer:- "In the Lent the sun and the moon darkened about noontide, when men were eating; and they lighted their candles to eat by. That was the thirteenth day before the calends of April." (The worthy chronicler might as well have adhered to the more usual method of expressing the date.) "Men were very much struck with wonder," "The darkness became so great," he says elsewhere, "that men feared the ancient chaos was about to return, and on going out, they perceived several stars around

Amongst all the eclipses hitherto mentioned there is only one, viz., the ecciose of Thales, which is comparable with that of August 17. And among more recent eclipses there is only one other approaching it in magnitude. This eclipse, which occurred on June 17, 1433, was visible in Scotland, and was long remembered in that country as "the Black Hour." It occurred at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and the records preserved respecting it relate that nothing was visible during the height of the totality. Professor Grant considers that "this last remark is a manifest exaggeration." Be this as it may, there can be no doubt that the eclipse was one of unusual extent, for the ma-thematician Maclaurin found that "at the time of its occurrence the sun was only two degrees from perigee, the moon not more than thirteen degrees from apogee." But neither in this eclipse nor in that of Thales did the totality But neither in this last so long as it will during the approaching

wards as Black Saturday. In a similar way the day of the total celipse of 1652 was pamed Mirk Monday by the people of Scottand, and although the relipse has long since been forgotten, the expression is still used in many parts of that

It is singular that none of the eclipses we have recorded had led to any observations of any value to the physical inquirer. Modern eclipses, on the contrary, derive their chief interest from observations of this sort.

In the total eclipse of 1706, which was observed at Montpellier and a variety of other places in Western and Central Europe, the stars Aldebaran and Capella, and the planets Venus, Mercury, and Saturn were visible to the naked eye. "Bats flew about as they do at dusk. Fowls and pigeons flew hastly to their Cage birds were silent, and hid their heads under their wings. Animals at labor in the fields stood still." Duillier relates that at Geneva the Council were compelled close their deliberations, as they could see neither to read nor write, "In many neither to read nor write, "In many places people fell prostrate on the ground, and prayed with earnestness, imagining that the Day of Judgment was come. From the tops of the Swiss mountains as many stars were seen as at the time of full moon. A peculiar color overspread the sky, resembling neither the darkness of night nor the mixed colors of the twillght sky. Even those who were prepared for the spectacle were appalled by the solemn gloom which fell upon the face of nature. Halley speaks in similar terms of the last total

eclipse which was visible in London. It took place in the year 1715. "I forbear," says Hal-"to mention the chill and damp attended the darkness of this eclipse, of which most spectators were sensible and equally judges. Nor shall I trouble you with the concern that appeared in all sorts of animals, birds, beasts, and fishes, upon the extinction of the sun, since ourselves could hardly behold it without some sense of horror."

The eclipse of May 2, 1733, is remarkable as being the first in which the singular appearances termed the "red prominences" were observed, Four spots of a reddish color were seen near the limb of the moon, but not in immediate contact with it." The chief interest attending the observation of total eclipses is at present centred on these mysterious protuberances. It has been shown very clearly that they belong to the sun, but what they may be, or what fremen-dous processes going on within his atmosphere they may be held to indicate, remains as yet unknown. It is hoped that the long duration the totality of the approaching eclipse, and the circumstances that it will be possible to observe the eclipse at several points along the shadow's track (which it will be remembered is upwards of 8000 miles long) will enable astronomers to gain some knowledge respecting the red promi-Yet more hopeful is the fact that now. for the first time, the subtle analytical power of the most wonderful instrument of research yet invented-the spectroscope-will be applied to examine the strange solar excrescences.

We pass over several total eclipses to the first of those which have been made the object of scientific expeditions. The eclipse of July 8, 1842, which was visible in the north of Italy, and in parts of France, Germany, and Russia, aroused an intense interest among European The leading observers of y. England, Germany, and astronomers. France, Italy, England, Germany, and Bussia repaired to various suitable stations along the track of central eclipse. M. Arago went to Perpignan, M. Valz to Marseilles, M. Petit to Montpellier; M. Carlini went to Milan; MM. Santini and Conti to Padua; the Astronomer Royal went to Superga, Baity to Pavia; M. Schumacher and Littron awaited the eclipse at Vienna; and, lastly, the Russian observers, O. Strave and Schidlowski, went to Lipesk. All these observers were fortunate in obtaining excellent views of the phenomenou. We shalf quote M. Arago's interesting description of the occurrence: "At Perpignau, persons who were seriously

unwell alone remained within doors. As soon as day began to break, the population covered the terraces and battlements of the town, as well as all the little eminences in the neighborhood, in hopes of obtaining a view of the sun as he ascended above the horizon. At the citadel we had under our eyes, besides numerous groups of citizens established on the slopes, a body of soldiers about to be reviewed. The hour of the commencement of the eclipte drewnigh. More than twenty thousand persons. with smoked glasses in their hands, were ex-amining the radiant globe projected upon an azure sky. Although armed with our powerful telescopes, we had hardly begun to discern the small notch on the western limb of the sun, when an immense exclamation, for med by the blending together of twenty thousand different voices, announced to us that we had anticipated, by only a few seconds, the observation made with the unaided eye by twenty thousand astronomers equipped for the occasion, whose first say this was. A lively currosity, a spirit of emulation, the desire of not being outdone, had the privilege of giving to the natural vision an unusual power of penetration. During the interval that clapsed between this moment and the almost total disappearance of the sun, we remarked nothing worthy of relation in the countenances of so many spectators. But when the sun, reduced to a very narrow filament, began to throw upon the horizon only a very feeble light, a sort of uneasiness seized upon all every person felt a desire to communicate his impressions to those around him. Hence arose a deep murmur, resembling that sent forth by the distant ocean after a tempest. The hum of voices increased in intensity as the solar crescent grew more slender; at length the crescent disap peared, darkness suddenly succeeded light, and an absolute silence marked this phase of the eclipse, with as great precision as die the pendulum of our astronomical clock. The phenomenon in its magnificence had triumphed over the petulauce of youth, over the levity which certain persons assume as a sign of supe riority, over the noisy indifference of which soldiers usually make profession. A profound stillness also reigned in the air; the birds had ccased to sing. After an interval of solemn expectation, which lasted about two minutes, transports of joy, shouts of enthusiastic ap-plause, saluted with the same accord, the same spontaneous feeling, the first reappearance of the rays of the sun. To a condition of melan-choly, produced by sentiments of an indemuable nature, there succeeded a lively and intelligible feeling of sacisfaction, which no one sought to escape from or moderate the impulses of; to the majority of the public the phenomenon had arrived at its term. The other phases of the eclipse had few attentive spectators, beyond the persons specially devoted to astronomical pur-

Remarkable effects were produced on birds and animals by the sudden darkness Bats and owls came out from their retreats; domestic fowl went to roost; and swallows were seized with so great a terror that in some places they were caught in the streets. A herd of cattle grazing in the fields near Montpellier "formed themselves into a circle, their heads directed outwards, as if to resist an attack. Horses and oxen employed in the fields ceased from their labors when the sun was totally eclipsed, and lay down, neither whip nor spur availing to induce them to resume their work until the sun's light returned. On the other hand, M. Arago states that "the horses employed in the diligences continued to pursue their courses without seeming to be in he elightest degree affected by the phenomenon" During this eclipse, also, it was noticed that several plants closed their leaves.

The close accordance between the calculations of mathematicians and the observed circumstances of the eclipse excited great attention, and led scientific as well as untermed men to contemplate with admiration the periection and regularity of the movements of the celestial bodies. "All the accounts respecting this eclipse," says Signor Piola, "contain reflections on the perfection of that great machine of the universe, whose movements are so regular that the astronomer is enabled, long beforehand, to predict their effects with unfailing precision; and from contemplating the machine, it was natural to ascend to the Supreme Artificer. While this dea swells in the mind there is another which at the same time shrinks into insignificancethat suggested by contemplating the position of man in the midst of creation. The magnificence of the scale upon which the phenomena of the sclipse, whether atmospheric or celestial, took In 1508 another total colipse occurred which was visible in the British Isles. The day of the college was remembered for a long time afterplace, was patent to every spectator. The ex-

nature like the funereal pall thrown over a dead body, and whose subsequent withdrawal in an instant operated like a resurrection -all this produced on the mind a mixture and indefinable impressions which it will be pleasing to hold long in remembrance."

Since the total eclipse of 1842 there have only occurred two which have attracted special notice among European astronomers. One is the eclipse of July 18, 1851, which was visible in Sweden; the other is the eclipse of July 18, 1860, which was visible in Spain, and led to the interesting "Himalaya expedition."

The totality lasted nearly twice as long in the eclipse of 1851 as in that of 1842. The Astronomer Royal, who had witnessed the earlier ecliose was one of a distinguished company which left England for Sweden to observe the eclipse of 1851. "I have no means of ascertaining," he writes, "whether the darkness really greater in the clipse of 1842. I am inclined to think that in the wonderful, and I may say appalling, obscurity, I saw the grey granite hills, within sight of Hvalas, more distinctly than the darker country surrounding the

"But whether because, in 1851, the sky was much less clouded than in 1842 (so that the transition was from a more luminous state of sky to a darkness nearly equal in both cases,) or from whatever cause, the suddenness of the darkness in 1851 appeared to be much more striking than in 1842. My friends who were on the upper rock, to which the path was very good, had great difficulty in descending. candle had been lighted in a lantern about a quarter of an hour before the totality; and M. Hasselgren was unable to read the minutes of the chronometer's face without having the lantern held close to the chronometer."

During this eclipse the red prominences were seen with remarkable distinctness. Airy at Gottenburg, Hind and Dawes at Reevelsburg, Lassell at the Trollhatten Falls, and other ob-servers took drawings of these remarkable appearances; and the agreement between the care with which these observers examined and recorded what they saw. Round one part of the black limb of the moon there was seen a serrated band of rose-pink light, in another place a pyramidal red mountain, in a third a curved streak of red light formed like a Turkish scimetar, and in a fourth a red detached cloud, which Airy and Lassell picture as nearly circular in form, while Hind and Dawes represent it as triangular. No doubt could exist that these objects belouged to the sun and not to the moon, since the moon was seen to traverse them, insomuch that on the side towards which she was moving their altitude diminished, while on the opposite side they grew larger until the appearance of the sun's disc in this neighborhood obliterated them through excess

The observers were especially struck by the perfect distinctness with which these remarkable appearances were exhibited, "I had heard them described as but faint phenomena," says Lassell. "My surprise and astonishment may therefore be well imagined when the view presented itself to my eyes which I am about to describe. In the middle of the (telescop field was the body of the moon, rendered visible enough by the light of the corona attended by the apparent projections. These prominences were of the most brilliant lake color-a splendid pink quite defined and bard. They appeared to me to be not quiescent; but the moon passing over them, and therefore exhibiting them in different phase, might convey an idea of motion. They were evidently to my senses belonging to the sun, and not at all to the moon; for e pecially on the western side of the sun, I observed that the moon passed over them, revealing successive portions of them as it advanced. formity with this observation also, I observed only the summit of one on the eastern side, though my friends, observing in adjoining rooms, had seen at least two; the time occupied in observing with the naked eye not having allowed me to repair again to the tele scope until the moon had covered one and three-fourths of the other. . . . The firs burst of light from the emergent sun was ex actly in the place of the chief western flame which it instantly extinguished."

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Fare, 10 cents between all points.

Excursion tickets, 15 cents, good to return by either to at.

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