

ASTRONOMY FOR ALL.

A Simple Method of Identifying the Stars and Constellations.

IT IS NOT SO HARD AS IT LOOKS.

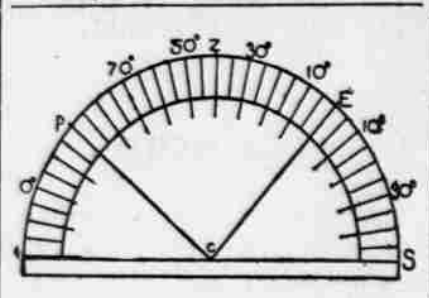
Some Plain Directions That Give the Needed Information.

A POPULAR REVIEW OF THE HEAVENS

WRITTEN FOR THE DISPATCH.

It is the purpose of this article, and of articles to follow, to systematically go over the entire starry heavens, describing in a popular way the principal objects of interest, and furnishing to the general reader a means of easily and certainly identifying the larger stars and more important constellations. The method used will be that of identifying objects on the meridian.

and annual motions of the stars, it is simply necessary for the observer to conceive all the stars set impossibly on the inside of a vast hollow sphere, and himself stationed on terra firma in the middle of this sphere. Now let him imagine an axis to the sphere, passing through his position and making, for our latitude, an angle of about 40° with the horizontal, and extending north and south.



To find this star, let the observer look directly north, and about 40° above the horizon he will see a rather bright star. It is pointed to by two stars in the bowl of the dipper.

HOW THEY MOVE. The whole explanation of the motion of the stars is, then, simply this: The entire celestial sphere revolves about an axis marked at one end by the pole star, once in 23 hours 56 minutes 4.09 seconds, or approximately in four minutes less than a day.

little watching of the motion of the stars from hour to hour on a clear night will show that they all move in concentric circles, having their centers near the pole star. Those in the star south describe but small arcs above the horizon; those rising in the east are about half way from the horizon to the zenith when due south, and those rising in the northeast pass near the zenith and set in the northwest, while some still nearer the pole never rise nor set, but simply circle around the pole in larger or smaller circles, according to their distance from it.

It is necessary for the observer to be familiar with the North Pole of the celestial sphere; he must also have firmly fixed in his mind the celestial meridian. This is a great circle passing through the north pole, the celestial pole, the zenith (point just overhead) and the south point. It corresponds to the terrestrial meridian of an observer's location, just as the celestial pole lies in the prolongation of the earth's axis.

It is convenient to have the meridian marked out, and to have some means of knowing at what part of the meridian a given object is to be seen. For this purpose the appended diagram is furnished.

It is then to be indicated as a convenient

place—a post, for example—in such a position that the line N. S. will extend in a north and south direction, and the line Z. C. will be vertical. The line C. P. will point to the pole, or approximately to the pole star, and the line C. E. to the celestial equator, or equinoctial. Astronomers reckon stars as so many degrees north or south of the equinoctial, this distance being called north or south declination. It will be advantageous to drive in a light nail at the point C. and one at every fifth or tenth degree, over which to sight a star.

The above scheme may seem a little complex, but it is really very simple, and a great help. Of course it can be done without, but it will be found very convenient. The first object to which we shall direct attention is the first magnitude star, Arcturus. The declination of this star is 20° north, and it crosses the meridian at 8:21 P. M. on June 23. As the celestial sphere completes a revolution in four minutes less than a day, on June 24, it will transit four minutes earlier, or at 8:17, and thus the time of any succeeding transit of the star may be calculated.

IF WE wish to know the altitude of any star when on the meridian, we have simply to bear in mind that the equinoctial, from which declinations are reckoned, is elevated 49° 33' above the south point, and that a north declination will place a star above it, and a south declination below it; so, we have the following rule: If the star's declination is north, add it to 49° 33', if south, subtract it from 49° 33'. The result is the elevation of the star above the southern horizon.

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stars which form the constellation known as the Northern Crown. Next let us find the constellation Libra, the Scales, one of the 12 constellations of the zodiac. It has only two stars of any size, Alpha and Beta. Alpha crosses the meridian on June 23 at 8:24, and has a declination of 15° south, corresponding to an altitude of 34°; Beta will be found about 10° northeast of Alpha. These two stars, each of about the second magnitude, are the principal stars by which Libra is identified.

AN INTERESTING POINT. The head of the Serpent may be identified by the third magnitude star Beta, which transits at 9:50 on June 23, at an altitude above the horizon of about 65°, its declination being about 16° north. Just east and north of this star will be seen four others, somewhat fainter, the five forming an irregular X, about 5° high; this is the Serpent's head.

To trace out his body we look southwest about 50°, where we see an irregular row of three stars, and still further, about 20° directly south of the star we first identified is another star; these, with a single star about 35° to the east, form the Serpent.

There is some slight sense in calling such a collection of stars by the name of serpent, a great deal more than there is in calling some star groups by the names the ancients invented for them, as we shall see later on. Our first hour with stars has had to be a brief one, but a more interesting list may be promised for next time.

BERT E. V. LUTY.

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