

R E G U L U S
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA - KINGSTON CENTRE
MARCH, 1981

OBSERVING ON FEBRUARY 26TH, 1981

Did you not do some observing on the night of Thursday, February 26th, 1981? If you did not do so, what is your reason? Surely it must be a good reason. Do you not know that it was the clear night for the month of February? Or if you missed observing, could your reason simply be that you forgot to check the skies, assuming that it would be another cloudy, rainy night?

These questions are, of course, ones that members of the local branch of our Centre may be forgiven for asking one another--not ones that you would likely hear from members of the Tucson, Swanton, or Calgary branches of our centre. Just as early January was incredible with its clear, still skies yet dreadfully biting, bitter cold, so too almost all of February was most unusual with night after night, week after week of first snow and then rain, and always, as their accompaniment, clouds and more clouds. A most depressing month it was for those who like an occasional glimpse of the celestial wonders. We could be forgiven for wondering if those clouds would ever move on.

Then came February 26th. The heavens were clear. Yes; the planets Jupiter and Saturn still swung around the sun; they were still out there in their orbits somewhere in the direction of Virgo. The Hyades were still high in the southwest in the evening and Orion in all his majesty still marched in pursuit of the Pleiades as they fled across the heavens. There were still variable stars flickering, and familiar asteroids to be found, and a bright comet moving northward.

Time must not be wasted. If one is given only a few precious hours after waiting so long, he must use them to advantage. Though it seemed that a dozen other duties were pressing on my time, shouting in the back of my mind with their shrill, clarion calls, yet I had to observe the heavens that night. It was a sheer delight to make a reacquaintance with Jupiter and its moons, Saturn and its rings, and the asteroids Ceres near its stationary point in Gemini and Vesta nearing the bright double in Leo called Algieba (which I was also able to resolve easily). To climax the observing session I was able to find Comet Panther and observe this newly-discovered (see last newsletter) object as it moved northward to skim by Polaris two weeks hence, splitting the tiny space between Polaris and the North Celestial Pole.

The beauty and clarity of the skies on February 26th seemed to give credit to my long-held theory that after a long period of cloudy weather the first clear night is not only one that seems gratifyingly pleasant with its clear skies, but actually is one which has superior "seeing" and clarity. At least, the good conditions of that evening were very much appreciated and it is only too bad that they did not continue long enough the next evening to allow us to share them with our visitors from the London Centre. However, as late winter passes into spring we can hope for more and more clear skies. Let them come as soon as possible!

ASTRONOMICAL POETRY

[Editor's Note: Your editors eyes light up whenever he receives anything to be published in the newsletter. This time I am especially happy to have received from Jeff Fret some interesting poems written on his favorite subject-Astronomy. Could the first one be about M57, or is it the Rosette?]

IN THE RING AND FEELING

Pale ships in green mists,
Star glider, nebula flyer,
Worship the dead,
Stars that died,
Wreaths that flow
Encircling.
No wind that tow-
Yellow plumes and red blooms,
Star dust
Swirls and soothes,
Rocket guest,
Space -time audience
Passing through
And by the Shrine,
White One left
To mark the time.

DISTANT GALAXY (SO CLOSE)

Tantalyzing
Distant galaxy,
Radiate
Not-quite images
Unresolved,
But far too fascinating
To pass off
As just a gravity smudge.

What nestles in your folds,
Breathes your life-givings?
Your history is all I see.
So far your message wanders;
How close you only seem to me-
On moonless fluid nights
Somehow closer
Being farther away.

JOIN THE MAIN PARADE

T Tauri,
Child Star:
Wake the fire for day.
Your day!
That I may see you
in my night.

Turn your covers
And join our day!
Blush red
From side to side
The Main Parade.
It courts your light.

.3.

THE UNIVERSE

The Universe,
Though complex,
Is simple to accept
And easy to praise.

It is a fact
Of geometry,
Of physics,
And light rays.

No glorious shrouds
Or triumphant banners
Need proclaim
Its simple being.

Its beauty
Though enigmatic
Declares itself
In pleasant seeing.

J.F.

FOR YOUR COMPENDIUM OF ESOTERIC FACTS

This month's esoteric fact concerns that very rare phenomenon known as the total penumbral lunar eclipse, the kind of lunar eclipse I observed on January 19-20th last and described in the last newsletter, the kind of eclipse in which the moon becomes totally immersed in the *earth's* penumbral cone without touching the umbra at all.

Did you know that the present century (the twentieth) has far more of these events than most centuries; in fact, it has three times as many as occur during a century that would be considered average. Indeed, there are two more of them still to occur during the present century, and so if you missed the one of two months ago you may still catch the one of 1988 or the one of 1999.

To explain in more detail, a recent study of total penumbral eclipses occurring over a period of twenty centuries has shown that in three of the centuries there were none at all and of the remainder, seven had only one or two. The average number was three per century but our present twentieth century was very noticeable on the list with a total of 9 (three times the average). Such eclipses occurred in 1900, 1901, 1908, 1926, 1944, 1963, and this year. Of the future ones, the one in 1988 will be on March 3rd and the one in 1999 will be on January 31st.

REPORTS AND OTHER ITEMS

1. It was a pleasure to have Peter Jedicke and Tom Glinos with us for our meeting on February 27th. The Kingston-London speaker exchange has been going on for several years now and once again Peter's talk and slide presentation made for

...4

an interesting meeting. Seeing slides taken in Tucson at the astronomy capital of the world was most enjoyable.

2. Observing reports, of course, are very sparse because of cloud cover during February! Remember! However, I hope you have a chance to observe some of the brighter asteroids this month and to see Comet Panther while it is near Polaris. Remember it skims by Polaris on the night of March 10-11th, and since it is at magnitude 8-9 you should be able to locate it in a small or medium-size telescope. Of course, Jupiter and Saturn must not be forgotten for they are putting on a dazzling display in the southern sky as they approach opposition late this month.

3. Plans are now well under way for our joining with the astronomical community in many parts of the continent to sponsor special activities on May 9th, which is Astronomy Day 1981. We intend to hold a mall display, and, if the weather allows, a star night for the public. It is hoped that many members of the centre will contribute to this effort. Further information will be given at future meetings.

4. Upcoming meetings are on March 13th, March 27th, April 10th, April 24th, May 8th, and May 22nd. Remember the place -- Room 222 in Ellis Hall at 8:00 p.m. Perhaps we may be able to continue to have observing sessions after the meetings and to use our centre's telescope more often.

CLEAR SKIES !

GOOD OBSERVING !

Leo Enright