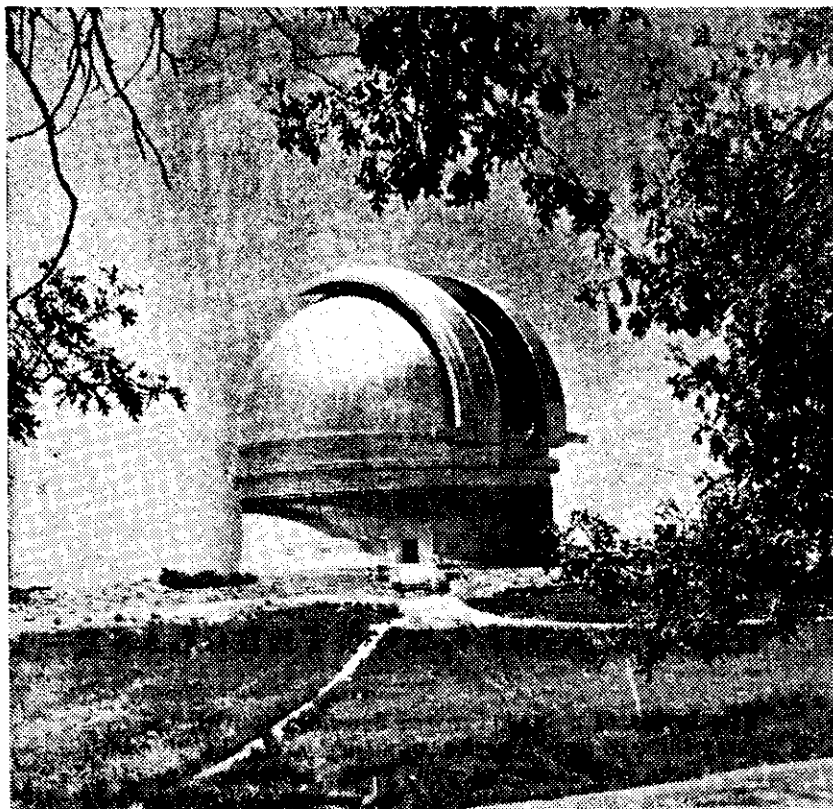




BOOKS

Exploring the Heavens

THE HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY, by Giorgio Abetti, with a foreword by the Astronomer Royal; Sidgwick and Jackson, English price 25s.

(Reviewed by I. L. Thomsen)

IN an almost artificial age of machines and crowded cities it is seldom realised how important the appearance of the heavens were to our earlier ancestors. The daily motion of the sun across the sky, the changing phases of the moon, and the wanderings of the planets among the fixed stars were matters of curious wonder; but the seemingly eternal nature of the stars has left a profound impression on the mental structure of the human race.

At a very early stage the use of the heavens as indicators for the passage of the day and night, as well as the greater cycles of the month and year, was well appreciated. From this we derive our present divisions of the day as well as the calendar. The sun, moon and stars are still our final appeal, with

all the technical refinements which can be assembled today, for telling the time. Seasonal variations with all their effects on nature were also noted to occur with the appearance of certain night constellations. To early peoples this indicated the effect of the heavens on the earth. Was it not possible that they also had strange effects on individuals, kings and empires? So was born the pursuit of astrology.

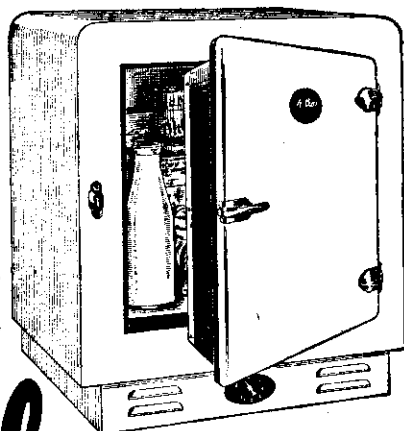
Although astrology is not recognised among the present-day sciences, it survived among learned men right up to the 17th Century. Astronomy owes a considerable amount to astrology for maintaining an interest in the heavens during periods when no observations would otherwise have been made.

Apart from these apparently practical aspects of time measurement and prognostication, astronomy has had a profound effect throughout the ages on religious and philosophic thought. For these aspects as well as the pursuit of pure physical knowledge, the subject stimulates much interest among many types of individual.

Our present knowledge of the universe has been achieved through the struggles and endeavours of many individuals. From this standpoint, astronomy has a very human story to tell, and this

★ *LEFT: The Palomar Observatory, California, which houses the world's largest telescope* ★

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