

"SEEIN' STARS"

Astronomy! Nebulae, constellations, star clusters and comets. Dry as dust subject, think you not? You've often been browsing your way through a bookshop, and accidentally found yourself staring, with mounting repugnance, at an astronomical publication which, without exercising the imagination to any great extent, positively oozes dust by the ton. But you, who gaze heavenwards on these beautiful starry nights, are mildly interested in astronomy without realising it.

Enjoying the cool night air up on the boat-deck I have overheard comments relating to a "pot," a few stars belonging to a group (or constellation) which has been known for many, many centuries (even before the birth of Christ) as Orion, the great hunter.

Now, how can a group of stars have any connection with a hunter, you may ask. Without delving too deeply it is said that shepherds and other watchers of the night, centuries ago, used to set their imaginations to work on the celestial bodies, and they ran imaginary lines from star to star to form birds, animals, men and women. Yes, they even introduced a woman's hair into the scheme of things. There would be no point in naming a few of such groups, but Orion seems the most popular, so next time you look at the "pot" try and imagine the figure of a man. The three stars forming a straight line, and which seems to be the bottom of the "pot," are actually Orion's belt. You work it out from there.

Many of you will have noticed that the Southern Cross, under which we used to ladle out lots of bluff to our girl friends, is now missing from the evening sky. The famous Cross, which never set, may now be seen about 2 a.m. low down on the southern horizon; from this latitude it does set, so it does not remain for very long above the water. At this time the constellation of the Great Bear can be seen to advantage, with Polaris, the north star, visible further north. This group is, indeed, shaped like a pot, but

is more popularly known as the Plough. These stars are never visible from N.Z.

There has been much speculation on the part of the dozens of amateur astronomers on the ship about the brilliant white object which glows so balefully in the east, just when the blackout hurtles itself upon us. This offending celestial body is Jupiter, by far the largest of all the planets in the Solar System. With relation to size, if Jupiter is represented as a cricket ball, then Earth pales into insignificance by being represented as a pill, the type the M.I.R. so maliciously and gleefully thrusts down our most unwilling throats at times. Some size, this Jupiter, don't you think?

Determined to share the spotlight with Jupiter are two more planets, but scintillating in a by far lesser degree. Nevertheless they are still objects of brilliance and well worth singling out, if you can do so. I am referring to Mars, Planet of War and Saturn the Ringed Planet, able to be observed favourably an hour or so after sundown.

Situated almost at the zenith, Mars is to be distinguished as a red spot, shining very brightly, while Saturn, though bright, fails to equal its companion. It is impossible to give directions as to their exact location, but if you look directly overhead you will observe these two planets, not so far away, forming a wide triangle with a star almost as fiery in appearance as Mars. Do not confuse Mars with Aldebaran. The latter is a pin point of red, Mars brighter and slightly larger. When you have divided these two, Saturn will be found as the third member of the triangle.

Venus, known as the morning and evening "star" (it is actually a planet) can be seen blazing with a strong intensity two hours before dawn, and is at its best then. However, it is still visible, though faintly, at 6 a.m. Venus, apart from the sun and moon, is the brightest body in the heavens, and can often be seen shining in broad daylight. The catch is—you must know where to look.

Astronomy, you see, is not the boring subject one may think it to be. A little perseverance and you may develop into another Herschel!

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