

are the meteors, commonly called "shooting stars," which appear during most of the month of August, but particularly about the night of August 11.

An average of a dozen or so meteors can be seen hourly on any dark, clear night during the latter half of the year. More are seen after midnight than before. This is because the meteors, small bits of cosmic dust, generally no larger than grains of sand, are moving through space more or less at random. After midnight we are on the advancing side of the earth, and meet those coming toward us head-on, as well as overtaking the slower moving ones. But in the evening hours, when we are on the receding side of the earth, only those moving more rapidly, and in our direction, catch up.

On the night of August 11, if one watches the northeastern sky, one or more a minute will probably be seen. And instead of flitting across the sky in all directions, these will seem to radiate from one particular place, the constellation of Perseus. The August meteors are therefore called the "Perseids." Actually this is an illusion, the same one that makes the tracks of a railroad converge in the distance, for the meteors are moving in parallel paths around the sun in a great elliptical orbit. Every August the earth crosses this orbit, and the meteors are seen in profusion. As they follow the same path as Tuttle's comet, last seen in 1862, they are believed to be the comet's debris.

In many years the moon is nearly full about August 11, and its glare hides the fainter perseids. This month on the best date it is several days before the first quarter, so it sets before midnight, and the early morning sky is quite dark.

For meteor photography a fast lens is essential. It should be of F. 6.3 or better, and fast films should also be used. Low in the northeast, soon after midnight, the brilliant star Capella will appear, and Perseus is the constellation just above and to the right. Place the camera on a tripod, or some film support, and point it to this region. Then open the shutter, and give a long exposure of 15 minutes, or even longer. During this time the turning of the earth makes the stars move, so they will photograph as parallel streaks, but the meteors will be moving in other directions, and they can easily be distinguished. When other exposures are given the camera's position can be changed, so as to keep it pointed to the same region of the sky. If one has another fast camera, it might also be used, pointing it to

the part of the sky above, or to the side, of that included in the first.

Such photographs may have some value to astronomers. The time of each exposure should be noted, and this information, together with the original films, which are better for the purpose than prints, sent to Dr. Charles P.

Olivier, of the University of Pennsylvania, at the Flower Observatory, Upper Darby, Pa. In Canada they may be sent to Dr. Peter M. Millman, Dunlap Observatory, Richmond Hill, Ontario. They will also be glad to know the number of meteors seen during half hourly periods.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Head of Public Health Service Urges War Against Syphilis

IN a fighting declaration of renewed warfare against the great but preventable plague of syphilis, Surgeon General Thomas H. Parran of the U. S. Public Health Service, in a new book, "Shadow on the Land" (Reynal and Hitchcock), calls upon physicians and laymen alike to insist upon putting into effect a platform of action:

1. Locate syphilis.
2. Obtain public funds which assure adequate treatment of all infected persons.
3. Educate the private physician and the general public.

This disease affects one out of every ten adults of the nation. It is a hundred times more prevalent than infantile paralysis and twice as common as tuberculosis. Dr. Parran calls it the greatest public health problem.

Giving figures and naming cities and persons, Dr. Parran discusses official action being taken to combat syphilis.

Chicago and St. Louis are not rated highly in their handling of clinics, although Dr. Parran praises the control program of Chicago now getting under way. In Houston, Dr. Parran quotes a local opinion that dairy cattle are given better care than syphilis patients. But Dallas, with newspapers leading, has developed an excellent clinic and control program. New York has done more than any other city in the past two years. Washington, D. C. has a "distressing" record in health protection and Dr. Parran lays the blame largely on lack of financial support from Congress.

Wiping out congenital syphilis is the first thing to do completely, Dr. Parran writes. This is a job that will not require a generation. With good treatment begun before the fifth month of pregnancy there is only one chance in eleven that the syphilitic mother will not bear a healthy child.

Prostitution is condemned by Dr. Parran as one of the major methods of spreading syphilis and he calls it "the single greatest social handicap to complete eradication of America's No. 1 killer." Fear of disease alone will not control syphilis, he observes, and ideally, we should teach our boys and girls to prefer sex morality.

Praises Newspapers

Dr. Parran acknowledges the cooperation of the press in bringing the syphilis problem to the attention of the American people. He also urged further reporting of the conditions in particular cities.

"During the past year a great number of American newspapers and magazines honestly have tried to be helpful in the program to educate people about the facts of syphilis control," Dr. Parran writes. "Some of the best feature writers in the country have been doing articles for their papers about how Columbus brought syphilis to Europe in 1493 and Wassermann devised a blood test to find it in 1907. They give a few national figures on prevalence and sometimes they review what Scandinavia and Great Britain have done. That's all.

"And that's fine! Everybody needs to know a little about the background of this problem. I've tried to sketch a few of those essential facts in preceding chapters. But we need spotlights as well as background for the great contemporary tragedy. The news story begins where these stories stop. I should like to see some of the crack reporters get down to brass tacks regarding how much syphilis we actually have, month by month and year by year in these states and cities. Where does it come from? How much of it is stopped at the source? Are all cases treated? Is treatment good? Is it considerate? If not, who's responsible?"

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