

Washington's Birthday Comet

Astronomy

Washington's birthday was celebrated in Germany by the discovery of a new comet—the first of 1928—announced Dr. Harlow Shapley, director of the Harvard College Observatory. The discovery was made by Dr. K. Reinmuth, of the observatory at Heidelberg University, where numerous discoveries of comets and other astronomical bodies have been made in recent years.

When first observed, the comet was in the constellation of Cancer, the crab, and was slowly moving towards the west. Cancer is in the south in late February and early March evenings about 11:00 o'clock, and is just to the right of the familiar "Sickle" in Leo, the lion. However, the comet was of the twelfth magnitude, much too faint to be seen with the naked eye. Astronomers cannot tell whether or not it is likely to become visible to

the unaided eye until its orbit has been calculated.

The comet will be known after the name of its discoverer as Reinmuth's comet. It will also be recorded in astronomical annals as 1928a, indicating that it is the first to be discovered this year. At the end of January the discovery of a new comet was reported from an observatory in Algeria, which, it was then thought, would bear this designation. It later proved that the supposed comet was really a defect on a photographic plate. As the Heidelberg Observatory specializes in photography of comets and similar objects, and is generally recognized by astronomers as one of the chief centers of this phase of astronomical science, it is supposed that this new discovery is entirely authentic.

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Snow and Steam From Volcano

Volcanology

Mt. Lassen, America's principal active volcano, is still asleep, but the spectacular effect produced by blowing clouds of snow, mixing with the steam that the crater is continually emitting, may give the illusion of a return to activity. The effect is especially striking when it occurs near sunrise or sunset, reports R. H. Finch, associate volcanologist of the U. S. Geological Survey, whose job it is to keep his finger on the pulse of the slumbering volcano. That it is merely slumbering, and not dead, is indicated not only by the steam, but by frequent earthquakes. Sometimes several shocks occur on the same day.

Evidence of subterranean activity also comes from Glass Mountain, about 75 miles north of Lassen Peak, and in the Modoc lava beds. Fairly recent lava flows are to be found nearly all the way between Glass Mountain and Lassen Peak, and For-

est Service officials in the vicinity report about half an acre of land covered with pumice which is very hot. By digging but a little way into the pumice much higher temperatures are reached, and near the pumice bed is a deep fissure emitting steam.

With George L. Collins, of the National Park Service, Mr. Finch attempted to make temperature measurements and to take photographs on the mountain, about 7,850 feet high, during January, but were driven back by a heavy snow storm. They are now planning to conduct further explorations in the spring.

According to the Indians the heat of Glass Mountain has been known for many years, and earthquakes originating in the mountain and accompanied by rattling noises have been noted by Forest Service Officials for at least 15 years.

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Good Crows

Ornithology

Even the despised crow has its defenders in Germany. A large number of the black marauders have been killed lately by means of poisoned eggs. Friends of the crow decry this practice, claiming that in spite of its undoubted mischievous and thievish habits, it still has its counterbalancing usefulness as a destroyer of field mice and similar vermin.

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Two Million Colors

Physics

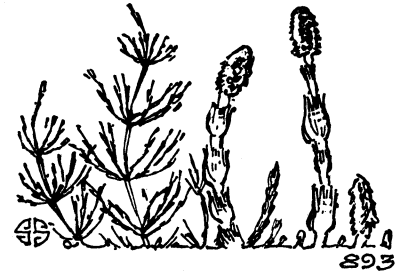
Necktie and clothing manufacturers probably still have plenty of colors left with which to add to the brilliance of life. Altogether there are slightly over two million separately distinguishable colors possible. This is the conclusion reached by George B. Welch, of Cornell University.

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NATURE RAMBLINGS

BY FRANK THONE

Natural History



Horsetails

One of the most interesting of outdoor sights, when late winter is hesitating on the verge of the first frosty week of spring, is a bed of the spore-bearing shoots of the horsetail or scouring rush, pushing its way up into the chill air in a wayside ditch. There is something eldritch, gnomelike, about these stiff, leafless, jointed stems, each bearing at its summit a symmetrical little cone marked off with what look like even, six-sided scales.

As a matter of fact, the other-earthly appearance of the horsetail is not inappropriate, for the horsetails we see are the relics of an earlier earth. They are the last roses of a very long geological summer. They are among the oldest of all the plants, and in the heyday of their tribe, during the Coal Age, they were giants with trunks a foot in diameter and fifty feet or so in height. As has often happened in the course of geological history, the big members of the tribe fell first in the face of changing climatic conditions and the competition of newer species of plants, leaving the meekest of their kind to inherit the earth, or at least so much of it as the newer vegetation would spare them.

The plants get their name, horsetails, from the bristly, much-branched non-fruiting stalks of some of the species, which do have a more or less superficial resemblance to the jointed tail of an animal. Their other name, scouring-rushes, comes from their usefulness as pot-cleaners in old-time kitchens. Long before the modern much-advertised scouring bricks and powders ever reached the market, the stems of these humble vegetables made copper and tinware bright. The interesting thing about it is that the harsh stiffening of the scouring-rush's stem and the effective scraping flakes of the scouring powder are both made of the same chemical substance—silica.

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