



is so bright that the additional brilliance of the star makes no appreciable difference.

It would still be conceivable that, with the eyes shielded from the glare of surrounding light, they might become more sensitive to contrasts in brightness, and that this might help.

However, numerous experiments by psychologists have shown that the eyes are actually less sensitive to such contrasts, when viewing a small luminous area surrounded by darkness. They are most sensitive when the surroundings are as bright as the area of the test.

Dr. Smith, in fact, found that, when the star Pollux was visible overhead at twilight, it was harder to see when he observed it from the bottom of the chimney than when he was outside!

Thus, he concludes in a report of his work published in the *Journal of the Optical Society of America* (June, 1955), "the common belief in the daylight visibility of stars through such a shaft is without real foundation." (See SNL, July 9, 1955, p. 24.)

Celestial Time Table for May

May	EST	
2	5:00 p.m.	Mercury farthest east of sun—visible around this date low in west just after sunset.
	9:55 p.m.	Moon in last quarter.
11	1:19 p.m.	Moon passes Mars.
10	8:04 a.m.	New moon.
12	8:00 p.m.	Moon nearest, distance 226,300 miles.
13	8:11 a.m.	Moon passes Venus.
15	9:00 p.m.	Venus at greatest brilliance—magnitude minus 4.2.
16	9:59 p.m.	Moon passes Jupiter.
17	12:15 a.m.	Moon at first quarter.
20	9:00 a.m.	Saturn at closest for year, distance 832,300,000 miles.
24	3:34 a.m.	Moon passes Saturn.
	10:26 a.m.	Full moon; partial eclipse of moon as it enters partly into earth's shadow, visible in Asia, Australia and Antarctica.
25	7:00 p.m.	Mercury between earth and sun.
28	4:00 p.m.	Moon farthest, distance 251,900 miles.

Subtract one hour for CST, two hours for MST, and three for PST.

Science News Letter, April 21, 1956

CHEMISTRY

Fats Not Used for Soap Are Source of Chemicals

➤ FATS, which become too plentiful as detergents displaced soap on the market, are now in increasing demand as chemical sources in manufacture of surface coatings, plastics, lubricants, cutting oils and even detergents themselves.

Treatment with nitric acid changes fats to materials taking an active part in a wide variety of chemical processes, making such products a "master key to the great variety of their industrial outlets."

Such applications were explained to members of the American Chemical Society meeting in Dallas, Tex., by Dr. Miles R. McCorkle of Armour and Co., Chicago. Dr. McCorkle spoke at a symposium on industrial applications of fatty acids.

At the same meeting, Dr. Waldo C. Ault, Eastern Regional Research Laboratory, Philadelphia, told of the availability, cost and composition of animal and vegetable fats and tallow oil as chemical raw materials.

Dr. Ralph H. Potts, Armour Chemical Division, McCook, Ill., described continuous processes, automatically controlled, for converting fats from such sources into a variety of chemical products. He stressed the proper materials to be used in these automatic plants to avoid corrosion by the fatty acids formed.

Science News Letter, April 21, 1956



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