

## CELESTIAL OBJECT MAY BE A COMET

What may be the Tempel-Swift comet has been sighted by M. Delporte, a European astronomer, according to a dispatch received from Copenhagen, it was announced by Dr. Harlow Shapley, director of the Harvard College Observatory.

The new visitor is described as an object of the tenth magnitude, so that it is too faint to be seen without the aid of a telescope, and is located in the constellation of Pisces, the Fishes. It will be necessary to arise early to see it, however, as this constellation does not rise above the eastern horizon until about 3.00 A.M.

The Tempel-Swift comet has a period of about five and one half years. As it was expected back this year, and, according to the calculations of its orbit, should be in approximately the position of the new object, Dr. Shapley thinks it possible that it is the comet.

-----  
MELONS FEWER; PRICES HIGHER

Only five watermelons will grow this year where six grew before, according to the estimates of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The market will not be glutted as it was last year, and all melons will taste better because they will cost more. Preliminary estimates show that 125,660 acres of land will be planted in watermelon by the time the season is over. Although this is the smallest acreage in many years no real shortage is expected.

-----  
FISH POISONING PLANTS PROVE DEADLY TO INSECTS

That the age old custom of intoxicating or poisoning fish so that they may be easily caught, as practiced in Madagascar, India, Ceylon, the Ivory Coast, Central and South America, and other tropical parts of the world, may be the forerunner of a very beneficial discovery for the same peoples, is the prediction of Monsieur Auguste Chevallier, in presenting his recent findings on the subject to the Academy of Sciences in Paris.

For many centuries the natives of these lands have been in the habit of using certain plants for capturing fish. The method of using these narcotic growths to catch fish is by taking the leaves and bruising them in a mortar. Thus crushed, they are put in sacks, which are thrown in the ponds where fish are known to exist. Several natives go out and stir up the water around this "belt" of narcotic material, while the others chase the fish toward the poisoned area.

As the fish pass through the poisoned zone, they become intoxicated or are killed, and float to the surface, where it becomes only necessary to gather them in. So far as has been discovered, this poisoning does not make the fish harmful in any manner to the natives.

As these plants drop out of use one way, they seem to be turning toward another and even more beneficial service to mankind. A chemical called "tephrosine" has been isolated from the tephrose group of plants by M. Hanriot

a chemist. A small dose of this compound kills instantly the fish that come in contact with it. Lately three English investigators, Tattersfield, Gunningham, and Morris, have showed that this drug can also be used to kill harmful insects. And here the plants of this group, which are still under cultivation, may play an important part in the warfare of man against insect.

---

#### PROMISES UPSET IN HEREDITY THEORY

Modern theories of heredity may be refuted by experiments now being made at Stanford University by Professor L.L. Burlingame of the Department of Biology on a plant known as the Clarkia. On first investigation this plant appeared to be contrary to the accepted laws of heredity; however, experiments are being continued to prove that that is merely an explainable deviation.

The present theory is that in every plant or animal there is a definite number of units, known as chromosomes. These units work in pairs. Man has 48 of these pairs. These chromosomes furnish the means for transmission of hereditary characteristics.

The Clarkia appears to have a varying number of pairs. The correct number seems to be four, but there have been counted from five to eight pairs in the sex cells and from two to seven in the body cells. This is in defiance of all knowledge of heredity.

Professor Burlingame discovered this wide variation while experimenting in hybridization of this plant in the garden. Upon noticing the inconsistency of the plant, he began a thorough study of its properties. He is attempting to prove that it may be explained by the chromosomes having broken up into smaller particles, but still remaining unchanged in their original quantity. If this were true, the smaller parts would be the same size as the sum of the proper number of full sized chromosomes. Owing to the irregularities in their shapes, however, great difficulty is being found in measuring them.

This is the only known case in which the number of chromosomes varies though there may be others yet undiscovered. Professor Burlingame believes that the explanation will be in accordance with the laws as they are now understood, and is attempting by experiment to confirm his theory.

---

#### DON'T DRINK METHANOL! ITS POISONOUS

Methanol, the synthetic alcohol which is now being made cheaply in Germany, is just as poisonous as the similar wood or methyl alcohol, despite claims that the foreign product, because of its high purity, is harmless. This statement is made by Dr. Reid Hunt, of the Harvard Medical School, in "Industrial and Engineering Chemistry", following a series of experiments.

"The results with the German (synthetic) methanol were the same as those obtained with pure methyl alcohol obtained from wood distillates," says Dr. Hunt. "It can confidently be predicted that the use of the synthetic methanol as a beverage or as an adulterant will be followed by the same disastrous effects to life and vision as have characterized such uses of wood alcohol. Those who are circulating the report that the synthetic methanol is not poisonous are not only stating an untruth but are assuming a grave responsibility, for death or blindness