

BOOK REVIEW

A RANDOM WALK IN SCIENCE

R. L. Weber, compiler, Crane, Russak, New York, 1973. 206 pp. \$12.50.

I would estimate that most of this book is amusing to hilarious, but it is sprinkled throughout with thoughtful portions, such as the sobering "Trial of Galileo," by F. Sherwood Taylor, and the eloquent writing of Jeremiah Horrox, in his "Transit of Venus." And there is an advertisement for a new university in Toulouse stating that among its courses is one on Aristotle's Physics, forbidden in Paris. The advertisement concludes with the following -- in Latin, of course: "So if you wish to marvel at more good things than we have mentioned, leave home behind, strap your knapsack on your back..."

William Cooper's forward to this book, plus the author's introduction, make worthy reading, and I suggest that both be read with care. Cooper suggests that his sub-title for this book would be Physicists at Play, and this reviewer would agree. Certainly, the book presents the very humorous side of the scientist, and not only today's, but also those of yesteryear, such as Newton, Rutherford, Bunsen, and many, many others.

On page 191, we find "Pulsars in Poetry," by Jay M. Pasachoff, first published in 1969:

Twinkle, twinkle Pulsing Star
Newest puzzle from afar.
Beeping on and on you sing --
Are you saying anything?
Twinkle, Twinkle more Pulsar,
How I wonder what you are.

Right below this bit of poetry, we find "Clouds, 1900" written by Lord Kelvin. You'll have to read it to find out what clouds he is referring to.

Moving back to page 120, we find a "Glossary for Research Reports," by C. D. Graham. It includes the following:

IT HAS LONG BEEN KNOWN THAT.....I haven't bothered to look up
the original reference.

THREE OF THE SAMPLES WERE
CHOSEN FOR DETAILED STUDY.....The results on all the others
didn't make sense and were
ignored.

THESE RESULTS WILL BE REPORTED
AT A LATER TIME.....I might possibly get around
to this sometime.

IT IS CLEAR THAT MUCH ADDITIONAL
WORK WILL BE REQUIRED BEFORE A
COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING.....I don't understand it.

THANKS ARE DUE TO JOE GLOTZ FOR
ASSISTANCE WITH THE EXPERIMENTS
AND TO JOHN DOE FOR VALUABLE
DISCUSSIONS.....Glutz did the work and Doe
explained what it meant.

On page 100 we find a spoof of Professor S. Chandrasekhar written by Professor J. Sykes. As the "victim", Chandrasekhar was so delighted he arranged to have it printed in the format of the Astrophysical Journal. Some librarians bound it in series and never even noticed. It is titled, "On the Imperturbability of Elevator Operators, LVII, by S. Candlestickmaker, Institute for Studied Advances, Old Cardigan, Wales." The abstract states:

In this paper the theory of elevator operators is completed to the extent that it is needed in the elementary theory of Field's. It is shown that the matrix of an elevator operator cannot be inverted, no matter how fast the elevation. An explicit solution is obtained for the case when the occupation number is zero.

There is something for everyone in this book: "The Art of Finding the Right Graph," "Inertia of a Broomstick," "N Rays," "Slidesmanship," "Gulliver's Computer," even physics terms made easy:

CALCULUS OF RESIDUES.....How to clean a bathtub.
 COMA.....Italian for "Multi-toothed device for arranging one's hair."
 FLUX.....Past participle of the verb to flex.
 HARMONIC FUNCTION.....A concert.
 MARGINAL RAY.....A ray of doubtful origin.
 HUMBUG.....Noisy wiretap.
 PARADOX.....Two Ph. D.'s.
 STATISTICAL CORRELATION.....36-22-35.

All in all, A Random Walk in Science is a veritable smorgasbord of intellectual lightheartedness. Weber's time and effort to collect such an anthology is to be applauded. When the next one is published around 2076, say, I will eagerly read it to see if the wit of the next 100 years will differ much from the past.

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BOOK REVIEW

THE STARS BELONG TO EVERYONE

Helen Sawyer Hogg, Doubleday & Co. New York 274pp, Ill. \$12.50.

The author is one of Canada's most famous astronomers and a former president of the AAVSO. She has written over a hundred scientific papers, but this is her first book. It is the result of 30 years of lecturing and 25 years of writing a weekly column for a major newspaper in Canada. Although not intended as a textbook on astronomy, it does answer many questions that people ask about what is in the heavens. It is more a book to explain celestial happenings, and covers a wide range of astronomical knowledge.

One of its most delightful attributes is the weaving of events and historical material among scientific facts, such as the gigantic volcanic explosion of Krakatoa in 1883, and its effect on our atmosphere; the disappearing moon as noted by Hevelius during the eclipse of 25 April 1642, the year after the eruption of Vesuvius; and the dramatic and frustrating adventures of Abbé Le Gentil during his 11-year voyage to the Indian Ocean to observe both transits of Venus in 1761 and 1769.

The book is written in a pleasant manner, and is easy reading. I can heartily recommend it to anyone.

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