

our solar system is only a speck of star dust, a speck which a traveler through the wilds of space might pass a hundred times without notice? We have learned much about this universe, though our knowledge of it is still dim. We see it as a traveler on a mountain top sees a distant city in a cloud of mist, by a few specks of glimmering light from steeples or roofs. We want to know more about it, its origin and its destiny; its limits in time and space, if it has any; what function it serves in the universal economy. The journey is long, yet we want, in knowledge at least, to reach the stars. Hence we build observatories and train observers and investigators. Slow indeed is progress in the solution of the greatest of problems, when measured by what we want to know. Some questions may require centuries, others thousands of years for their answer. And yet never was progress more rapid than during our time. In some directions our astronomers of today are out of sight of those of fifty years ago; we are even gaining heights which, twenty years ago, looked hopeless. Never before had the astronomer so much work, good, hard, yet hopeful work before him as today. He who is leaving the stage feels that he has only begun, and must leave his successors with more to do than his predecessors left him.

To us an interesting feature of this progress is the part taken in it by our own country. The science of our day, it is true, is of no country. Yet we very appropriately speak of American science from the fact that our traditional reputation has not been that of a people deeply interested in the higher branches of intellectual work. Men yet living can remember when in the eyes of the universal church of learning all cisatlantic countries, our own included, were *partes infidelium*.

Yet American astronomy is not entirely of our generation. In the middle of the last century Professor Winthrop, of Harvard, was an industrious observer of eclipses and kindred phenomena, whose work was recorded in the transactions of learned societies. But the greatest astronomical activity during our colonial period was that called out by the transit of Venus in 1769, which was visible in this country. A committee of the