

OUR AUTUMN NIGHT SKIES

By Elsie A. Dent

Mother of balms and soothing manifold,
Quiet-breathed Night whose brooding
hours are seven,
To whom the voices of all rest are given,
And those few stars whose scattered names
are told,
Far off beyond the westward hills outrolled,
Darker than thou, more still, more dreamy
even,
The golden moon leans in the dusky
heaven,
And under her one star—a point of gold :
And all go slowly lingering toward the west,
As we go down forgetfully to our rest,
Weary of daytime, tired of noise and light :
Ah, it was time that thou should'st come :
for we
Were sore athirst, and had great need of thee,
Thou sweet physician, balmy-bosomed
Night.

LAMPMAN'S poetic apostrophe to a balmy, restful night, following upon the heats and worries of the day, may be paraphrased in the prose of the silver-tongued Flammarion, who says that the profound silence of a starry night presents an appropriate scene to our contemplative faculties, and that no other time is more propitious to the elevation of the mind towards the beauties of the heavens, for night is, in truth, "the hour of solitude in which the soul is regenerated in the universal peace."

Now, as the glowing month of September is one of the most suitable months for a contemplation of the splendours of the night sky, and as many of our readers are under country skies where these splendours may be best observed, it may be opportune to invite their attention especially, and that of others generally, to some of the advantages presented by this season of the year for learning something useful and pleasurable of the stars.

Carlyle in his old age grumbled because "somebody" had not taught him the constellations and made him at home in the starry heavens, "which," he exclaimed, "are always overhead, and which I do not half know to this day." The Sage of Chelsea spoke—nay, still speaks—for

thousands. Who is there who loves Nature and yet loves not the stars, possibly the most splendid exemplification of the works of Nature? Who does not on a brilliant starlight night almost involuntarily turn to look for familiar stars and conspicuous star groups, which as one's knowledge increases become more and more like old friends, and therefore, as they reappear from season to season, more and more welcome? Many a vigil has been less lonely, many a long ride or drive less irksome, and many a trackless voyage less dreary because the watcher or the traveller was able to commune, as it were, with well-known constellations or objects about which group mythological lore and legend, or which call to mind famous observers or discoveries in the work of research, or suggest passages in the poets, who have all loved the stars. One finds also that in coming to know the stars, he has greatly improved his ability to appreciate some of the finest passages and most beautiful illustrations to be found in the verse of our best writers. Milton and Tennyson, for example, have almost countless astronomical allusions, the true beauty of which is perceptible only to one who has some knowledge of astronomy. The significance of even so simple a reference as that by Tennyson to the Charioteer and starry Gemini when they "hung like glorious crowns o'er Orion's grave low in the west," is unfortunately lost on many readers. To one who knows something of the stars it indicates the time of the year, as does also to the wildflower lover the reference to the "shining daffodil dead." How many readers of the lines referring to

"A single misty star
Which is the second in a line of stars
That seem a sword beneath a belt of three,"

know where to find that misty star in Orion, as misty now as when Merlin