

OUR ENGLISH PAGE

New Star Seen

(新星見(Φ))

(By Science Service.)

Flashing out from obscurity to a temporary brilliancy exceeding that of the Pole Star, a nova, or "new star" was discovered in the southern skies on May 25 by R. Watson, an amateur astronomer at the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, according to an announcement by Dr. Harlow Shapley, director of the Harvard College Observatory. The nova is in the constellation of Pictor, the "Painter," which can never be seen from points north of the Tropic of Cancer, but which from New Zealand, South Africa and the southern part of South America, can be seen in a part of the sky as prominent as that occupied by the Great Bear for northern observers.

While such new stars are not uncommon, an average of about eight or ten a year having been discovered since the Harvard Observatory, with the assistance of its southern branch at Arequipa, Peru, began to search systematically for them, one of the brightness of that of a Pictor is rare. According to Dr. Shapley, it is the brightest that has been seen since August, 1920, when one appeared in the constellation of Cygnus, the Swan, or "Northern Cross." Nova Cygni III., as astronomers refer to it, because it is the third that has been recorded in that constellation, was of the 3.5 magnitude on August 20 when it was discovered, and on the 24th it had reached the second magnitude, but by September 10 it was again too faint to be seen with the unaided eye. Nova Pictoris is being anxiously watched to see if it continues to become brighter. Dr. Shapley stated that the Harvard branch station in Peru has been notified of it, as well as other observatories in Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Cuba.

The cause of a nova is still in doubt, but many astronomers believe them to be due to the collision of a star with another, or to its passage through a mass of nebulous material. In such a case the friction would generate a great amount of heat, and the star would become much brighter. This theory is given support by the fact that most novae are seen to be surrounded by nebulous material for a considerable time after their outburst.