

of *Radiants*, No. XXI. (Memoirs, vol. liii.), but I have no doubt this stream has often escaped recognition owing to the proximity and strength of the Perseids.

As this particular shower is liable to complication with that formed by early Perseids so there are others which are sometimes confused with late Perseids. In the third week of August there is a well-defined radiant in Camelopardalis at  $61^{\circ} + 59^{\circ}$ , which is only a few degrees E. of the place of the Perseid radiant. There are other showers of swift, streak-leaving meteors at  $60^{\circ} + 49^{\circ}$ ,  $70^{\circ} + 65^{\circ}$ , and  $71^{\circ} + 51^{\circ}$ . A close observer at the Perseid epoch will in time detect these various outlying systems, but at first they are very likely to give erroneous impressions.

This year during the fine weather and great heat which prevailed during the last half of July observers were very successful in recording a number of early Perseids and determining the place of the radiant.

Bishopston, Bristol,  
1900, July 27.

W. F. DENNING.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

*To the Editors of 'The Observatory.'*

*Alexander Aubert.*

GENTLEMEN,—

This astronomer of the last century was born at Austin Friars on the 11th of May, 1730, but educated abroad, and whilst at school in Geneva had his attention first directed to astronomy by the appearance of the great comet of 1744. He returned to London in 1751, and shortly afterwards entered into business in partnership with his father, becoming also a Director of the London Assurance Company. The first astronomical observation he is recorded to have made is that of the ingress of Venus on the Sun's disk at her transit on June 3, 1769, which he observed at Austin Friars with a Cassegrain reflector, by Short, of 2 feet focal length and power of about 110. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1772. It was probably about that time that he established his observatory at Loampit Hill, near Deptford, for in his paper on a new method of finding time by equal altitudes, which was read before the Royal Society on November 9, 1775, and is printed in vol. lxvi. part 1, no. iv., of the *Philosophical Transactions*, he refers to observations of  $\gamma$  Draconis made there on the 15th of July, 1773, and gives the position of his station as latitude  $51^{\circ} 28' 7''$  North, and the longitude  $5^{\circ}$  West of Greenwich. In vol. lxxiv. part 1, no. x., of the *Phil. Trans.* is an account by him of two remarkable meteors observed on the 18th of August and the 4th of October, 1783. The former (which was seen by Herschel and many other persons, and is characterized by Archdeacon Cooper, of York, who observed it at Hartlepool, as "this awful meteor")

appeared a little before half-past 9 o'clock in the evening, and was noticed by Aubert whilst passing near Lewisham Bridge on his way home to his observatory at Loampit Hill; the latter came into view about a quarter before 7 o'clock in the evening, and was seen by him whilst on horseback in Blackman Street, Southwark.

Aubert observed the transit of Mercury on the 4th of May, 1786, at Loampit Hill (*Phil. Trans.* vol. lxxvii. p. 47). In 1788 he removed his observatory to Highbury House, Islington, but though it was well equipped with instruments, we do not meet with any results of observations made by him there. This may probably be accounted for by the absorbing nature of his other occupations. He was a great friend of Smeaton, the engineer, and was appointed Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the completion of Ramsgate Harbour. Political matters soon became very engrossing, and in 1797 Aubert organized and was made Lieutenant-Colonel of the "Loyal Islington Volunteers." He died on the 19th of October, 1805 (two days before the battle of Trafalgar), whilst on a visit to a friend near St. Asaph. After his death his library and instruments were sold and dispersed.

An account of Aubert, with portrait, is given in the 'European Magazine' for November 1798 (vol. xxxiv. p. 291) and a view of his house at Islington in the number for August 1799 (vol. xxxvi. p. 79). The revolving dome was removed a few years later to Dr. Pearson's Observatory at South Kilworth, in Leicestershire.

Yours faithfully,

W. T. LYNN.

Blackheath, 1900, Aug. 6.

### *The Eclipse of Josephus.*

GENTLEMEN,—

Records of early eclipses are no doubt useful in astronomy when the date is fixed by the record, because in such cases we can test the accuracy of our present tables; but when the date is not fixed by the record and we have to endeavour to ascertain it by computing backwards, the astronomical value of the record is *nil*. It may have a historical value if the accuracy of our present tables may be relied on for the last 2000 years, but it can throw no light on the accuracy or otherwise of these tables.

For this reason I consider the eclipse of Josephus of no astronomical value. In the first place, Josephus was not born for many years afterwards, and it is not likely that any careful astronomical records were available in his time. Christ is supposed to have been 33 years of age when crucified under Pontius Pilate. Josephus mentions that he was 26 years old in the time of the subsequent Procurator Felix, and he cites no authority for the eclipse. He mentions in the same paragraph that one Joseph had acted as High priest for a day (the day of a fast) and that Herod removed Matthias from the High Priesthood, and then adds that "there was an eclipse of the Moon on this very night." Was this the night of the day on which Joseph officiated or on which Matthias was deprived? Indeed from the context it might mean the night on