

*Astronomy of the sentimental sort.*

Camille Flammarion has a very considerable reputation as a writer on popular astron-

omy. He understands the audience for which he writes, and his works have a large sale in France. But when his latest book is placed before the American public under the title of 'Astronomy for Amateurs' (Appleton), there is cause for protest; for the title of the French volume of which this is the authorized translation is 'Astronomy for Women,' and the contents amply justify the title. Indeed, had the American title been 'Astronomy for French Women,' it would have described the book more accurately. There are, however, at least two passages in the first hundred pages which a French or American mother of average discreetness would hesitate to read to her family of growing girls and boys. Such passages might be expected in the pages of a French novel, but there is no good excuse for inserting them in a book on astronomy. The general style of the book may be indicated by saying that the text is sentimental, fanciful, rhetorically exuberant, at times inexact, and always readable by people who enjoy reading of that sort. The inexactness is sometimes due to the author's endeavor to adapt his knowledge to the average feminine intellect, as he estimates it. Educated American women will resent the estimate. Most of the errors, however, were evidently 'made in America.' For example, the statement that the two moons of Mars were discovered by 'Mr. Hall at the University of Washington,' can scarcely have been made by a man so well posted as Flammarion; his well-known

antipathy to the French National Observatory would hardly lead him to refuse to credit this capital discovery to the U. S. Naval Observatory. As an illustration of the depths of sentimentalism with which the author essays to charm the reader betimes, we quote from p. 192, premising that 'Fig. 54' is a wood-cut which occupies nearly a page and represents a young girl looking at a stooting star. 'The young girl dreaming in the delicious tranquility of the transparent night smiles at this charming sister in the Heavens (Fig. 54). What cannot this adorable star announce to the tender and loving heart? Is it the shy messenger of the happiness so long desired? Its unpremeditated appearance fills the soul with a ray of hope and makes it tremble. It is a golden beam that glides into the heart, expanding it in the thrills of a sudden and ephemeral pleasure.' For a combination of irrefragable logic and unimpeachable English, behold the following quotation from page 208. The author is endeavoring to show how the earth is supported in space, without falling. 'A body can only fall when it is attracted, drawn by a more important body. Now in whatever direction we may wander upon the globe, our feet are always downward. *Down* is therefore the *center* of the Earth. The terrestrial globe may be regarded as an immense ball of magnet, and its attraction holds us at its surface. We weigh toward the center. . . . This once understood, where could the Earth fall to? The question is an absurdity. "Below" being toward the center, it would have to fall out of itself.' But why quote further? The whole matter may be summed up by saying that the reader of this book is by turns enlightened, misled, bewildered, and amused.