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“PARALLAXITES”

[2938.]—I FEEL sorry to trouble you with a letter on this subject; but it has its fascinations, and noticing that you have opened your columns to this unprofitable branch of science, I have presumed on your good nature to inflict this upon you. When we meet people who chronically will not hear nor see, and who persistently call black white, and white black, a doubt assails us whether we ought to pass by on the other side or to go in and finish them, and not uncommonly we give way to our pet vanity, desirous of showing our superior learning.

Many of your readers may be in the dark concerning “Parallax,” and perhaps may imagine him a very hardly-used philosopher, a man not appreciated, being in advance of his time. To these readers a plan of “Parallax’s” world will not come amiss. This “great zetetic philosopher” considers (nay, proves) that the earth is flat and circular, like a large plate, with an aggregation of ice at its centre, which he terms the North Pole, and also an aggregation of ice at the circumference, which he calls the South Pole. That the South Pole should encircle us, instead of our being able to encircle it, he evidences from the fact that our navigators never could make much of it, always getting wrong in their reckonings, and finally giving it up as a bad job disagreeing as to its size, extent, and

position. The equator naturally follows as a circle situate midway between the centre and circumference, with its ecliptic in due course. The sun he places not quite 4,000 miles above this flat disc, revolving in concentric circles round the North Pole. (I may here observe that this "4,000" miles is no matter of speculation, being reduced to a certainty by the absolute measurements by "Parallax," who took for a base line the 50 miles or so lying between London and Brighton.)

The moon and the stars, also, he places at moderate though respectable distances from the earth.

I believe, in common with a few others, that were calculations in plane trigonometry applied to a sphere, the results would not be very satisfactory; nor would the results of spherical trigonometry, if applied to solve problems in plane trigonometry, be attended with accuracy. Yet I should like to call the attention of intending Parallaxites to the insignificant fact that our captains take their vessels across the ocean to the port they want by calculations in spherical trigonometry.

I very much wonder whether the people who put such faith in their prophet as to make 4500 bets would let him navigate them to Australia by plane trigonometry.

Every one has some pet problem for the discomfiture of the Parallaxites, and if I have not extended this letter beyond the usual limits allowed by our kind Editor for subjects of such grave importance, I should like to "state my few remarks."

Every one, the Parallaxites as well, knows the mistaken shape of our earth (spherical), and that the degrees of meridian expand from the North Pole towards the Equator, and contract again at the South Pole, the length of a degree taken 100 miles north of the Equator being equal to the length taken 100 miles south.

The Parallaxian, or true shape of the earth, is, as I have stated, a flat, round disc; and if we take the degrees of meridian expanding from the North Pole, they (according to the plan I have before me of "Parallax's" earth) also continue expanding after passing the Equator, the length of a degree at the South Pole being twice as long as at the Equator.

Now, if we take a point on the Equator of our spherical world, sail 100 miles north, then 100 miles west, then 200 miles south, then 100 miles east, then 100 miles north, we arrive at our starting point. Trace the same route on "Parallax's" map, and you would arrive some miles to the west of the starting point. Yet, strange to say, such bad reckonings do not happen to navigators on the other side of the Equator, systematically, as would most certainly occur did the meridional lines expand towards the South Pole. What do the "flats" say to this? Perhaps they may answer, that, however peculiar their views may be, they are upheld by the old saying that "Truth is stranger than fiction."

SIDNEY.