SCIENCE

Friday, July 26, 1912

SIR WILLIAM HERSCHEL

During the last twenty years there has been a great revival of statistical investigations as to the distribution and motions of the so-called fixed stars. Kapteyn, of Groningen, is the leader of those who are renewing the attempt to obtain in this way some idea as to the construction of the universe. Earlier astronomers had of course done something in this direction, but the work of William Herschel so far transcends that of all others, that it would be fair to describe him as the originator of this class of investigation. It may be of interest to mention that a complete edition of his works is now in course of publication, under the direction of a joint committee of the Royal and Astronomical Societies.

The interest of Herschel's writings, and the simple charm of his style—written it is to be remembered in a language which was not his from birth—have led me on to read about the man as well as about his scientific work. Throughout his life's work his name is inseparable from that of his sister Caroline, and I hope it may prove of interest to you to hear of what they were as well as of what they did. They were born at Hanover, he in 1738, she in 1750, the children of a bandsman of the Hanoverian Guards. At the age of fifteen Herschel was already a member of the Guards' band. In 1757 the regiment, which had been in England for about a year, served in Germany during the Seven Years' War, and William seems to have suffered from the hardships of the cam-