

SCIENCE

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1911

THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE
THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
OBSERVATIONAL SCIENCES¹

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It will doubtless startle my audience to hear that this section has only once in its history been addressed by an astronomical president upon an astronomical topic. I hasten to admit that I am not using the term astronomical in its widest sense. Huxley once declared that there were only two sciences, astronomy and biology, and it is recorded that "the company" (which happened to be that of the Royal Astronomical Society Club) "agreed with him." One may agree with the company in assenting to the proposition in the sense in which it is obviously intended without losing the right to use the name astronomy in a more restricted sense when necessary; and at present I use it in its classical sense. At Brighton, in 1872, Dr. De La Rue addressed Section A on "Astronomical Photography" in words which are still worthy of attention, though they are all but forty years old; and this is the only instance I can find in the annals of the section. There have, of course, been occasional astronomical presidents such as Airy, Lord Rosse and Dr. Robinson, but these presided in early days before the address existed, or when it was brief and formal; and the only allusions to astronomical matters were the statements, by Robinson and Airy, of what the association had done in subsidizing the reduction of Lalande's observations and the Greenwich lunar observations. In 1887 Sir Robert Ball occupied this chair, but he

¹Address of the president to the Mathematical and Physical Section. Portsmouth, 1911.

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