

POPULARIZING THE STARS.

Emerson advised aspiring souls to hitch their wagon to a star; and the public of South Australia is indebted to the Adelaide University authorities for raising at this juncture the important subject of astronomical education. On Monday the Chancellor introduced to the Treasurer a deputation who forcefully stated the case for the establishment of a Chair of Astronomy; and, though Mr. Peake saw difficulties in the way of complying with the request, his attitude was appreciative and sympathetic. Sir Samuel Way made a strong point when he disclaimed on behalf of the University Council any personal or interested motive. Unquestionably the object of the deputation will be endorsed by all lovers of knowledge in the community, and particularly by those whose imagination and enthusiasm have been stirred by the sublime study of the sun and stars, and who realize the singular capacity of that study to elevate the mind. As an educational subject astronomy has been somewhat strangely neglected in Australia. For professional purposes in connection with science, surveys, exploration, and navigation it has been followed; and the venerable and revered Sir Charles Todd, assisted by his zealous staff and a society of ardent amateurs, has in his time done much to popularize the ancient and royal pursuit. But, after all, little has been attempted to engage the mind of young Australia with its noble charms. To an isolated island continent, a large area of which still remains to be explored and pioneered, while its seas call for daring navigators, the subject, even in its elementary aspect, is one of practical educational value, if only as a means of creating a bias for adventure and colonization; and this apart from its peculiar fitness to correct insular tendencies, impart mental breadth, and stimulate the imagination and emotions.

The time, however, has arrived when as a vehicle of academic and popular culture astronomy should be assigned in Australia its rightful place—a post of honour which is, and has ever been, awarded to it among all intelligent peoples. If, as the Chancellor suggested, the educational aspect of the subject has hitherto been accidentally overlooked, an opportunity is now presented in connection with the Commonwealth rearrangements to correct the error, and to suffer no longer under the Southern Cross the reproach of a comparative subordination of the science which has brought so much lustre and fame to the British nation. The Federal Government has taken over the meteorological work previously performed by the States, and has left the Observatory branches upon their hands. Although the Constitution appears to contemplate the transfer of both departments simultaneously, the Treasurer will find it extremely hard to coerce the Commonwealth authorities into accepting the more expensive and less attractive. Indeed, for all the practical purposes fulfilled by the Observatory relative to supplying correct time locally, assisting the survey officials, and furnishing purely scientific research, there is no occasion

for Federal action. The Commonwealth should not do for the States what they can do individually for themselves, and equally well. This principle has its application to both the practical and the scientific aspects of observatory functions; and concerning the educational—the new element sought to be introduced—even an ardent federalist may be pardoned for hoping that the day will never come when the Commonwealth will meddle with educational agencies within the State.

The Federal Government has wisely resolved, then, not to take over the Observatory work, which, in truth, can be more efficiently and economically undertaken by the States; and the question which remains for the Ministry to answer is how best the astronomical branch can be conducted under the altered conditions. The deputation proposed an excellent scheme, endorsed by Sir Charles Todd—a scheme which entails a moderate cost, imports into the work an educational feature of great importance, and brings the University into line with the most advanced institutions on the subject. Mr. Peake need have no misgivings whatever in accepting the co-operation of the University. Its business has been conducted with conspicuous ability and remarkable success, and readers of The Register cannot fail to have been struck with the splendid record printed in Saturday's issue of the contributions rendered by the professorial staff to original research—a record of which any State and University might well be proud. To do the Treasurer simple justice one must admit that he fully shares in the popular admiration for the University which reflects so much credit upon South Australia, and would readily open the door to further distinguished efforts; but quite naturally he is concerned about the "eternal peace" complexion of the matter. He suggests that private munificence shall initiate the movement for the establishment of the Chair of Astronomy. Philanthropic citizenship has already assisted higher education in this State in a larger degree than has been done elsewhere, but fine opportunities for further enterprise of this nature are still available. If, however, donations should

not be forthcoming on behalf of this particular object—and it is impossible at all times to command the stream of affluent benevolence—the scheme suggested by the deputation is the best alternative presented, and would probably cost little if any more than the outlay which would be involved if either the State or the Commonwealth otherwise continued the work. Besides, whatever additional expense might possibly be incurred would be amply repaid in scientific usefulness, and notably in furnishing an important feature to complete the educational system in the improvement of which Mr. Peake and his colleagues have displayed a laudable and an intelligent zeal.

TEACHING ASTRONOMY.

There is nothing unduly ambitious in the attempt to create a Chair of Astronomy at the Adelaide University. Indeed, when the importance of the science is considered, together with the fascination which is inseparable from its vastness, it is surprising that something has not been done in this direction before now. Although astronomy is one of the oldest of the sciences, in its present development it is among the newest. In the pursuit of knowledge, as in art, nationality is to a large extent obliterated. Those who devote their lives to the study of any science at first hand form a brotherhood cosmopolitan in character. Still if it were either possible or desirable for any branch of investigation to belong mainly to one race that branch would be astronomy, and the race would be the Anglo-Saxons or the English-speaking people. There is no one spot where an observatory could be erected from which the whole subject could be studied. Only by taking observations at numerous different centres and comparing these with each other can the field be adequately covered. America has contributed voluminously to the world's store of astronomical knowledge. With the aid of the colossal telescope at the Lick Observatory some splendid work has been possible, and Harvard has been the centre of a great deal of useful effort. Many of the most illustrious names in the history of the science are British, but if the observations were confined to Greenwich or any other part of the United Kingdom it would not be possible for the English astronomers to keep pace with those of some other countries. To the great observatory in Cape Colony much practical work in recent years has been due. Of course it would be possible to stud the Empire with observatories without establishing a chair of astronomy in each place. In some measure this has been done already, but the view of Sir Samuel Way is the right one. South Australia will not be content with anything short of an active part taken by her own sons, trained on the spot, in this great science.

How is the money to be raised? Naturally, in replying to the deputation that waited on him yesterday, the Treasurer was anxious on this point. Private munificence has been generously extended to the University in the past, as doubtless it will be in the future. It is not probable that wealthy men will stay their hands when there is such an excellent cause needing support, but the question is whether the exceptional opportunity which now presents itself should be allowed to slip away. The University will provide £100 a year towards the £730 which it is estimated will be required for the proposed new chair. Surely it is not too much to expect the Government to make a grant sufficiently liberal to induce public-spirited gentlemen to take the matter up and bring it to a successful issue.

Perhaps the Government might see their way clear to devote a portion of the money they are to receive from Victoria in consideration of the settlement of the boundary dispute to the establishment of the chair of astronomy, for, as Sir Samuel Way pointed out, it was Sir Charles Todd's astronomical work that was largely responsible for defining what should have been the true boundary. The