

tentionally gotten rid of his assistant so that he would not have to share the glory of the discovery; they think that Hall was judging Newcomb by his own behavior.

The book is organized around a dozen events in Newcomb's life, leaving gaps that miss many fun anecdotes. For example, readers do not learn that Newcomb was the intentional prototype for Arthur Conan Doyle's arch-villain Professor James Moriarty. They also are not told that Newcomb was the "learn'd astronomer" in Walt Whitman's famous *When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer*. Nor are they told about how Newcomb restored the reputation of Father Maximilian Hell, S. J., by showing that the astronomer did not fake his observations of the 1769 transit of Venus. And Newcomb is not credited with discovering and explaining the logarithmic distribution of the leading digit in lists of real-life statistics, which came to be known as Benford's law.

Such gaps also leave unanswered in-depth questions and evaluations. One example is the paradox of how Newcomb went from being the most famous astronomer in the world to a name recognized mostly by older astronomers who have an interest in the history of astronomy. My resolution for why Newcomb is now so little known is twofold: First, the dynamical astronomy of old is now solved and out of fashion, so no forum exists for trumpeting its greatest practitioner. Second, Newcomb never had a discovery named after him.

Simon Newcomb is not the definitive biography, but it contains many intriguing stories. It captures well the sweep of astronomy from the Civil War to the early 1900s. The only other biography of Newcomb, Albert E. Moyer's *A Scientist's Voice in American Culture: Simon Newcomb and the Rhetoric of Scientific Method* (U. California Press, 1992), is for scholars interested in the sociology and philosophy of science. Thus the Carters' book fills an important gap in astronomical history. I recommend it to libraries and individuals interested in the history of American astronomy. But maybe the best recommendation is that I had a lot of fun reading the book—and I could not put it down until finished.

Bradley E. Schaefer
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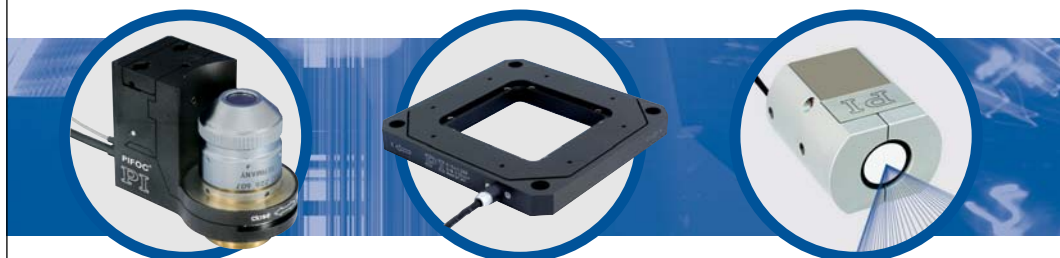
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