

Brahe, containing 777 stars, constructed in 1600, as having originated in a phenomenon similar to that which drew the attention of Hipparchus. In more recent times, astronomers, provided with the finest instruments their respective eras could supply, and established in observatories, munificently endowed by the sovereigns and governments of different European nations, have vied and are still vying with each other, in extending the number of registered stars, and giving the utmost possible degree of accuracy to the determination of their places. Among these, it would be ungrateful not to claim especial notice for the superb series of observations which, under a succession of indefatigable and meritorious astronomers, has, for a very long period, continued to emanate from our own national observatory of Greenwich.

(308.) The distance of the fixed stars is so immense, that every attempt to assign a limit, *within which it must fall*, has hitherto failed. The inquiries of astronomers of all ages have been directed to ascertain this distance, by taking the dimensions of our own particular system of sun and planets, or of the earth itself, as the unit of a scale on which it might be measured. But although many have imagined that their observations afforded grounds for the decision of this interesting point, it has uniformly happened either that the phenomena on which they relied have proved to be referable to other causes not previously known, and which the superior accuracy of their researches has for the first time brought to light; or to errors arising from instrumental imperfections and unavoidable defects of the observations themselves.

(309.) The only indication we can expect to obtain of the actual distance of a star, would consist in an annual change in its apparent place corresponding to the motion of the earth round the sun, called its *annual parallax*, and which is nothing more than the measure of the apparent size of the earth's orbit as seen from the star. Many observers have thought they have detected a measurable amount of this parallax; but as astronomical instruments have advanced in perfection, the quanti-