

16th magnitude in this space. These stars are projected on the wholly unresolved, uniformly bright and unspeckled nebula.*

The *Black Specks* which attracted the attention of Portuguese and Spanish pilots as early as the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, circle round the southern pole opposite to the Magellanic Light-clouds, although at a greater distance from it. They are probably, as already remarked, the *Canopo fosco* of the "three Canopi," described by Amerigo Vespucci in his third voyage. I find the first definite notice of these spots in the first Decade of Anghiera's work, "*De Rebus Oceanicis*" (Dec. i., lib. 9, ed. 1533, p. 20, *b*). "Interrogati a me nautæ qui Vicentium Agnem Pinzonum fuerant comitati (1499), an antarcticum viderint polum: stellam se nullam huic Arcticæ similem, quæ discerni circa punctum (polum?) possit, cognovisse inquirunt. Stellarum tamen aliam, ajunt, se prospexisse faciem densamque quandam ab horizonte vaporosam caliginem, quæ oculos fere obtenebraret."† The word *stella* is used here for a celestial constellation, and the narrators may not have explained themselves very distinctly in reference to a *caligo* which *obscured* their sight. Father Joseph Acosta, of Medina del Campo, gives a more satisfactory account of the Black Specks and the cause of this phenomenon. He compares them, in his *Historia Natural de las Indias* (lib. i., cap. 2), to the eclipsed portion of the Moon's disk in respect to color and form. "As the Milky Way," he says, "is more brilliant because it is composed of denser celestial matter, and hence gives forth more light, so likewise the *Black Specks*, which are not visible in Europe, are entirely devoid of light, because they constitute a portion of the heavens which is barren, *i. e.*, composed of very attenuated and transparent matter." The error of a distinguished astronomer in supposing that this description referred to the spots of the Sun,‡ seems scarcely less singular than that the missionary Richaud

* See *Observ. at the Cape*, § 20-23 and 133, the beautiful drawing, pl. ii., fig. 4, and a special map of the graphical analysis.—Pl. x., as well as *Outlines*, § 896, pl. v., fig. 1.

† "I asked some mariners who had accompanied Vicentius Agnes Pinzo (1499) whether they saw the antarctic pole, and they told me that they did not observe any star like our North Star, which may be seen about the arctic pole, but that they noticed stars in another form, having the appearance of a dense and dark vapor rising from the horizon, which almost obscured their vision.

‡ *Cosmos*, vol. ii., p. 287, and note.