illusory; and it was not till the year 1839 that Mr Henderson, having returned from filling the situation of Astronomer Royal at the Cape of Good Hope, and discussing a series of observations made there with a large "mural circle" of the bright star α Centauri, was enabled to announce as a positive fact the existence of a measurable parallax for that star: a result since fully confirmed with a very trifling correction by the observations of his successor, Sir T. Maclear.

(22.) The parallax thus assigned to α Centauri is so very nearly a whole second in amount (0".98) that we may speak of it as such. It corresponds to a distance from the sun of 206,265 times that of the sun from the earth, which, as we have already seen, is itself 23,222 polar semi-axes of the latter, thus making a total of 4,789,880,000 such semi-axes (or 10,000,000 times that number of geometrical cubits), equivalent to 18,918,000,000,000 (nearly nineteen billions) of British It's near neighbour β of the same constatute miles. stellation and other stars adjacent exhibit no such annual displacement, and are therefore beyond the reach of our measurement. Such, then, is the length of the sounding-line with which we have first touched bottom in the attempt to fathom the great abyss of the sidereal heavens. At such a distance, the vast globe filling the earth's orbit, above spoken of, would be covered from sight by a human hair held at twenty-five feet from the eye.*

(23.) The other mode in which this great question

* Supposing the pupil reduced to a point.