



SECTION OF MAIN BUILDING—UNITED STATES NAVAL OBSERVATORY, 1844.

visit to London to secure his instruments, then so slowly constructed, he was caught there by the breaking out of the war. Returning only in 1815, and the survey itself being soon arrested by Congress, his instruments and the "fixed observatory," the establishment of which he was the very first in this country to propose, rested quietly *in statu quo ante bellum*. In 1832 the Coast Survey was revived; but as an observatory was peremptorily forbidden by the law, the transit was loaned to Lieutenant Wilkes for his observations; and Mr. Hassler from this date, instead of further urging the creation of an observatory under the Coast Survey, or of exhibiting any jealousy of the new institution when afterward secured, accepted its legitimate separate existence and objects, and always gave them his cordial support.

Lieutenant Wilkes's observations were, however, at first only for obtaining clock errors, needed for determining the true time for rating the naval chronometers then under his charge. This testing of all the chronometers and other naval instruments used by our ships (begun in 1830 by Lieutenant Goldsborough) had been at once found a wise and useful economy for the navy. The secretary, therefore, established this little receptacle for charts and instruments by placing an officer in charge, permitting him to build his own little observatory and do his own work. The "Dépôt" was the christening then given to the establishment. This was all that Wilkes or any one of his successors dared call it even as late as 1842, when establishing the veritable present astronomical institution. Hassler had proposed an observatory, and Gallatin and Jefferson had indorsed his plan; Monroe, when Secretary of State, had recommended it in a report to the House of Representatives; President Adams had urged it in 1825, in

1838, and in 1842; but for partisan reasons it was again and again peremptorily forbidden, and remains so to this day to the Coast Survey.

But in 1838 a new call was made upon the Dépôt, which turned the whole current of its future. The exploring expedition was about to sail for the South Seas. It would be of prime importance, in determining the longitude of places to be visited by the expedition, that corresponding astronomical observations should be made at home, to be compared on its return. Secretary Paulding gave the observations in the United States to Lieutenant Gilliss, Wilkes's successor at the Dépôt, and to Professor Bond, of Cambridge. For the years 1838-42 Gilliss worked most accurately and unremittingly. With the help of an achromatic telescope, added by the Navy Department, and the transit before mentioned, he observed and recorded 10,000 transits; and his observations, afterward tested by Professor Peirce, were ranked by him among the highest then made. They are in the libraries of the astronomers of Europe. They procured, in fact, the founding of the present Naval Observatory.

For this, however, hard work in abundance was to be done. Gilliss urged the unsuitableness of his building erected alongside of Wilkes's wooden square room, and his want of space to erect a permanent circle. He won over the old Navy Commissioners and the indorsement of the secretary to their recommendation for something better. He pressed the Naval Committees frequently and closely, but enlisted scarcely one except Mallory, of the House. Almost to a man they kept away from the Dépôt, although it was "so near," and no help seemed available. But a celestial visitant now appeared, as, singularly enough, another did in 1843