

***JAMES CLERK
MAXWELL***

***FIVE OF MAXWELL'S
PAPERS***

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James Clerk Maxwell

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On the Unequal Sensibility of the Foramen Centrale to Light of different Colours.

James Clerk Maxwell

[From the *Report of the British Association*, 1856.]

When observing the spectrum formed by looking at a long vertical slit through a simple prism, I noticed an elongated dark spot running up and down in the blue, and following the motion of the eye as it moved *up and down* the spectrum, but refusing to pass out of the blue into the other colours. It was plain that the spot belonged both to the eye and to the blue part of the spectrum. The result to which I have come is, that the appearance is due to the yellow spot on the retina, commonly called the *Foramen Centrale* of Soemmering. The most convenient method of observing the spot is by presenting to the eye in not too rapid succession, blue and yellow glasses, or, still better, allowing blue and yellow papers to revolve slowly before the eye. In this way the spot is seen in the blue. It fades rapidly, but is renewed every time the yellow comes in to relieve the effect of the blue. By using a Nicol's prism along with this apparatus, the brushes of Haidinger are well seen in connexion with the spot, and the fact of the brushes being the spot analysed by polarized light becomes evident. If we look steadily at an object behind a series of bright bars