

## THE ASTRONOMER

"The Astronomer," said Professor H. H. Turner lecturing on "Comets" at the Birmingham Midland Institute early in December last, "has done his best to beautify imaginative life. Not only has he given us beautiful things to think of, but he has removed some very ugly things. The fear of comets is a very good example of the kind of dreadful things I mean." There was, declared the lecturer, a very real fear of the comet of 1858. Comets in early times were considered to be the bringers of some great disaster. "A comet's tail," wrote a dignitary of the church in 1578, "is the thick smoke of human sin rising every day, every hour, every moment full of stench and horror." Even scientists were mystified by the movements of comets. A French authority declared in 1665 that the motions of comets were so irregular that they would not be reduced to any laws. Milton compared Satan to a comet, and declared, "His hair shakes pestilence and war." Comets at that time were considered to be stars with hair on. The comet 1618 was said to be responsible for the "prodigious revolutions now beginning in Europe, especially in Germany." Since the invention of the telescope, added Professor Turner, astronomers had become familiar with comets, and there had been very rapid increase in the discovery of them. Now they understood their movements and their courses, but no one knew from whence they came and whither they went. (E.M.2907)

(譯) 昨年十二月初め英國バーミンガム市のミッドランド・インスティテュートで「彗星」といふ題でターナー教授が講演した中に曰く「天文學者は精神生活を美化するために最善を盡した。彼れは人々に美しい事實を紹介したのみならず又一面に於ていろいろ醜い物を除き去つた。彗星の恐怖などは私がこゝで恐ろしい物といふ種類の中で頗る好い例である。」教授によれば一八五八年の彗星は甚だしい恐怖であつた。昔の彗星は皆何れも大きな災厄を~~結~~つて來るものだと思はれてゐた。一五七八年耶蘇教會の一高僧は「彗星の尾は毎日毎時毎刻天に擧がる人類の罪惡の濃密な烟で惡臭と恐怖とに満ちてゐる」と書いてゐる。科學者でさへ彗星の運行には惱まされたものである。一六六五年佛國の或る學者が言つた説によれば彗星の運動はとて~~も~~法則で説明が出来ない程不規則である。ミルトンはサタンを彗星に譬へて言ふには「彼れの髮は惡魔と戰爭とを振りまくのだ」と彗星は其の當時の人には髮のある星だと考へられてゐたのである。一六〇八年の彗星は「當時歐羅巴殊に獨逸に始まつたばかりの大革命戰の原因である」と言はれた。ターナー教授は尙ほ曰く望遠鏡の發明以來天文學者には彗星が珍らしいものでなくなり新發見も急に數を増して來た。今日彼等は彗星の運動や軌道を知つてゐる。しかし此等が何所から來何所へ去るのかは誰も知らない。(E.M.は雜誌English Mechanic and World of Scienceの略)