

THE COMET

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ABOVE

Sir, - If none of your readers better informed than myself on the subject have given the public any information about the comet which is now disappearing, the following particulars may be of interest. I believe it to be the same which so astonished Europe in 1848. That comet was described as being of extraordinary length, and so brilliant as to be visible even in the daytime. In addition to being one of the most remarkable comets ever recorded, as far as its brilliancy and the length of its tail were concerned, its elements were also among the most astonishing of its peculiarities. The principal of these was the shortness of the perihelion distance. The comet approached the luminous surface of the sun within about a seventh part of the sun's radius. Before any calculation had been made, the appearance, coincidence of situation and physical resemblance excited, save Sir J Herschel, a strong suspicion of its identity with one seen in Lisbon in 1668, thereby implying a period of 175 years, within a day or two. This suspicion was converted to a certainty by a careful comparison of the elements of both. It was also identified with another comet which appeared in 1689; for though at first the inclination assigned to it by Pingre' (author of the well-known *Cometographic*) appeared against such a view, Professor Pierce computed the elements afresh and found a much closer resemblance in the inclination. To reconcile its appearance, eight returns in the 175 years are supposed, giving it a mean period of twenty-one years, decimal 875. Should this view of the subject be the true one, Sir J Herschel adds, we may expect its return about the end of 1864 or the beginning of 1865, in which event it will be observable in the Southern Hemisphere both before and after its perihelion passage.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that our recent visitor is the comet of 1813; and if its period is considered settled, we can identify it with the comet of 1516 (supposed to have predicted the death of Ferdinand the Catholic) and several comets which appear in the Chinese annals as being visible in the Southern Hemisphere. More than this, the period calculated back coincides with the dates of some of the most remarkable cometary visitations recorded in history, amongst which is that of 1011, whose "brilliancy dazzled the eyes".

I offer these remarks with diffidence, and if any person has in the meantime made the above facts available to the public, I beg you will toss my letter aside.

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Penola Jan 28