

A Comet which appeared in 1080, approached so near the sun in its perihelion as 490,000 miles, which is less than a third part of his diameter; its train extended through a space almost as long as from hence to the sun, and it moved on its course at the immenso rapidity of 1,057,000 miles in an hour, but when in its *aphelion*, or greatest distance from the sun, it will move only 45 miles in the same time.

Another Comet became visible in 1743; it approached within about 10,000,000 of miles of the sun's centre, and when nearest to that luminary, moved at the rate of 600,000 miles in an hour.

The two Comets which make their appearance this year, are those known by the names of Halley's, and Encke's Comets; of the former, the following is an account of its last revolution in 1759, taken from a pamphlet published in 1811.

The period of *Halley's Comet* has been computed at 75 years; it having appeared successively in the years 1456, 1531, 1607, and in 1682. Its re-appearance was expected in 1757, or 1758: A similar comet was discovered on the 21st of January 1759, by M. *Messier*, assistant of M. *de Lisle*, which was observed as often as the weather would permit. It was invisible during March, from the state of the atmosphere, and was not seen again until the beginning of May, when it appeared only as a faint light or cloud.

"By letters from the West Indies and North America, it appeared that it was seen there soon after the time of its passing the *perihelion*, towards the latter end of March; from which it advanced far to the southward, its body increasing considerably in diameter, and its train growing broader, but decreasing in length; because the comet was then so placed, with respect to the observer, that its body was nearest the earth, and its train nearly in a line beyond it, but a little inclining upwards. When this comet was in its *perigee*, or that part of its orbit which is nearest the earth, on the 23d of April, and about eight million of miles distant from it, its body was larger than the full moon, and its velocity so extremely rapid, that in three days it ran through fifty five degrees of a great circle.

"Dr. *Halley* remarks, as the reader will do from what I have stated, that the appearance of this comet was a year later than the rest; but from the affinity of all other characters, both he and *Clairaut* concluded that it was the same comet, and conceived that its period might be lengthened by the attraction of Jupiter and Saturn: It might also be supposed that this might occur to prevent its meeting in its course with the earth, or some other planet."

For the information of those who have not procured an Almanac, we subjoin the following conjectures upon its present visit, from *Belcher's Almanac* of the present year:

"This year will be remarkable for the long expected return of the Comet of 1759; commonly designated "*Halley's Comet*," (from its having been successfully predicted by that celebrated astronomer,) which in one of its former returns appeared in great splendour, with a tail 30° in length. If the calculation of the most eminent mathematicians may be relied on, it will come into the vicinity of the earth's orbit early in July, and cross the plane of the ecliptic, about the beginning of August, in near the middle of the sign Gemini; moving among the fixed stars from the west to the east, and north, through the constellations Taurus, Auriga and the Lynx, into Ursa Ma-

jor, or the Great Bear; it will not however probably be visible till it arrives in the constellation Auriga, about the first of September, when it will rise in the N. E. at about 11 o'clock in the evening, and pass the meridian, near the zenith, at a little past 7 the next morning. On the last of September it will be about 20° due north of the stars Castor and Pollux, and will rise in the N. N. E. at about 10 in the evening, and will pass the meridian a little north of the zenith at about 8 the next morning; its apparent velocity of motion through the constellations about this time being incredibly swift, equal to 15° of longitude in 24 hours. At about the beginning of October, when it arrives at Ursa Major, it will have attained so great a northern declination, that it will revolve without setting for several days, but will probably be lost for a few hours, near the horizon in the humidity of the earth's atmosphere. Its distance at this time will be about twenty-five millions of miles from the earth, and will probably exhibit a brilliant appearance. From Ursa Major it will pass rapidly into the constellation of Boötes, thence through the head of the Serpent, into the Serpent-Bearer, but it will now, (near the last of October,) have arrived so near the Sun, as probably to be lost in his rays except it may possibly be visible for a little time early in the morning near the horizon, in the east or a little south of east. It will reach its perihelion about the 4th November, and be invisible during the remainder of the year; but on its return from its perihelion in 1836, it will probably be visible early in the morning in the south east, for a few weeks about the last of January and first of February; but it will soon after reach such a distance from the earth, that the attenuated light of the sun, which it reflects, will cease to make an impression on the organ of sight; and it will be no more visible until the year 1912, as its period is computed to be about 76 years; so that probably not one that has now arrived at the age of manhood, will live to witness another return of this illustrious visitor. Since its last appearance successive generations have arisen and passed away, and more than two hundred millions of the human family have joined the innumerable company of the mighty Dead.

"The year 1832 was distinguished by the predicted appearance of two comets, the most remarkable that have yet fallen under the notice of astronomers. These are the comets of Encke and Biela, the former was not expected to be visible in this hemisphere during its visit: that part of the heavens in which it pursued its track was, notwithstanding, carefully examined night after night, but not the faintest glimmering of it could be perceived. It was, however, seen in the southern hemisphere, at Buenos Ayres, but it exhibited so very faint an appearance, as to induce the suspicion that it had undergone considerable physical changes since its perihelion in 1829. Its return in August, the present year, will also be unfavourable for observation in the northern hemisphere of the earth, and we must wait till the autumn of 1838 before it will again be advantageously situated for tracing it. The latter had been an object of fear to many on account of the nearness with which it approached, not the earth but a point of the earth's path. Towards the end of October it actually intersected the orbit of our planet; happily, however, the comet was in advance of the earth, so that unless our globe had augmented its pace, or the visitant had retarded its journey, there was no risk of any dangerous proximity, much less of a hostile collision. There are many who without going the length of fearing danger from the shock of a comet, nevertheless imagine that any unusually hot weather, which happens while such a body is visible, or going to be

visible, is caused by it in some measure at least. A comet may certainly strike the earth in the next century; not one of these which are known, unless the laws of nature be singularly altered, but some one or other yet to come; and as the Science of Astronomy approaches towards perfection, we shall doubtless add some important and interesting facts to our knowledge of comets. As to the multitude of idle theories with which for want of better information, this part of astronomy has been loaded, such as that the planetary system was formed by matter struck off from the sun by one comet; that another caused the deluge; that the four small planets were formerly one, which was broken in pieces by a third; that the moon was originally a comet, and the like;—we would willingly amuse our readers by an account of them, if our limits permitted.

The revolutions of some comets are completed in much less time than a few years since was supposed; the comet of 1682, whose period is 75 years, was termed by Dr. Halley, "*the Mercury of comets*." The following are some of the most remarkable; the comets of Encke, Biela, and Halley, are the only three whose returns have been satisfactorily verified:—Comet of Encke, 3 1-2 years; comet of Biela, 6 3-4 years; comet of 1770, 50 years, 5 1-2 years and 20 years (having had its original period disturbed by the action of Jupiter); comet of 1815, 74 or 75 years; comet of Halley, 75 or 76 years, (this is the comet which is expected to return the latter end of this year;) comet of 1680, 575 years; second comet of 1811, 875 years; comet of 1769, 929 years; comet of 1807, 1713 years; first comet of 1811, 3383 years; and the comet of 1763, 7934 years.

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