

Miscellaneous.

PROBABLE COLLISION OF THE EARTH AND A COMET.

Never removing from the sun to a greater distance than Pallas, and crossing the track of the earth, as well as that of every other planet below Pallas, more than sixty times in a century, it is from the comet of Encke chiefly that we have to apprehend the risk of a collision. It is found to be particularly liable to suffer perturbation from the attraction of Mercury, which it sometimes approaches so near as 360,000 miles. This circumstance has led some to apprehend that at a future period a collision may take place between this comet and Mercury; at all events, their frequent proximity will afford to astronomers the means of determining that planet's mass, which is not yet accurately known. Concerning its approach to our own planet, Olbers has computed, that in the course of 88,000 years this comet will come as near to us as the moon; that in four millions of years it will pass at the distance of about 7,760 geographical miles, when if its attraction should equal that of the earth, the waters of the ocean will be elevated 13,000 feet, that is, above all mountains except Mount Blanc. The inhabitants of the Andes and Himalay mountains, therefore, would alone be able to escape such a deluge, which would, probably, leave upon our globe records of its occurrence, similar to those discoverable at the present day. After a lapse of two hundred and nineteen millions of years, according to the calculations of the same astronomer, an actual collision will take place between this comet and the earth, severe enough to shatter its external crust, alter the elements of its orbit, and annihilate the various species of animated beings dwelling on its surface. Hence we may conclude that, in the course of two hundred and nineteen millions of years, our globe will certainly be smashed by a comet. I have remarked that Encke's comet approaches nearer the earth's orbit than any other yet discovered; and hence the probability is, that the fate which is thus demonstrated to be reserved for our globe, will be fulfilled by means of this particular comet. But such speculations, however striking the results, conduce to no practical advantage, and contribute little to the advancement of science. They afford astonishing proofs of the energy of man's intellectual power, by which he extends his vision to the horizon of the most distant futurity, and looks forward, it may be, with a feeling of complacent assurance, to those momentous events, which from his knowledge of nature, he is enabled to foresee. But let him not rest too confidently on the verity of such anticipations.—Astronomers have prophesied, it is true, the collision of a comet with the earth, an event that will at once destroy the greater part of the human species; but any slight attraction, which, in calculating the movements of this comet, they have chanced to overlook, must invalidate all their conclusions, and render the prediction at once vain and futile; while perhaps, some other comet, among the many thousands traversing the system, and following an orbit to us unknown, may, in the meanwhile, come in contact with our globe, and thus, without any warning of its approach, produce the same terrible effect, long before the expected period have arrived.—*Milne's Essay on Comets.*

A harmless yet very whimsical joke was played off in the schoolhouse of Doune, when it was occupied as a police Office, by the special constables on duty during the late fair:—A stout robust native of the Emerald Isle, apparently more under the influence of mountain dew than good breeding, staggered into the office about midnight, and with out the least ceremony stretched himself on his back on the brick floor. In a few minutes afterwards, the loudness of the notes which proceeded from Pat's nasal organ betokened that he was sound asleep, although what followed gave evidence that this was more assumed than real. The room was dark and gloomy; yet the intermittent light which escaped from a feeble fire showed the constables that if they should attempt to eject the stranger *vice armis*, they had an "ugly customer" to deal with. In the midst of their dilemma, a wag among the number brought him of a plan for effecting their object, without any trouble. He accordingly began to whisper mysteriously to his companions—yet sufficiently audible to reach Pat's ears—what an excellent opportunity they had of securing a good subject for the anatomist's knife. All affected to be delighted with the scheme, and agreed—still in whispers—that being only an Irishman, there could be no risk of discovery, while there was a certainty of a subject so fresh yielding a handsome sum. One proposed to another to another him—another to bleed him

to death. It was now remarked that Pat's nasal notes fell at least an octave—an indication sufficient to induce the constables to proceed in their threats. It was allowed that smothering was a neat way of doing the business, but unluckily they had neither bed nor blankets;—a patch on his mouth would not do, for they had no sticking plaster. The various modes for stabbing and strangling were in this way discussed, but rejected, for fear of either abusing the room, or making an unseemly subject for the anatomist. At length shooting him through the head was agreed upon as the least objectionable mode. During this debate the prostrate Hibernian was evidently in a most uncomfortable state of trepidation; his snoring indications of sleep died away to suppressed breathings; and it was observed that he slyly managed to hitch himself forward towards the door, by catching with his heels at the irregularities in the floor. To poor Pat every moment was fraught with danger. His assumed assassins affected to commence the operation of loading the piece, which must in a few minutes terminate his existence; at each stage of preparation for effecting the horrid deed, Pat had recourse to his novel mode of progression. Matters went on in this way till the ramming down of the last coffin—which was done with as much precision and parade as pen, case, and black lead pencil would permit. Pat at this interesting moment was right opposite the door, which happened to be partly open. He sprung to his feet in an instant—and at one leap cleared the door, and bolted out of sight, his tormentors never having seen or heard of him since.—*Stirling Advertiser.*

MOST EXTRAORDINARY STORY.

[From the York Herald.]

A very remarkable instance of the depravity of the human heart, and of the power of evil propensities, even in defiance of the refinement of education, is said to have lately been evinced in a great commercial and manufacturing town of a neighbouring county, where this paper is extensively circulated. The occurrence has formed the subject of general conversation, and has excited great interest among the social parties of this city; but we deem it prudent at present to forbear giving the name of the town, or the address of the parties. The circumstances are as follow:—

A commercial gentleman having, in the course of one of his journeys, arrived at the town alluded to, was out from his inn later than is usual with the virtuous part of that useful fraternity. It is not for us to enquire why a gentleman should be out at an unseasonable hour, or to doubt the fact that good company, or a general associate, must always, in such cases, form the power of attraction. Gentility, however, in some seasons and situations, is more calculated to excite suspicion, than to command respect, and such was the case to the detail of which we are hastening. Our hero, during a saunter in one of the principal streets, was met by a lady, whose genteel appearance roused his curiosity and commanded his admiration. That she was not a courtesan, was evident to him; but yet she hesitated as she passed him, and appeared to be in quest of an unknown friend. He stopped—conversation ensued; but suspicious as the hour and circumstances might appear, her virtue was not to be doubted, nor could her superior deportment and education be disguised. She was in apparent haste, but engaged to meet him again the following evening. The first interview was consequently short, but delightful, for the commercial gentleman already began to dream of having gained the heart of an heiress; and as he anticipated, a commission in the army, or a cure of souls, as a final result of this romantic adventure, he now and then felt it exceedingly irksome that he should ever have had to associate with travellers, whose lives are ignobly spent in procuring paltry orders in trade, and whose only object is to realise profit for perhaps low and avaricious employers.

In the midst of this diversified reverie, our hero, prompted by curiosity, and influenced by caution, turned and followed at a distance the fair lady who had exhibited so much condescension and partiality towards him. His object was to convince himself of the fact, that she was no common personage. He soon saw her ascend a lofty flight of steps, which formed the entrance to a stately mansion. She did not knock at the door; but, with the authority of its owner, she opened it with a key, and glided in like the fairy vision of an enchanted tower. He drew near with a cautious step—he copied the number of the house—and he doubled the proudest of all his aspiring calculations.

On his return, the clock of a neighbouring church struck twelve; and he thought he would look at his watch—when, lo! it was gone. The fair owner of that noble mansion could never have taken it, as a token of remembrance. There was death to all his prospects, in the very idea. To

return again and knock at the door, was impossible. His only alternative was to go to his inn, to retire, and wait the second interview. He did repair to the inn—he did retire—his dreams were still of gold, but alas! they were relative to the loss of his gold watch, gold chain, and gold seals.

The following day he consulted a friend, who advised him to forsake his foolish anticipations of a second interview as arranged, and to lose no time in going with a police officer to the mansion of the lady. He took this advice, and they were introduced into a large and most elegant room. The lady of the house soon appeared—but she was not the desired fair one. Her female servants were all summoned up, but the midnight wanderer was not amongst them. Inquiry was then made, if there was no other resident female there. The reply was, that there was but one in the house, and she being the governess, was with the children; and that her privacy should not be intruded upon by the rude interrogations of any such men as they were. The production of a search warrant, however, soon silenced all opposition; and the governess was introduced. She was fair as the morning, lovely in appearance as a summer's evening, and bashful as a nun: but alas! she was the suspected thief. Protuberations of innocence, symptoms of fainting, &c. &c. ensued: but she was ordered to open her trunks, to expose her drawers, and to disclose long hidden secrets, to this man of brief authority.

To conclude—in one of those trunks was found, not only the lost watch, but also many other watches, several purses, and &c. &c. the production of many other a midnight ramble, which a horrible propensity had prompted, and which had been taken when the respectable family, with whom she then was, were gone to a peaceful repose.

The detection caused great distress to all around the thief. She acknowledged that she had always held prostitution in the utmost abhorrence; but she had a strong propensity to steal, and had picked many a pocket, whilst forming engagements of second interviews, which she never meant to confirm. In the midst of this career, she trusted for escape to the respectability of her situation being above suspicion; and her discovery could then only be attributed to the credulity of her accuser. The whole affair, however, was made up to save the feelings of the family—she was discharged from their employment; and we tell the story as a warning to commercial gentlemen, and to the public at large.

EXECUTION IN FRANCE.

Paris, October 31.

On Tuesday last took place, at Versailles, the execution of two women—one named Pitra, and the other Darcy—condemned at the last Assizes for the Department of the Seine and Oise; the woman Pitra for having poisoned her husband, and the girl Darcy for the murder of her mother.

Since her condemnation, the woman Pitra, who, during her trial, evinced great firmness and sang froid, has given herself up to the most violent despair, constantly protesting her innocence, and appealing from the justice of men to that of God. She has been frequently visited by two charitable ladies, belonging to the most respectable families, who have sought to calm her mind, and bring her to a proper sense of her situation. The other culprit, the girl Darcy, has since her trial been in a state of moral stupor, and apparently unconscious of the dreadful fate hanging over her. On being informed, on Tuesday morning, that the execution was to take place in the afternoon, the woman Pitra uttered the most harrowing cries of horror and despair; whilst the girl Darcy was scarcely roused from her state of apathy by the dreadful intelligence. When the executioners appeared, the woman Pitra fell into convulsions. On coming to herself she exclaimed—"It is, then, all over; my last hour has struck. If the justice of God be not more true than that of men, what am I to expect? I am a poor, unfortunate, and innocent woman." She was then taken, leaning on the two ladies already mentioned, into another room, to undergo the sad preliminaries of her punishment. She thanked the ladies for their charitable attention to her, and spoke of her child, who, as she said, would, in a few minutes more, be deprived of a mother. Perceiving one of the turnkeys, she said—"Let five francs be given to poor Jerome. This cannot be refused me, for it is one of the last wishes of a dying woman." She then bade him adieu, and resumed her protestations of innocence, saying, "This is the justice of man, to condemn a woman upon mere suspicion." "Put your confidence in the justice of God," said the Countess de— to her, at the same time holding up a crucifix to her lips. "Will his justice," exclaimed