

Halley's Comet.

THE subject of this article is a stellar gentleman of somewhat pronounced periodic habits who called on us about seventy five years ago and whose presence again in a few weeks promises to be a matter of some interest. The gentleman in question has indeed been here quite often, but his visits have always been at the same long interval and invariably short,—a fact perhaps easily enough accounted for when we consider the number and urgency of his engagements and the almost immeasurable distances he must travel to meet them. For our part we have not heretofore had the pleasure of meeting Halley's Comet, but those who had that happiness assure us that he is a most interesting person, somewhat sparing of words but eminently condescending. And let us flatter ourselves with the thought that those occasions were not altogether devoid of interest for our celestial visitor, or that our ancestors were in any way lacking in appreciation of their importance, for in his presence have been enacted the best performances ever staged behind the footlights of the world. In 1835 the scenes were less spectacular perhaps than many he had before witnessed, but the last act of the long drama of British liberty was then in course of presentation; on his previous coming he beheld the giant and decisive struggle which resulted in the conquest of Canada; he looked, and no doubt with interest, on the rebellion which ended in the deposition of the Stuarts; he saw the initial act of Henry's Reformation; and in the early years of the Seventeenth Century he happened along

in the period of the world's most noted discoveries, including the Gunpowder Plot and the Moons of Jupiter. He saw the Capture of Jerusalem, the Destruction of Carthage and the Burning of Rome; he looked upon Grecian valor at Thermopylæ and upon Norman savagery at Hastings, and later viewed the most sanguinary conflict of the Wars of the Roses. What a fund of historic memories he must have stowed away! The eternal vaults have lately been reechoing the clashing testimony of those who claimed to have reached the Pole, and the intrepid discoverers themselves have favored the world with enthusiastic evidence in their own behalf—and at so many dollars per line—in numberless lectures and magazine articles, but so far as we are aware Halley's Comet has never indulged even in the notoriety of an interview.

And the Press correspondent—that modern marvel of enterprise and mendacity—where has he been all these years? And where now are those countless Royal Societies, Astronomical, Historical, Antiquarian, etc? Arise brothers! Consider for a moment the rich harvest that may be gathered from a judicious exploitation of Halley's Comet and the monetary value of the historic revelations that may be placed on the literary bargain counter! An Apocalypse by W. T. Stead after two or three years in spirit-land and a close personal contact with the natives would be a financial nightmare in comparison! For has Halley's Comet not been a regular visitor since the world began? Did he not see us cracking nuts and jabbering Simian in our erstwhile innocence? Has he not come into personal contact with the giants of the world? Indeed we may be sure that he enjoyed the close friendship of Methuselah and other distinguished patriarchs since he had such exceptional opportunities of renewing their acquaintance.

But we may safely leave these rich possibilities of increasing our store of knowledge in the hands of the Associated Press and the various Royal Societies aforesaid : our chief concern is the fitting reception of our eminent visitor.

In view of the entertainment provided by our ancestors on those occasions, and at such expense, shall we be unmindful of our duty or of our opportunities? We boast much of a superior business talent, a penetrating shrewdness in developing commercial relations and a patriotic pride in the quality of what we place on the market, but we are sometimes neglectful of the fact that prudent advertising is indispensable to a successful business. The coming of Halley's Comet affords us a rare and indeed an excellent opportunity of becoming better known and we should not be slow to take advantage of it. The possibilities of an inter-astral entente-cordiale ought not to be overlooked. It may be there are heathens in those twinkling planets who would afford us an extensive field for the introduction of some of the by-products of our civilization, and an opportunity of still further neglecting the heathen of the home grown variety. Or perhaps the profound mysteries of millinery or the latest creations in religion have not yet been disclosed to the inhabitants of the stars. Then—who knows?—they may have something to dispose of that would be of advantage to us, and if their ideas of the relative values of things are yet undeveloped we may be able to barter a whole skyful of third rate politicians somewhat on the principle on which the fur-traders traded with the Indians or Peary with the Esquimaux. But this is a matter which may safely be left to Mr. Fielding who will no doubt avail himself of the presence Halley's Comet to establish a

few commercial arrangements along the lines dimly suggested in this article.

The proper reception of His Cometship is, however a different matter. It was suggested that an international display of fire works be made but a great part of the English contribution prematurely exploded during the winter reminding the Committee that this was no way to entertain a stranger living in close proximity to the Aurora Borealis. It was also suggested that a number of addresses be presented, but when Halley's Comet was communicated with on this point and asked if he would be gracious enough to receive them, a reply came that he was turning back, whereupon he was assured that no such indignity would be offered him and finally prevailed upon to continue.

The members of the Entertaining Committee are now naturally somewhat perplexed, but why not take the gentleman around and introduce him—show him those many monuments of our genius and evidences of our rapid progress towards perfection that never fail to elicit the admiration of travellers? He could not fail to be interested or refuse to constitute himself the herald of our name forever after.

But if this suggestion be acted upon it may be well to exercise some care in the choice of persons to be introduced, and to place little emphasis on some of the more prominent features of our economic development. He may notice that nation is outdoing nation in childish civilities on the one hand and in preparation for war on the other—pretentiously holding out the right hand of friendship and surreptitiously reaching for the dagger with the left; he may notice that a dozen social pirates whose superiors morally are to be found in every penitentiary in the land will today enter into

a conspiracy to control the necessities of life and to-morrow dictate their price to those who produce them; he may notice that a political party will preach purity in opposition and permit its parasites to rob the treasury when in power ; he may notice that a criminal with a bank account becomes an object of engrossing solicitude on the part of the press and of sentimental women while his less fortunate brother is unceremoniously hanged ; he may notice that prayerful pilferers of the widow's mite and the orphan's patrimony are allowed to steal away in the all-seeing presence of the reporter while the register of the police court is as assiduously scanned for the names of new arrivals as that of the Canadian High Commissioner in London. And what impression think you will be left in the mind of our visitor by such ill-concealed absurdity and colossal humbug ?

Then we have the hypocrite, the liar and the law-abiding rogue—may their tribe decrease—differing only in talent from their less fortunate brethern in stripes; we have the professional politician profoundly ignorant of his country's needs but none the less aware of his own; we have the subsidized editor set up as an instructor on the economics of government and whose sole *raison d'être* is a well-developed propensity to gabble and an alert readiness to abuse or excuse as the interests of a party suggest. These we may have some difficulty in keeping in concealment during the stay of our visitor for self repression is not one of their properties, but for our own safety and that of our institutions we should see to it that he meets none but honest men. Doubtless he will conduct himself diplomatically but the provocation may be so great that he may, with an indignant swish of his great tail,

work injury to some things we cannot so conveniently dispense with.

Besides compromising our hitherto peaceful relations with the other planets it were a needless waste of time to pay any attention to these disfiguring outgrowths on the body social when we can point with pride to so many legitimate sources of credit. If Halley's Comet is interested in exploration and discovery we can present Dr. Cook if we can find him; if he wants to take note of our progress in architecture and art since 1835 we can show him the peach-basket hat and the Sunday supplement of the Boston American; if he looks for men valorous and patriotic such as those who championed the rights of the Canadian People on the occasion of his last visit we can introduce Dr. Sproule who is still fighting though the enemy disbanded seventy years ago; if he enquires for heroes like Wolfe and Montcalm whom he saw die in deathless struggle for possession of half a continent on the Battlefield which has since become a pledge of the mutual respect and common national ambition of their countrymen, we can point to Colonel Hughes,

Verily, deeds of chivalry are with us yet,
Lest we forget! Lest we forget!

But will His Cometship call on the Pope? This is the question that is now disturbing two hemispheres. We may perhaps feel satisfied that a gentleman of travel and of diplomatic precision such as he, will precipitate no unnecessary diplomatic embarrassment, but then the Rev. Mr. Tripple has not yet established communication with him. After that we may read the following wireless despatched via the moon by the Astral Ambassador at Rome:—

“The Holy Father will be delighted to receive Mr. Halley's Comet in private audience and hopes that no

untoward incident such as interfered with the reception of Mr. Roosevelt will deprive him of the pleasure of meeting a gentleman for whom he entertains the profoundest respect."

And this from Mars, where Halley's Comet is spending a few minutes studying the canal system of that planet after a successful season's shooting in the Zodiac:—

"It would indeed be a pleasure to meet the Holy Father for whom personally and as head of a great church I have the highest regard, but I very much regret that I cannot assent to any conditions that would in any way limit my freedom of conduct while in Rome."

We hope Halley's Comet will enjoy his stay amongst us and that he will take away with him impressions that may be of some satisfaction to him and of much profit to us.

S. D. C. May 1st.

