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To Dept. C.N.3, Lott's Bricks Ltd., Watford, Herts.

A LIFE OF THE WEEK
The Optimist

On December 12, 1889, died Robert Browning. Robert Browning, who divided the honours as a poet with Tennyson, was born in London on May 7, 1812.

Like Milton and Pope and Shelley he felt all his life that his true calling was to be a poet. His father sympathised with him, and was sufficiently well off, as an official in the Bank of England, to let him have his own way.

Browning did not have a college education, but he learned much that helped him as a poet, studying languages and reading many books with eager interest. His poems show a very wide range of knowledge of past and present, of literature and life.



Robert Browning

Until he married, when he was 34, he lived at home with his parents, a very good son, writing ambitious poems and plays that had very little success. At first he began by imitating poets he admired, particularly Shelley, but soon he developed a style of his own. Earnest readers of poetry recognised in him a true poet though difficult to read, but the general public were not impressed, and were even resentful, of writing which they could not understand.

Among the people who could understand and admire the poet's poems and poetical plays was a Miss Elizabeth Barrett, who herself was a poet. In one of her poems she gave warm praise to Browning's verse. This led to his seeking her acquaintance, and he found her to be an invalid. They became great friends, and presently devoted lovers.

A Happy Life

But Miss Barrett's father was a grim domestic tyrant, with queer views of his own. One odd determination was that none of his daughters should marry. Browning's parents, too, thought it a mistake for him to marry an invalid. But Browning, who was a great optimist, went his own way, and one day, in September, 1846, he quietly escorted Miss Barrett to a church near her home and they were married. They resided in Italy chiefly, and during nearly fifteen years of a very happy married life Elizabeth Barrett Browning found comparative health and a degree of fame as a poet which during her lifetime exceeded that of her husband.

Browning did not write a great deal in those years, but what he wrote brought him a considerable increase of admirers. After Mrs Browning's death he returned to London, so that their son might have an English education; and from that time onward he continued to add steadily to his list of works. Though living in London he travelled frequently abroad, and he died in Venice. He lies in Westminster Abbey.

His Chief Poem

As a poet Browning stands by himself, imitating no one and having no imitator. His chief poem, *The Ring and the Book*, best illustrates his method. It deals with an Italian murder of which twelve people had knowledge, and it gives the reader the view of each of the twelve. The poet gets inside the mind of each and shows its working.

His insight into character is wonderful. What he says is condensed into the fewest words, and his peculiarities in expression have to be studied before they are well understood. Because of this he will never be really popular, except through a few of his poems that are clear, simple, and melodious.

But Browning is unquestionably a great poet, and his fine character, his unflinching faith in eternal righteousness, and the romantic story of his love will, in union with his keen and powerfully imaginative genius, preserve the memory of him for many centuries.

METEORS COMING OUR WAY

Rushing Toward Us at 40 Miles a Second

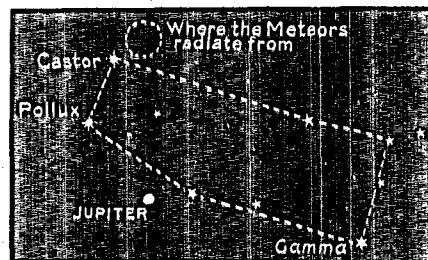
HOW TO SEE THEM

By the C.N. Astronomer

The absence of the Moon from the evening sky next week should make it possible to see some of the meteors which radiate from the constellation of Gemini and are known as the Geminids.

The position of this constellation may be readily found, for the radiant Jupiter, the brightest object in the south-east sky, is situated within Gemini, as described last week. Our star-map, showing the chief stars of this constellation, also shows the region from which the meteors appear to come. This is a point to the right of the bright star Castor. From about 7 o'clock onward the meteors may be observed, but the later they are looked for the more we shall see, for at midnight we shall be nearer to the point where most of them charge into the atmosphere of our world.

This the Geminids do at a terrific speed, amounting to about 40 miles a second, or 80 times faster than a bullet leaves a gun. Yet we manage to see them, though we cannot see a bullet shot through the air. The reason, of course, is because the meteors are so far away,



The chief stars of Gemini, and Jupiter

and, moreover, they are illuminated by their own combustion induced by the immense rate at which they rush through the Earth's atmosphere. This accounts for the meteors not being seen until they enter it and become ignited.

If a shot were fired some twenty miles away or more, and was illuminated, we should quite easily see it travelling over five miles in about 10 seconds.

The Moon, on the other hand, appears to hang quite still in the heavens, and her motion, as a rule, only becomes apparent if we watch her for half an hour or so. Yet the Moon is actually speeding on her course round the Earth faster than a bullet leaves a rifle, at about 3350 feet a second. This is approximately three-fifths of a mile, or at an average rate of 2287 miles an hour; so the Moon has to travel about a thousand miles before she appears to the eye to have moved appreciably. But the Moon is at an average distance of some 240,000 miles.

In the Middle of the Night

The meteors are, however, when we see them, only somewhere between 50 and 100 miles away. In the evenings next week they will be nearer, 100 miles away when first observed, while in the middle of the night they will approach to within 50 miles, and occasionally nearer if almost overhead.

It will be during the nights between December 6 and 14 that the Geminids are most likely to be seen; and if we happen to be on the night side of our Earth when she passes through the denser central portion of this meteor stream a fine display may be expected, and as many as 30 to 40 an hour counted, as happened on December 13, 1923.

An exceptional instance was that of December 13, 1925, when an observer saw them flashing across the sky at the rate of about 120 an hour. From this it may be inferred that the nights of December 12, 13, and 14 are most likely to offer the best chance of a fine display.

G. F. M.

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