

**THE COMETS: A
DESCRIPTIVE TREATISE
UPON THOSE BODIES**

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The Comets: a Descriptive Treatise Upon those Bodies by J. Russell Hind

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J. RUSSELL HIND

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THE COMETS:

A DESCRIPTIVE TREATISE UPON THOSE BODIES.

WITH

A CONDENSED ACCOUNT

OF

THE NUMEROUS MODERN DISCOVERIES

RESPECTING THEM;

AND

A TABLE OF ALL THE CALCULATED COMETS,

From the Earliest Ages to the Present Time.

BY

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PREFACE.

THERE is perhaps no branch of astronomy in which our knowledge has progressed more rapidly of late years than that relating to the Comets, but I believe there is not at present any special descriptive work upon the subject. In treatises on the science of astronomy generally, the space allotted to the Comets is usually very limited, and many interesting points connected with their history are necessarily passed over unnoticed. I have endeavoured, in the following pages, to supply the want of an elementary treatise upon these bodies, and to place before the reader a popular account of the discoveries which have been made in the cometary department of astronomy in modern times, and a brief description of the most remarkable comets recorded in history.

The facts which are here collected together are, for the most part, scattered through many works of a purely scientific character, usually in foreign languages, and not known or easily accessible to the general reader. The Catalogue of the elements of the Orbits of Comets, with the accompanying Notes, will, it is hoped, be acceptable to the young student, as presenting in a small compass the results of a vast amount of time and labour which various astronomers have expended upon them.

J. RUSSELL HIND.

*Grove-road, St. John's Wood, London,
November, 1852.*

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THE COMETS.

CHAPTER I.

OF COMETS IN GENERAL—THEIR NUMBER—DURATION OF VISIBILITY—LENGTH OF THEIR APPARENT TRACKS IN THE HEAVENS—THEIR NUCLEI AND TAILS—APPARENT DIMENSIONS.

COMETS are nebulous-looking bodies, moving in orbits of great eccentricity, and visible to us only about the time of their nearest approach to the sun, or, as it is termed by astronomers, the time of perihelion passage. Unlike the planets, they move in every possible direction, and are seen as well near the poles as about the equatorial or zodiacal regions of the heavens.

In the dark ages of superstition and ignorance, these bodies were regarded as omens of evil to men in general, and the sudden appearance of a great comet excited the utmost consternation, and on more than one occasion influenced the progress of sublunary affairs. One which became visible in the spring of 837 in the southern parts of the heavens, so alarmed Louis I. of France, that he ordered the building of churches and monasteries, in the hope of appeasing the