

**ESSAY ON COMETS, WHICH GAINED THE
FIRST OF DR. FELLOWES' PRIZES,
PROPOSED TO
THOSE WHO HAD ATTENDED THE
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH WITHIN THE
LAST TWELVE YEARS**

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Essay on comets, which gained the first of Dr. Fellowes' prizes, proposed to those who had attended the University of Edinburgh within the last twelve years by David Milne

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DAVID MILNE

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WITHIN THE LAST TWELVE YEARS.

BY

DAVID MILNE, A. M. F. R. S. E.

Comètes que l'on craint à l'égal de tonnerre,
Cessez d'épouvanter les peuples de la terre.

VOLTAIRE.

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TO
THE SENATUS ACADEMICUS
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH,

THIS ESSAY IS INSCRIBED,

AS

A TRIBUTE OF DEEP RESPECT FOR THAT LEARNED BODY;

AND

IN TESTIMONY OF SINCERE GRATITUDE

FOR THE INVALUABLE INSTRUCTION RECEIVED

UNDER THEIR AUSPICES,

BY THE

AUTHOR.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS Essay stands in no need of a formal introduction. The following documents will sufficiently explain its origin, and the circumstances which have brought it forth to the world. On this account, the Author has little to address to the reader; but he may be permitted to remark, that the subject is one which does not demand so much a studied elegance of composition, as accuracy of related facts, and perspicuity of mathematical reasoning. This Essay, therefore, is not glossed over with the gay colouring of fancy, or enriched with the stores of classic association; nor does it require for its perusal any very profound knowledge of Astronomy. Originally never designed for publication, it ought not to be judged of by its own merits, but rather in relation to that academical object for which alone it was composed.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

DR FELLOWES' PRIZES.

“ ROBERT FELLOWES, Esq. LL. D., of Reigate in Surrey, proposes, for the encouragement of Science, to give the following Prizes :

“ The sum of *Fifty Pounds* with a Gold Medal, for the best *ESSAY ON COMETS*, and *Twenty-five Pounds* for the next in merit, to be composed by those Candidates who, within the last *twelve years*, have finished their Philosophical Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

“ The writer of the *Essay on Comets* will begin with the earlier notions entertained on that subject, and trace their influence on the conduct and opinions of mankind : he will then review the hypotheses which have been successively advanced : and having produced his own speculations, he will conclude with a clear Exposition of the most improved Mathematical Theory of the Cometary Motions. This Discourse should be of moderate length, perhaps not exceeding 100 quarto pages : it must have a motto annexed, which is also, with the name of the Author, to be put under a separate cover, and the whole sealed up and transmitted to Professor LESLIE before the 1st of March 1827. The decision will be announced in the following month.”

“ 18th October 1826.”

The following notice appeared in the Scotsman Newspaper 23d May 1827:

“ THE Essays on Comets written for Dr FELLOWES’S Prizes being extended to a great length, and crowded with intricate *formule*, have required longer time for examination than was anticipated. Though deserving generally high commendation, they are not considered as possessing that degree of originality, or the clearness and fulness of exposition, which should entitle them in their present form to obtain the award. The *programme* is therefore renewed, and those competitors, with such others as may be inclined to join them, are invited to send their Essays to Professor LESLIE, on the first week of November next; and they are recommended to exemplify the precepts by the calculation of the elements of the comet observed by Mr RUMKER at Paramatta, as stated at p. 315, in the Philosophical Magazine for April. The final decision, it is expected, will be announced about Christmas.”

“ SIR,

EDINBURGH COLLEGE,
20th March 1828.

“ I have much pleasure in transmitting to you the inclosed copy of a Minute of the SENATUS ACADEMICUS, which was unanimously approved of at a meeting held on the 4th instant; and

“ I have the honour to be,

“ SIR,

“ Your most obedient servant,

“ ANDREW DUNCAN, jun.”

“ To DAVID MILNE, Esq.”

Copy of a MINUTE of the SENATUS ACADEMICUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH, of date 4th March 1828.

Professor LESLIE laid before the SENATUS ACADEMICUS a Report as to the FELLOWS' PRIZE; of which the SENATUS unanimously approved.

The Report was as follows:

“ With the assistance of my learned colleague Professor WALLACE, I have carefully examined the Essays on Comets received by me since the enlarged programme was issued, and find that the Discourse written by Mr DAVID MILNE is very far superior to the rest, and fully entitled to the First of Dr FELLOWS' Prizes. We also find, that, though the other Essays evince ingenuity, and considerable extent of reading, yet we do not think ourselves warranted to bestow the Second Prize on any of them.

“ We hope, therefore, that the SENATUS ACADEMICUS will sanction this decision; and we farther propose that our body should testify their regard for so estimable an alumnus as Mr DAVID MILNE, by desiring him to print the Essay. Mr MILNE has already obtained the honour of A. M.

(Signed) “ JOHN LESLIE.

“ WILLIAM WALLACE.”

Extracted from the Minutes of the SENATUS ACADEMICUS by

ANDREW DUNCAN *jun.*