

but still unquestionably made out. This has been held to prove that the comet is by very slow degrees approaching the sun, and will at last fall into it—as if it moved in a space not quite empty, and were in some very slight degree resisted in its motion. I cannot quite reconcile myself to this opinion, and I think I have perceived another explanation of the fact, which I have given elsewhere; but to state this would lead me too far, and I must now go on to relate one of the strangest and most uncouth facts of this strange cometic history.

(36.) On the 27th February 1826, Professor Biela, an Austrian astronomer of Josephstadt, discovered a small comet. When its motions were carefully studied it was found by M. Clausen, another of those indefatigable German computists, that it revolved in an elliptic orbit in a period of 6 years and 8 months. On looking back into the list of comets, it proved to be identical with comets that had been observed in 1772, 1805, and perhaps in 1818. Its return was accordingly predicted, and the prediction verified with the most striking exactness. And this went on regularly till its appearance (also predicted) in 1846. In that year it was observed as usual, and all seemed to be going on quietly and comfortably, when behold! suddenly on the 13th of January it split into two distinct comets! each with a head and coma and a little nucleus of its own. There is some little contradiction about the exact date. Lieutenant Maury, of the United States Observatory of Washington, *reported officially on the 15th having seen it double on the 13th*, but Professor Wichmann, who *saw it double on the*