

William Reid.

William Reid, the greatest of South Africa's amateur observational astronomers, passed away at Rondebosch, Cape Peninsula, on Friday, 8th June.

In his own words, a great comet was blazing high up in the northern heavens within half-an-hour of perihelion when he first saw the light. This was at Pitcaple in Aberdeenshire in 1861.

His interest in astronomy commenced at the early age of 13, when Coggia's comet left an "indelible impression on his young mind."

He came to South Africa 27 years ago and joined the firm of John Forrest & Co., millers, of Rondebosch. His first instrument was a 4-inch refractor, and about seven years ago this was replaced by a fine 6-inch photo-visual refractor by Cooke & Sons. With these instruments Mr. Reid studied the starry heavens for many hours night after night throughout his career. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that every night on which observation was possible found him at the telescope, either through the first part of the night into the "wee sma' oors," or else from soon after midnight to the dawn. He was first and last an observational astronomer, but he was far more than a comet-seeker. His knowledge of the Southern skies was unrivalled and it is a matter of deep regret to his friends and admirers that he could so seldom be persuaded either to read papers or even to speak at meetings. The only way to get him to talk was to spend a considerable time in his company discussing all sorts of things at random over companionable pipes and finally to put forward one's own crude views on some point. This would bring a "D'ye think so? Well, now, have you ever taken a good look at" (some particular part of the sky)? And then one would get the results of his brooding over his own observations, combined with what he had read and studied in authoritative works.

His desire to encourage others in searching for comets was so great that he undertook not to claim discovery of any comet found by himself if any other discoverer communicated with him before he had himself reported to the Royal Observatory.

In at least one instance he had announced to his family a discovery and described the position and appearance of the comet some hours before a report was made to him by another amateur who had also picked up the new arrival. This comet bears the name of the other amateur.

Details of Mr. Reid's cometary discoveries will be found in the speech of the President of the R.A.S. when presenting the Jackson-Gwilt medal in February of this year, but there is another part of his work of which, unhappily, little or no record will remain and that is why I have referred to his observational work in this humble tribute to his memory.—T. M.
