

PROF. LEWIS SWIFT.

The Aged Rochester Astronomer Can Devote No More Nights to Studying the Starry Heavens.

From The Rochester Post-Express.

Prof. Lewis Swift, the astronomer, who from the roof of Duffy's cider mill and the tower of the Warner Observatory made himself and Rochester famous, is in the city the guest of his niece, Mrs. A. D. Mott. He came from Marathon, Cortland County, to be a guest at the anniversary supper of the Third Presbyterian Church on Thursday night.

To a Post-Express reporter the old astronomer confessed that his days of active work are over. His left eye has grown dim—that eye with which he has discovered 15 comets and 1,342 new nebulae, and which has placed him next to Sir William Herschell in the number of his discoveries.

When H. H. Warner failed, several years ago, Prof. Swift went to California upon the invitation of Prof. Lowe, and upon Echo Mountain, in the San Gabriel range, he established under Prof. Lowe's patronage a new observatory. Thither he took with him from Warner Observatory the sixteen-inch telescope purchased for him in Rochester by a popular fund amounting to \$13,000. Prof. Swift remained on Echo Mountain until a year ago, when, owing to the fact that his eyesight was rapidly failing, and that Prof. Lowe had failed in business, he sold his telescope and other instruments, together with his library, and came back to New York, where he has since resided in Marathon, with his daughter.

Time has dealt gently with the aged scientist. Although eighty-two years old and ever since his thirteenth year a sufferer from a broken hip joint improperly set, his steps are still as elastic and his movements as agile as those of a boy. His memory on astronomical subjects is clear. Deafness makes it impossible for him to engage in ordinary conversation, but he manages to carry on communication with his friends by means of writing or with the assistance of those whose voices he can best understand.

The biographies of successful men present few examples of difficulties so bravely and persistently overcome, as those which all his lifetime have been the portion of Prof. Swift. To the trials of physical deformity there were added in his career the obstacles of personal hardships suffered through lack of proper mechanical equipments and surroundings.

"No one knows how much I have suffered," said the old scientist. "as night after night I have lain out in the snow and cold on the roof of the old cider mill or in the alley on Ambrose Street. If I hadn't had an iron constitution I never could have stood it, but I never caught a cold in my life from such exposure."

What material reward has the world given to this man, who for his lifelong devotion to science and his remarkable discoveries has been made a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society of England, a member of the Astronomical Society of London, a member of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific Coast, and a member of the Boston Scientific Society, who has been honored with more medals than any other astronomer in the world, and has been given the well-earned degree of Ph. D. by the University of Rochester? Read the pathos of the answer in the following statement made by Prof. Swift to his interviewer:

"For my discoveries during the fifty years or more of my active life work I have received in cash prizes \$1,145."

Yet in this recital of his rewards there was not the faintest note of dissatisfaction in the old astronomer's voice or manner. On the contrary, there was a decided ring of pride in his tones—an honest pride that one could not fail to sympathize with, who knew the years of patient, self-sacrificing toil that lay behind the old man's words.

"Here are my medals," said he proudly, as he exhibited a handsome photographic reproduction of those honors. Three of them are of solid gold, the gift of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, Austria. Four are of bronze, given by the Society of the Pacific Coast. The most honorable and distinguished medal in the collection is also of gold. It is the Laplace Medal, given to Dr. Swift by the French Astronomical Society for the most rapid discoveries. Dr. Swift is the third person in the United States on whom this honor has been conferred. With it came a prize of 540f.

"But the medal of which I think the most is this one," said the old astronomer, laying his finger upon a large gold disk, handsomely embellished. "It is a medal struck off from a fund left to the Royal Astronomical Society of England by Mrs. Jackson-Gwilt, who specified in her will that it should be given to the most deserving astronomer. I was the man who received it. Do you wonder that I prize it so highly?" Along with this honor also came a cash prize of \$125.

Of the fifteen comets which he has discovered in his time six of them were original discoveries. The possessive interest with which Dr. Swift regards these is quaintly humorous. He speaks of them familiarly as of children who belong to him.

"I've got one comet," said he, "that comes around once every 28,000 years. Then I've got another that visits us every 123 years; one that comes around every eight years, and another that appears once in five and a half years."

Prof. Brooks of Hobart College, who used to carry on astronomical observations in his native town of Phelps, was a rival of Dr. Swift in the days when the doctor was sky-gazing from Warner Observatory.

"He beat me by just fifteen minutes in the discovery of one comet," said Prof. Swift. "and I got down to all sorts of fine calculations before I would give in to him."

Prof. Swift has witnessed three total eclipses of the sun. In the observation of the one commonly known as the "Denver eclipse" he startled the scientific world by the discovery of two intermercurial planets.

"How did I come to take up the study of astronomy?" repeated Dr. Swift. "Well, it was in this way. I was on my way to singing school in Clarkson one night, when up in the sky I saw a huge comet whose broad tail reached from the horizon up to the very middle of the heavens. The sight dazzled me and filled me with wonder. The next day I told my school teacher I had seen a comet. He laughed at me, and said it was only zodiacal light, but I was right. Three days later the discovery of the great comet of 1843 was announced. I was about to take up the study of some special subject and that night's vision determined what the subject should be. About the first discovery I made, however, was that comets could not be discovered in bed, and then my life of hardship began."

Of the new star in Perseus, which sprang into view recently, and which, on account of its nebulous rings, is believed by certain astronomers to be a new world in the very process of creation, Prof. Swift said: "No, I have not seen the star, but from my reading of the observations made on it I am inclined to the theory that it is the result of the collision of two suns. Yet there are several grave objections to that theory. If the suns were in the space in which the star appears it seems strange that they did not appear on the negative of the picture taken the day before the star's appearance, and then, again, if there had been a collision the colliding matter would have been so heated that the star would have glowed for ages. As it is, it has grown dim with astonishing rapidity, and this fact would seem to favor the theory that what took place was not a collision, but an explosion."