

VII. *An Account of the Shooting Stars of 1095 and 1243.* By Sir FRANCIS PALGRAVE,
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THE Chronicles of the Middle Ages frequently contain important notices of natural phenomena worthy of more attention than they have hitherto received. The narratives of these signs and wonders are, of course, frequently given with the involuntary exaggerations of ignorance and of fear: but at the same time they are usually characterized by sincerity. And in the description of the very remarkable appearance of the shooting stars of the 4th of April 1095, we have the testimony of a great number of independent witnesses in France and England, whose attention was particularly drawn to the phenomenon, from the circumstance of its being concurrent with the Crusade.

I will begin with the account in the SAXON CHRONICLE, which, as far as we can collect, was compiled at Peterborough; and, from their style and narrative, we can scarcely doubt that these venerable annals were the result of notes taken down contemporaneously with the events which they describe.

“1095. In this year Easter fell on the eighth day before the kalends of April; and on the night of the feast of St. Ambrose (that is to say the 2nd before the nones of April) there was seen nearly throughout all the land, and during all the night, manifold stars falling from the heavens: not by one or by two at a time, but so thickly that no man could reckon them.”

FLORENCE of Worcester describes the same appearance more shortly, by stating that on the 2nd of the nones of April, in the night, “stars were seen, as if falling from heaven.”

The Chronicle of the ABBEY of ANJOU states, that “on Wednesday, the 2nd of the nones of April, the moon being twenty-five days old, stars were seen falling like a shower of rain from heaven upon the earth;” an expression of some importance when compared with the remarkable fact which we shall find given by the next authority.

This is SIGEBERT of Gemblours, who states, that “on the 2nd of the nones of April, about daybreak, very many stars were seen to fall at once from the heavens to the ground.” One very large star thus fell in France; and a bystander, having noted the spot, “cast water upon it, which was raised in steam, with a great noise of boiling:” a description leaving no doubt that in this case the star was an aerolite.

The Chronicle of Verdun, by HUGH DE FLAVIGNY, states that “on Wednesday, the day before the nones of April, from the middle of the night until dawning, stars were seen falling.”

The CHRONICLE of RHEIMS, giving the same date, describes the appearance as if all the stars in heaven were driven like dust before the wind; and this continued from cock-crowing until dawn.

ORDERICUS VITALIS, who lived in the monastery of Ouches in Normandy, grounds his narrative upon his own observations and those of GILBERT, Bishop of Lisieux, who professed medicine and astrology, and, as such, was a diligent observer of the courses of the stars. ORDERICUS gives exactly the same date as the other authorities, Wednesday the day before the nones of April; and says that "so many shooting stars were seen, and so thick were they together, that, if they had not shone, they might have been taken for hail." When GILBERT saw the phenomenon, he called up his assistant, WALTHER of Corneilles, and explained to him that it portended the changes and wanderings of nations from kingdom to kingdom; and this was the explanation which the meteors generally received.

With respect to the shooting stars of 1293, they have not the same advantage of a number of witnesses; but our single authority, MATTHEW PARIS, the monk of St. Albans, is clear and precise. "1243. In this year, on the 7th of the Calends of August (26th July), being the 8th day of the new moon," says he, "the air being most pure and calm, so that the milky way was seen as in a clear winter's night, the stars were seen to fall from the heavens, darting this way and that. In one minute thirty or forty were seen to fall, two or three following in one track; so that if they had been true stars, not one would have remained in the heavens."