

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON

CLUB DINNER AT THE CRITERION April 10. 1908 PROFESSOR H. H. TURNER F.R.S. Chairman.

E. B. Knobel Esq. F.R.A.S.

Gentlemen,

I rise to propose the health of my very old friend Mr Grover, whom we are delighted to welcome among us tonight. I was reminding Mr. Grover a few minutes ago, of a course of lectures on Astronomy which I delivered at the Working Men's Institute, Great Ormonde Street more than thirty years ago; and he brought to my mind similar lectures delivered at Dulwich College and at other places, where his skill with the optical lantern considerably helped to my success. We have just listened to his able exposition of the work on the Variable stars which has been carried on for the last twenty five years at the Rousdon Observatory, and the value of which has been spoken of by Prof. Turner, and we sincerely hope that Mr. Grover may have many years of health and strength to still further enrich our science with his valuable observations.

Mr. Grover,

Gentlemen,

I am very much pleased with my kind reception here tonight, though I feel I hardly deserve all the good things said about me by Mr. Knobel, whom I have known a great many years. I think it was in 1872 that I brought to the meetings of this society the model of Knobel's observing chair and Knobel's triangular aperture Astrometer which he invented about that date. I am here tonight by the invitation of Prof. Turner, and this gives me the opportunity of expressing my thanks to this great society for much kind help and encouragement from past and present members during my fifty years as an astronomer.

It is nearly half a century since I began to study astronomy, being then a working brush-maker. (Expressions of surprise). Yes, gentlemen, I began the study of astronomy without either books, instruments or money; but fortunately I came under the notice of some members of the Royal Astronomical Society, and I gratefully remember good old Dr Lee of Hartwell, the Rev Cooper Key, pioneer of the silvered glass reflector, Mr. With, the celebrated maker of specula. Mr. George Knott, the well known double and variable star observer, the Rev T W Webb, and a host of others.

From 1865 onward I wrote many letters and articles in the "Intellectual Observer", "Astronomical Register" and other publications, and in 1869 I was offered a position in the establishment of John Browning the eminent optician. The silvered glass reflector was then coming into favour, and during the next twelve years I had much to do with all the principal instruments of that kind, and became quite an expert in silvering specula.

I was a frequent attendant at the meetings of this society at the little room in Somerset House, the then Secretary being a short little gentleman, Mr. Williams. He was a wonderful Chinese scholar and an authority on ancient Chinese astronomical observations. I think he once read a paper on a great comet which appeared during the flood, and the only authentic observation of which were taken by Noah from the windows of the ark. (Cheers)

At one of the meetings, I think it was in 1873, a very young gentleman read a paper on the lunar theory. He arranged his papers with an air of great assurance, and, after going on at great length, looked down on the grey haired philosophers below him and remarked "I have given great care and labour to this subject with the result that this important research is now nearly complete, and if any gentleman has any remarks to make, I shall be very pleased to hear him".

Now the late Sir George Airey, the then Astronomer Royal, had listened to the young man, and now rose, and in a few well chosen words completely demolished his work, and finished with the remark, "Our young friend has shown great courage, and expended considerable labour, for which he deserves some amount of credit; but so far as I can discover, he has left this great problem exactly where he found it".

Dead silence followed, and the eclipse of the new exponent of the lunar theory was complete.

In the year 1882 I joined the late Sir Cuthbert Peek in his Transit of Venus expedition to Queensland, and, returning to England in 1883, the Rousdon Observatory was at once commenced. Of the twenty five years work there I need not say anything now, only to refer to the sad loss of our distinguished chief in 1901, and to the great encouragement extended to the work during the last few years by Prof. Turner.

Gentlemen, I thank you very much for your kind sentiments expressed here tonight.

(Applause).

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Original transcript by John Grover. (Great grandson)

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