

PROFESSOR PLANTAMOUR

THE daily journals notify the decease on the 7th instant, at Geneva, of Prof. Plantamour, for many years Director of the Observatory and Professor of Astronomy in the University of that city.

Emile Plantamour was born at Geneva in 1815, and received his early education in the old college founded by Calvin. He entered the Geneva Academy in 1833, where he became a pupil of Alfred Gautier, then in the Chair of Astronomy, and on graduating, adopted this science as his profession. He studied two years at Paris under Arago, and subsequently proceeded to Königsberg, where he became a pupil of the illustrious Bessel. His inaugural dissertation was upon the methods of calculating the orbits of comets, and he obtained the degree of Doctor in 1839. He subsequently visited Berlin where Encke was then one of the great masters of astronomical science of the day. On returning to Geneva he was appointed Professor of Astronomy and Director of the Observatory; these positions he continued to occupy nearly up to the time of his decease. The observations made under his direction were published in various parts, commencing in 1843, and related to astronomy, magnetism, and meteorology. He took part in a number of geodetical operations in Switzerland, and was the representative of Geneva on the Swiss Geodesic Commission.

Plantamour was a man of considerable private means, and hence was independent of the very modest salary attaching to his official position. A few years since he presented a 10-inch refractor to the Observatory of Geneva, and a building suitable for it was erected at his expense. This instrument has already done good work in the hands of Dr. Meyer. Plantamour devoted much attention to cometary astronomy, one of his most elaborate investigations being his determination of definitive elements of Mauvais' comet of 1844, which was observed from July 7 in that year, to the middle of March, 1845, and therefore offered a favourable opportunity for the calculation of the true form of orbit. Plantamour's result was a somewhat notable one: after taking into account the effect of the attraction of the planets during the

comet's visibility, he concluded that at the passage through perihelion in October, 1844, the comet was moving in an elliptical orbit with a period of revolution of 102050 ± 3090 years. In 1846 he made extensive calculations bearing upon the motion of the two heads of Biela's comet, the results of which will be found in No. 584 of the *Astronomische Nachrichten*. He further discussed the elements of what was called at the time "Galle's second comet," 1840 II. (*Astron. Nach.*, No. 475-6). In this paper he pointed out some anomalies in the intensity of the comet's light, similar to what has been observed from time to time in other comets.

Plantamour was placed on the list of Associates of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1844; he was a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Institute of France, and honorary member of the Academy of Turin. Few of those colleagues who were at work at the commencement of his astronomical life now remain.