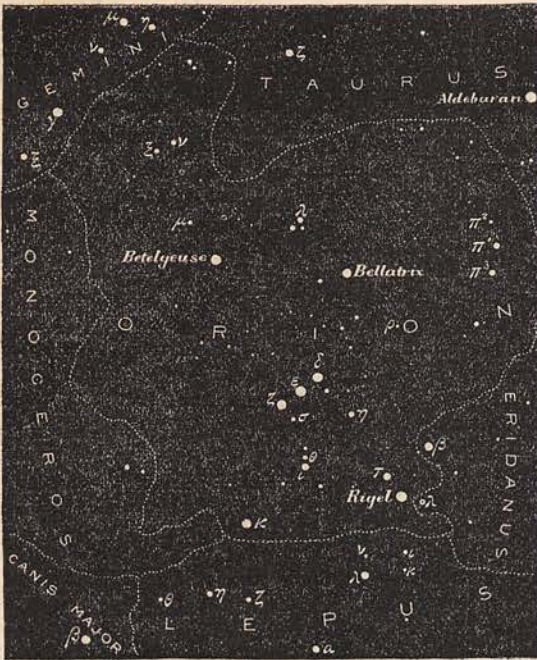


In December, 1868, three of the most brilliant of the planets are visible during the month, either in the morning or evening. Mercury is not in a very favourable position. He rises about an hour and a half before the sun in the first week, after which the interval

6th at 9.34 P.M.; new moon on the 14th at 1.33 A.M.; first quarter on the 22nd at 4.28 A.M.; full moon on the 29th at 1.48 P.M. She is nearest to the earth, or in perigee, on the 4th and 31st, and farthest from the earth, or in apogee, at midnight on the 19th.



MAP OF THE CONSTELLATION ORION.

gradually decreases till the last week in the month, when the planet and sun rise and set nearly together.—Venus is still a morning star, and a conspicuous object in the south-east. She rises on the 1st at 4.9 A.M., and on the 31st at 5.36 A.M. Venus is now passing on towards her superior conjunction with the sun, which takes place on the 9th of May, 1869.—Mars is daily increasing in magnitude and lustre, and is visible throughout the night. He rises on the 1st at 10.4 P.M., on the 15th at 9.30 P.M., and on the 31st at 8.36 P.M. Mars is situated in the constellation Leo near Regulus.—Jupiter is the evening star of the month. He is on the meridian or due south at 7.34 P.M. on the 1st, and at 5.43 P.M. on the 31st. He sets about due west soon after midnight.—Saturn rises and sets nearly with the sun; he is consequently very unfavourably situated for observation, either with the naked eye or through a telescope.—Uranus and Neptune are both in good positions for telescopic observation, the former in Gemini, and the latter in Pisces. Uranus may be seen through a small telescope, but Neptune is of too small a magnitude to be found without the aid of a superior instrument fitted with the necessary graduated circles for the purpose of setting to its exact position in the heavens.

At the beginning of the month the moon is in Gemini. On the 5th she is in Leo, near Regulus and the planet Mars, which on this day is in conjunction with the moon. She is not far from Venus on the morning of the 11th, from Mercury and Saturn on the 13th, from Jupiter on the evening of the 22nd, and from Aldebaran on the 27th. On the evenings of the 16th and 17th, the moon will appear as a fine crescent in the south-west near the horizon. Her principal phases or times of change are as follows:—Last quarter on the

### ON THE ROAD.

BEFORE the days of iron rails and flanged wheels to fit them, before the days of "harnessed fire" and steam whistles, and express trains, I knew a little about travelling. Those who then desired to travel and had no conveyance of their own, were thankful enough to travel "by coach." Travellers were then comparatively few; their journeys were also comparatively few, and far between, and the rate of progress would now be reckoned *decidedly slow*. It was considered a great achievement when a four-horsed coach made the journey between Wolverhampton, Birmingham, and London in twelve hours. The proprietors who first undertook to accomplish this, continually advertised their coach in great black letters as "THE WONDER!" never omitting the note of admiration following the name. "The Wonder" was looked upon as the handsomest "turn-out" on the road. The coach was a pattern of build, spotlessly clean and bright, at least when starting. The guard and the bugle, the coachman, "the ribbons," and "the cattle" were the first of their kind. To see the coach start from the Swan Inn was deemed by "connoisseurs" quite a treat. "The Wonder" was set a-going when I was a schoolboy, and in our school it was held in no small admiration. The boys who admired fine horses and a "fine whip" were wont to steal out, as occasion served, to enjoy the treat of seeing "Dick Evans," as they impertinently called him, drive out of the Swan yard and up the hill. "The Wonder" always started from the yard, passing through a gateway or opening beneath a portion of the inn. The gateway was narrow and its roadway still narrower, being bounded at the junction with the street by two large dumpy blocks of stone, which left but a minimum of spare space beyond the breadth of the wheel track. The street itself was not wide, and ran at right angles with the roadway from the yard, so that a very sharp turn was of necessity demanded to bring the four horses and the coach out of the yard. The performance of this feat with four fresh, spirited animals, and without the slightest help from any man at the horses' heads, never failed to secure applause from certain sporting gentlemen, and certain big and little boys, to say nothing of accidental passengers in the street, and strangers staying at the inn.

I have said "The Wonder" was looked upon as "the handsomest turn-out" on the road. You might have thought so had you seen the start. A pleasant sight it was on a fine clear morning. The bright yellow coach, with its lettering of gold and black, and its wheels picked out with black, always looked as if it had just come from the builder's. The beautiful well-matched horses, with sleek smooth skins, and brilliant jet harness with silver-plated mountings, might have been the envy of a nobleman.

Though the fare was not lower—I think rather higher—than by other coaches, "The Wonder" commanded the preference. It seemed as if the proprietors conferred a favour by booking places, whilst passengers accepted as a privilege the opportunity of getting them. Consequently "The Wonder" was always full, and most exact as to time. The luggage was promptly stowed,

and every passenger was settled in his place before the striking of the clock, the only vacant places being those of the coachman and guard. The guard swung himself to his place behind, and took his bugle from its basket, which hung beside his seat. "Dick," the chief proprietor, a master of his craft, who drove the coach the first stage, came out from the office with all the addition to the appearance of his fine person that tailoring and dress could give. What a smooth silky hat! You might have thought that, like the coach, it must be a new one every morning. What a rich shawl necktie! What a magnificent breast-pin! What a choice flower in the button-hole! What a contrast to certain dingy drivers of to-day! The reins and silver-mounted whip were taken in hand, and "Dick," as if he scarcely touched the steps, sprang to the box-seat, and on the first stroke of the hour the start was made. The skill of the driver was displayed in passing the aforesaid dumpy blocks of stone, deftly turning the angle of the gateway, and bringing his horses into line with the main road, whilst a burst of music broke from the bugle of the guard.

Punctuality was the soul of progress. "The Wonder" did not, whilst in motion, actually get on much faster than other coaches, but the guard strictly kept time, and not a moment was lost by delay. Others were long enough in changing horses to allow passengers to get down and up again; but with "The Wonder" none dismounted. At each stage the horses were kept to their pace till sharply pulled up at the station for the relay. Before the wheels were stayed, the driver unbuckled his bunch of reins, and was prepared on the instant of stopping to throw down two ends on each side. Four men were waiting, each of whom dexterously released a horse, and smartly substituted a fresh one in its place. Every moment thus gained was given to the general progress, and "The Wonder," without much extra wear and tear, accomplished its journey in less time than any of its predecessors, publishing to all thoughtful observers a striking moral on the value of moments. Rival and afterwards companion coaches were put upon the road, and it soon became a matter of course to do the journey in the same time with equal convenience.

In one of these opposition coaches I once had a narrow escape. As we were going down a hill, at the foot of which stood the posting-house, the horses turned restive: the driver lost control of them, and they started off. Thus I got the benefit of the fastest ride I ever had on a turnpike road. On our right side was a path, raised about six or nine inches from the road. I sat behind the coachman at the end of the seat next the foot-path. When we had gone some distance the wheels on that side were drawn up on the pathway for a few yards, and then suddenly came down with a jerk to the level of their fellows, though this level was not long retained. The coach received a swinging motion, so that as the horses furiously tore along it ran alternately on the two wheels to right or left, threatening to fall over, now on this side, and now on that. Towards the foot of the hill, where the ground approached the level, we saw that the road had been raised as an embankment above the adjoining meadows. We observed also that on the right-hand the footpath was without rail of any sort. There was what might be called a sunk fence. At this point the wheels again came upon the pathway; and as it seemed to me looking steadily down, the seat on which I sat was so carried over the edge of the sunk fence that I looked down perpendicularly on the sod in the field. How well I remember instinctively preparing to swing my legs outwards so that I might

come feet first to the ground, though this would probably have been of little use, since other passengers beyond me on the same seat would have most likely crushed me in the fall. Just then, in the critical moment, the top of the coach took its swing towards the left, the horses returned to the middle of the road: and at the next swing to the right, the wheels under me came to the ground with a bounce, and we were saved from falling into the field. Unchecked in speed, the horses still flew onwards, though we were in sight of the posting-house, where four fresh horses standing opposite were waiting for the change. As we passed, the wheel on my side struck the hinder part of one of these waiting horses, who stood diagonally to the course of the road. I saw the poor beast suddenly go down before the stroke, rolling over almost on its back. The collision gave us no small jolt, and yet we were not overset. We had scarcely time to note how the grooms and ostlers stared. They took care to stand clear, and to give us "a wide berth." From the posting-house the ground began to rise, and directly before us lay a long steep hill. From the time of the "bolting" till now, not a word had been spoken, except perhaps by the coachman in his first attempt to check the runaways. As we came to the rise of the hill "coachee" began to swear at the horses, called them by the worst of names, slashed their hides fast and furiously; fiercely wished his "whip wor' strong enough to cut them up to ribbins."

"I'll teach you to run away. *I will!* You've come *nicely* down hill, *you have*, to please yourselves; and *now*" (as the whipcord whistled in the air) "you shall go fast enough up, to please me!"

Never surely were horses so flogged, *secundum artem*, before—hardly one passenger, I am afraid, for the time, giving them a grain of pity.

At what a rate were we whirled up that steep! till at last the stride of the beasts shortened; the pace slackened with a sort of collapse; and no flogging could induce them to "get on." At last we came to a dead stand. The jaded brutes, with a drunken reel, blowing, sweating, steaming, seemed ready to fall against each other.

They were then turned about, driven down the slope again, and this time *easily* brought up at the inn, only too glad to pause at last. Every passenger dismounted the moment the wheels ceased to roll. All breathed freely. What each might feel I cannot say; but I do not remember any distinctive acknowledgment of Providence, or utterance of gratitude. "It was a near chance." "We've had a lucky escape." "What a good job we had no women here."

We found one of the four fresh horses completely disabled. Poor creature!

"You can't go on with *him—that's sure*," said one of them, pointing to the maimed animal.

"He'll ne'er go n'more," said another.

"There's nought for it but to shoot him," ejaculated the landlord.

"He'll be a dead loss to *somebody*," said a calculating passenger.

"It's a wonder ye weren't all spilt," said a bystander.

While coachman, guard, and landlord discussed what was to be done, and whether a substitute could be found for the wounded horse, I thought there would be time to go and look at the embankment and the meadow, where we had so nearly been capsized. On examining the spot, the course of the wheels could be easily traced by a deep rut in the gravel, which abruptly ceased at the edge of the embankment, and was again continued

a yard or two further on, showing that the wheels on that side must have passed over some distance in the air, at the height of at least three feet from the sward below. As I stood and imagined the course of those wheels above the open field, and remembered the opportune swing of the coach in the safe direction at the critical moment, I saw most distinctly the peril of which I had a pretty strong impression in passing it. I shuddered at the remembrance of the possible catastrophe, which when imminent had hardly moved me, and I felt that our deliverance had been marvellous.

I am afraid I had, at the time, no very distinct or devout recognition of Divine Providence, but in after life I have often recalled it with surprise, and felt thankful for this merciful preservation. But for this, I might have been maimed for life, or cut off with short warning.

But it was not my purpose to run off into old recollections, on seeing the picture of the mail at Christmas-time. This is a scene which I once saw on the road. The mail was changing horses at the Red Lion. Like our own coach, the mail was hung round with game of all sorts, sent from country sportsmen to their cockney friends. The hares, with their downy fur, and the birds, with their bright feathers, made a show which it was then thought a sight to see on a Christmas coach. The body of the mail, a fine deep red, strengthened by dark shadows cast from its abundant top fringe of game, contrasted with the neutral luggage; the sombre dress of the passengers, the grey horses just released from the trace-hooks, and the dull surroundings, formed a central mass of well-ordered form and rich warm colour, the more striking to an artist's eye from the winter accessories—a leaden sky, trees feathery with frozen rime, snow-covered roofs, and a snow-clad landscape with dazzling breadths of light borne out by shadows characteristically cold.

#### LIFE-BOAT SERVICES.

WE are unwilling to allow the year to close without reminding our readers of the services and the claims of the Royal National Life-boat Association. We happened this summer to be at Lowestoft on the day of the annual inspection of the life-boats of that port and of the adjacent parish of Pakefield. Besides the trial of the two life-boats, an exhibition of Capt. Manby's rocket apparatus for communicating with ships in distress, and other interesting experiments, formed part of the proceedings. Having made special inquiries as to the services rendered by the Lowestoft and Pakefield boats, it occurs to us that a brief notice of some of these may serve better than any general statistics to exemplify the humane and beneficent work of this noble institution.

On the 7th October, 1858, at eleven a.m., the barque *Zemira*, of Leghorn, with twelve Italians and an English pilot on board, ran aground on the Newcombe Sands, near Lowestoft, the wind blowing a hard gale from the S.W. at the time. The Pakefield boatmen, as soon as possible, launched the life-boat; but the greater part of their number being absent in Lowestoft Harbour, they could not be on the spot immediately; she was, however, afloat in about forty minutes, but the vessel had then broken up and disappeared. The life-boat's crew, nevertheless, determined to search the spot where she had been, with the chance of picking up any of her crew who might have been able to hold on by pieces of the wreck. On crossing the shoal, in a very heavy sea, the whole boat and crew were once completely immersed;

but, nothing daunted, they prosecuted their search, and happily succeeded in picking up eight of the crew floating about on pieces of the wreck at various distances from the spot, the last man picked up being two miles distant from where the main part of the vessel remained. The captain, three of the crew, and the English pilot, unfortunately perished. This service was considered to be altogether of so gallant and praiseworthy a character that the Board of Trade awarded medals to the coxswain and crew; and a considerable collection (£60) was raised by visitors at Lowestoft in testimony of their admiration of it, and given to the crew, who also received the highest scale of payment allowed by the National Life-boat Institution, viz., £2 to each man—10s. each being the ordinary sum for day service in its life-boats.

On the 26th October, 1859, the schooner *Lord Douglas*, of Dundee, parted from her anchors in a heavy gale from the south, and foundered off the village of Corton, on the Suffolk coast. The Lowestoft life-boat proceeded under sail to the spot, and having anchored to windward of the wrecked vessel, the crew of which had lashed themselves to the rigging, succeeded in saving them, five in number, drawing them through the water by lines thrown to them, and landed them safely at Corton.

On the same afternoon the Lowestoft life-boat performed another valuable service. Scarcely had she returned from saving the crew of the *Lord Douglas*, than another schooner, the *Silva*, of Glasgow, drove ashore at Corton, although lying with three anchors ahead. The life-boat had split her foresail in the previous service, but another was borrowed, and she again started on her mission of mercy, which, happily, was crowned with similar success, and the crew of the wrecked schooner were taken off in the same manner. Having split her borrowed foresail, the life-boat was compelled to land on Yarmouth beach, where the shipwrecked men were hospitably received into the Sailors' Home. The life-boat had to be left at Yarmouth until the 28th October.

On the 1st November, 1859, the crew of this valuable and efficient life-boat had another opportunity to distinguish themselves. The screw-steamer *Shanrock*, of Dublin, ran ashore on the above-named day, on the Holm Sand, during a heavy gale from the S.W. The Lowestoft life-boat was launched as soon as possible after the situation of the unfortunate vessel was perceived, and proceeded under sail to the spot, when she anchored, and the crew of fourteen men were with much difficulty hauled into the life-boat by lines thrown to them. The sea was said to be breaking over the mast-heads of the steamer, and repeatedly filled the life-boat. The danger of the service was much increased by the circumstance that a great expanse of shoal water lay close to leeward of the boat, and if her cable had parted, it was considered that the destruction of the boat and her crew might have followed. For this service the life-boat's crew received double the usual payment, or £1 each; and in testimony of admiration for this and previous distinguished services in the life-boat, the following men had, in addition, the silver medal of the institution awarded to them:—Richard Hook, coxswain; Francis Smith, Richard Butcher, Alfred Mewse, Thomas Liffen, James Butcher, and William Rose.

On the night of the 2nd November, 1861, the schooner *Fly*, of Whitby, was in a leaky state, and in danger of foundering near Lowestoft, in a heavy gale from the north. On her making signals of distress, the life-boat of the National Life-boat Institution, at Lowestoft, was launched through a tremendous surf, and proceeded to