



Richard Anthony Proctor

CARICATURES OF MEN OF SCIENCE

by E. C. WATSON

THE BRITISH ASTRONOMER, Richard Anthony Proctor, was a popularizer rather than a creator of astronomical science. His writing excited a wide influence in familiarizing the public with the main facts of astronomy and he was well known as a popular lecturer not only in England but in America and Australia as well.

The caricature of Proctor at the left, and the written account below, appeared in *Vanity Fair* for March 3, 1883, when Proctor was 45 years old. He died in New York five years later, having settled in America in 1881.

“When Mr. Proctor went to Cambridge College over twenty years ago, he had no thought of becoming a prophet. He had learned several languages more or less efficiently, and he had excellent mathematical capabilities. After beating all the best men of his year, and proving that he could be Senior Wrangler if he chose, he grieved the academic heart by deciding not to choose. Rowing and riding seemed to him very much better than thermodynamics and curves as objects of human interest; so he rowed and rode instead of earning the affection of coaches.

“The moral proceedings of Messrs. Overend and

Gurney startled him in the midst of his athletic career, and he saw that the universe contains many things besides outriggers and hacks. Having lost his fortune, he settled down to steady work, and, to beguile the world, he wrote a little treatise on cycloids which is the best thing of its kind ever done by an English mathematician. Eighty people in the world rushed upon this book and bought it; but, so far from being satisfied with this unprecedented appreciation of his years of labour, Mr. Proctor declared that he would have a larger audience. He therefore devoted himself to astronomy, and became the secretary of the Royal Astronomical Society—to the enormous dismay of the fogies.

“He has lectured in America and Australia; he has written innumerable essays of the brightest and clearest kind; he has sketched, modelled, gone into training, started a newspaper, and married an American lady. These feats caused the fogies to esteem him a heterodox.

“At present he is editor of *Knowledge*, and his journal seems to please many people. He is a five-and-forty years of age, he has invented a new theory of the universe, and he is afraid of growing fat.”

One of a series of articles devoted to reproductions of prints, drawings and paintings of interest in the history of science—drawn from the famous collection of E. C. Watson, Professor of Physics and Dean of the Faculty at the California Institute.