

acal light, although the night was already perfectly dark. An hour after sunset it was seen in great brilliancy between Aldebaran and the Pleiades ; and on the 18th of March it attained an altitude of $39^{\circ} 5'$. Narrow elongated clouds are scattered over the beautiful deep azure of the distant horizon, flitting past the zodiacal light as before a golden curtain. Above these, other clouds are from time to time reflecting the most brightly variegated colors. It seems a second sunset. On this side of the vault of heaven the lightness of the night appears to increase almost as much as at the first quarter of the moon. Toward 10 o'clock the zodiacal light generally becomes very faint in this part of the Southern Ocean, and at midnight I have scarcely been able to trace a vestige of it. On the 16th of March, when most strongly luminous, a faint reflection was visible in the east." In our gloomy so-called "temperate" northern zone, the zodiacal light is only distinctly visible in the beginning of Spring, after the evening twilight, in the western part of the sky, and at the close of Autumn, before the dawn of day, above the eastern horizon.

It is difficult to understand how so striking a natural phenomenon should have failed to attract the attention of physicists and astronomers until the middle of the seventeenth century, or how it could have escaped the observation of the Arabian natural philosophers in ancient Bactria, on the Euphrates, and in the south of Spain. Almost equal surprise is excited by the tardiness of observation of the nebulous spots in Andromeda and Orion, first described by Simon Marius and Huygens. The earliest explicit description of the zodiacal light occurs in Childrey's *Britannia Baconica*,* in the year

* "There is another thing which I recommend to the observation of mathematical men, which is, that in February, and for a little before and a little after that month (as I have observed several years together), about six in the evening, when the twilight hath almost deserted the horizon, you shall see a plainly discernible way of the twilight striking up toward the Pleiades, and seeming almost to touch them. It is so observed any clear night, but it is best illac nocte. There is no such way to be observed at any other time of the year (that I can perceive), nor any other way at that time to be perceived darting up elsewhere; and I believe it hath been, and will be constantly visible at that time of the year; but what the cause of it in nature should be, I can not yet imagine, but leave it to future inquiry." (Childrey, *Britannia Baconica*, 1661, p. 183.) This is the first view and a simple description of the phenomenon. (Cassini, *Découverte de la Lumière Céleste qui paroît dans le Zodiaque*, in the *Mém. de l'Acad.*, t. viii., 1730, p. 276. Mairan, *Traité Phys. de l'Aurore Boréale*, 1754, p. 16.) In this remarkable work by Childrey there are to be found (p. 91) very clear accounts of the epochs of maxima and minima diurnal and annual temperatures.