

adopt the children, and form them after his own similitude in body and mind. Thus Minos was a king, under Jupiter; Æneas was beautiful, as born under Venus; and Autolychus a thief, from his father Mercury."

Without extending our remarks upon the universal belief in the influence of the stars, which obtained in the darker ages, it will be evident that the opinion must have been exceedingly injurious to all ignorant people, conforming itself, as it does, to the indolent habits of man, by assuring him that all the circumstances of his life are fixed, independent of the exertions he may make. With such a belief the public mind was prepared to expect some personal result to attend every celestial appearance, and both comets and eclipses were viewed with terror, increased by the ignorance of the nature of the one, and the cause of the other. These feelings, however, are now removed, and we are in possession of information by which we can calculate the paths of the comet, and foretel the appearance of eclipses.

The physical constitution of comets is little better known in the present day than in former times, though the ancients appear to have differed in opinion as to their character. The Peripatetics described them as meteors, while Aristotle, Plutarch, and others, class them among the planetary bodies. "I cannot believe," says Seneca, "that a comet is a fire suddenly kindled, but that it ought to be ranked among the eternal works of nature. A comet has its proper place, and is not easily removed from it; it goes its course and is not extinguished, but moves from our view. But, you will say, if it were a wandering star, it would keep in the zodiac. Yet, who can set one boundary to all the stars? Who can confine the works of divinity to a narrow space? For each of those bodies which you imagine to be the only ones that have motion, have very different circles; why, therefore, may there not be some that have peculiar motions of their own, by which they are caused to recede far from the rest?"

Newton discovered that comets are bodies moving in fixed orbits round the sun. As soon as this philosopher had discovered the laws of universal gravitation, he applied them to the determination of the motion of comets; for having proved that, according to the conditions of that force, a body might describe any conic section about the sun, he conceived that comets, in their apparently irregular motions, might be gov-