

towards the north inclines as much to the east. The exact quantity of this declination I have found, after numerous experiments, to be five degrees. However, this declination is no obstacle to our guidance, because we make the needle itself decline from the true south by nearly one point and a half towards the west. A point, then, contains five degrees." The authenticity of this letter has been doubted, and many arguments have been adduced to justify the skepticism. It is true that no notice was taken of this fact for two centuries after its discovery, and this may appear singular in the present day to those who do not know that even in this age of enlightened benevolence and disinterested zeal discoveries are too frequently estimated by the wealth and influence of the discoverer more than by their intrinsic value. But a graver charge has been pleaded. It is stated that, if the variation had been observed, it would, at the time mentioned, have been directed towards the west instead of the east. This argument is destroyed by another, which has been considered by the same persons as conclusive against the claims of Adsiger to the merit of the discovery. The instruments employed at the time have been thought inadequate for the discovery of the fact; but we might say with greater propriety that the insufficiency of the means accounts for the erroneous results, though the principle itself is true to nature. But it may be farther stated, that men do not usually fabricate for the purpose of deceiving, without having some interested motive. When individuals practise the arts of deception, they are invariably influenced by personal objects; it would be absurd to suppose a man a deceiver for the public good, and it is almost impossible to imagine so violent a misanthropy as that which would be displayed in an attempt to deceive with the purpose of producing a public evil. With these opinions we cannot assent to the supposition, that the letter bearing the name of Peter Adsiger is the work of one who had no other desire than the deception of posterity. If it were possible to imagine a confirmed misanthropist presenting himself to the world for the purpose of stating an important fact, that he might deceive all men as to the date of its discovery, then, indeed, we might agree with the disputants, that the letter in question was unworthy of credence, and that the fact stated was discovered at a period subsequent to the date recorded. But, as we cannot assent to the