


LECTURE III.

ON COMETS.

HE subject of comets, about which I now propose to say something, is one that has of late naturally drawn to it a good deal of inquiry and general interest, by reason of the unusually magnificent spectacles of this description which have within the last few years been exhibited to us.* In itself it is perhaps not one of the best adapted for popular discussion and familiar explanation of this nature, because there are so many things in the history of comets unexplained, and so many wild and extravagant notions in consequence floating about in the minds of even well-informed persons, that the whole subject has rather, in the public mind, that kind of dreamy indefinite interest that attaches to signs and wonders than any distinct, positive, practical bearing. The fact is, that, though much is certainly known about comets, there

* This lecture was delivered on February 14, 1859.