

is a great deal more about which our theories are quite at fault; and, in short, that it is a subject rather calculated to show us the extent of our ignorance than to make us vain of our knowledge, and to cause us to exclaim with Hamlet, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in our philosophy." This; the sublimity of the spectacle they afford; and the universal interest they inspire, make the appearance of a great comet an occasion for the imaginations of men to break loose from all restraint of reason, and luxuriate in the strangest conceptions. I have received letters about the comets of the last few years, enough to make one's hair stand on end at the absurdity of the theories they propose, and at the ignorance of the commonest laws of optics, of motion, of heat, and of general physics they betray in their writers. This is always the case whenever a great comet appears, only that in the later instances one feature of the general commotion of mind they inspire has been wanting. Thanks to the prevalence of juster notions of the constitution of the universe, and of the relation in which man stands to its Author; countries calling themselves civilized appear not to have been disgraced by any of those panic terrors, or thought it necessary to propitiate Heaven by any of those superstitious extravagances, about which we read on several former occasions. Even at Naples, which seems to be almost the lowest point of Europe in the scale of intellectual and social progress, I have not heard that it was thought necessary to liquefy the blood of St Januarius,