

disturbances do really exist, and have often very considerable effects on the return of comets. This very comet, in the table of its returns set down in the note below,* offers some striking examples. There occurs, for instance, 1378 A.D. and not 1380 set down for one of the epochs of its appearance, with 78 years interval between that and 1456. The fact is that Halley was mistaken in supposing either the comet of 1305 or that of 1380 to be the same with that in question. That comet really appeared in 1378, but *that fact Halley had no means of knowing*. It has very lately come to light on searching the Chinese annals. And the same annals have informed us of no less than six other still more ancient appearances of this selfsame comet, the earliest in the 11th year before our Saviour. And this, it must be allowed, greatly tends to increase our confidence in those venerable records of Chinese history. All this apparent irregularity is owing to the action mainly of Jupiter, which is a general disturber of comets, and gives a vast deal of trouble to calculators, as I shall soon explain; and Saturn is not without a finger in the pie.

(23.) This prediction of Halley's, as the time for its accomplishment drew near, created a great sensation—all the astronomers furbished up their telescopes, and all the mathematicians set to work to calculate. The mutual actions of the planets in that long interval had been well studied, and it was clearly ascertained that

* A.D. 451, July 3; 760, June 11; 1378, Nov. 8; 1456, June 8; 1531, Aug. 24; 1607, Oct. 26; 1682, Sept. 14; 1759, March 12; 1835, Nov. 15.