

ground, now on that, attached itself to them, and out of harmless natural phenomena made subjects of wonder and of dread, which in their turn, upon the history of men, have exercised an important, often a terrible and bloody influence. With satisfaction do we to-day give ourselves up to the conviction that, since science has brought to light the true nature of these appearances, a pernicious abuse of them is henceforth no longer possible. And yet we cannot repress a shudder when we think of the unhappy victims which, in former times, must indispensably accompany the appearance of these phenomena.

In all those times in which by the side of faith superstition has been exercising a weighty influence in the world's history, we hear of innumerable *wonders* which are everywhere interrupting the course of nature, considered now as immediate punishments from God, now as portents of dread events to come. Stones are rained from the clouds, demons are at work, graves vomit forth their dead, spectres are seen, caves suddenly open, water changes into blood, portents fiery and otherwise are seen, now in the heavens, now on the earth. The more educated an age, the purer its religious and philosophical conceptions, and rarer will portents be, and they would already have entirely ceased if those minds had ever entirely died out, which, incapable of clear contemplation and keen reason, are on that account, even at this day, all the more predisposed to belief in miracles.

In the eighteenth century, when the strife after enlightenment not infrequently degenerates into superficiality, all those wonders and portents with which the annals of the notoriously superstitious Romans, but above all the chronicles of the middle ages are replete, were summarily classed as pure creations of the imagination, or as gross intentional deception. A deeper and more thorough investigation has, however, since shown *that at the bottom of many so-called portentous appearances there lies in fact a true natural phenomenon*, which in truth does not possess that unusual significance which earlier ages