

CHAPTER V.

COMETS.

The greatest phenomena pass daily before our eyes but we see them so frequently that they come and go unnoticed. The calm serenity of the heavenly bodies, always going regularly about their duties, never erring or changing perceptibly, cause us hardly to think of the magnitude of their labors; nor even of the beauties which they present. When a comet comes intruding its brilliant self into our neighborhood, we are all agog with excitement and even today, begin at once to speculate upon a possible collision or some other catastrophe.

In the middle ages these celestial transients were a source of terror to all spectators. Few had the courage to think rationally about them. It was an age of superstition and we are surprised to find men of learning and genius held captive by the popular beliefs of the day.

A brilliant comet appeared during the year in which Caesar died. The people at once said that it was the visible image of the Dictator's spirit. He had been taken captive by Uranus, they said, and was being carried to the realms of Bliss. He became immortal, escaped from the god, and taking this visible form wended his own way into eternity.