

Meteoric stones are a Myth.

To the Editors of the Geological Magazine.

In the first page of your first number I hailed the words "a wholesome scepticism". In the last page of your last number a passage (notes on meteorites) tempts me again to write under a sceptical heading. Your "notes" allude to two cases of meteoric iron - both problematical. For the first specimen, being supposed terrestrial, is pronounced celestial. The second being supposed celestial is pronounced terrestrial. I take the liberty

to disbelieve that any stone or mass of metal ever fell from heaven to earth.

Humboldt in his Cosmos gives a long dissertation headed "Aerolites", but the dissertation is almost entirely on (so called) shooting stars. Now that there are shooting stars, meteors, and will o' the wisps we may all see oculis fidelibus, but these are tenues curae and not stone or iron. Humboldt says "Shooting stars, fire balls and meteoric stones (as if these all were the same) are, with great probability, regarded as small bodies moving with planetary velocity, and revolving in obedience to the laws of general gravity, in conic sections round the sun. When these masses meet the earth in their course, and are attracted by it they enter within the limits of our atmosphere in a luminous condition, and frequently let fall more or less strongly heated fragments covered with a shining black crust." Ships becalmed attract each other, and may come together. But did a ship "in obedience to the laws of general gravity" ever attract cannon balls out of another? or pots and pans? or any other fragments about as much as our earth ever attracted "fragments" from a meteorite. Anaxagoras

is said to have predicted the fall of the aerolite into Olgos potamos, Humboldt predicts its rediscovery. Because "it would be so difficult to destroy" and "the region in which it fell is now become so easy of access to European travellers". In winding up, Humboldt does indeed express his disbelief that the Heanean lion fell from the moon, and says "Here instead of stones from the moon we have an animal from the moon". But notwithstanding his incredulity here he instantly proceeds pathetically to inveigh against "that arrogant spirit of incredulity which rejects facts" &c. He then enumerates the facts for aerolites. "For more than 2000 years the annals of nations had recorded falls of meteoric stones". "the important part enacted by Betylia in the meteor worship of the ancients". "the fact of the companions of Cortes having seen an aerolite in Cholulca". "Caliphs and Mongolian chiefs had caused swords to be forged from recently fallen meteoric stones" in 1511 a monk was killed by a meteoric stone, in 1550 another and in 1674 two Swedish sailors. These are his facts. They are well worthy of the belief of "Mongolian chiefs" but not of philosophers of the 19th century. Those who think otherwise should act on Humboldt's hint and search Olgos potamos for "the stony star of Anaxagoras". all the evidence

that an aerolite ever fell on earth is unworthy of belief. The argument for it is that the same ingredients are not found similarly mingled in any other substance on earth. If they were it would not be an other substance but the same substance. But does it follow from this that this substance which we find on earth has come from heaven? Every substance which we find on earth must have come from heaven on this argument.

your obedient servant

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