

parent diameter of the Moon, innumerable quantities of shooting stars have, on the other hand, been observed to fall in forms of such extremely small dimensions that they appear only as moving points or *phosphorescent lines*.*

It still remains undetermined whether the many luminous bodies that shoot across the sky may not vary in their nature. On my return from the equinoctial zones, I was impressed with an idea that in the torrid regions of the tropics I had more frequently than in our colder latitudes seen shooting stars fall as if from a height of twelve or fifteen thousand feet; that they were of brighter colors, and left a more brilliant line of light in their track; but this impression was no doubt owing to the greater transparency of the tropical atmosphere,† which

times, according to which, the lights in the firmament were said to undergo a process of *snuffing* or cleaning; and other nations generally adopt a term expressive of a *shot* or *fall* of stars, as the Swedish *stjernfall*, the Italian *stella cadente*, and the English *star shoot*. In the woody district of the Orinoco, on the dreary banks of the Cassiquiare, I heard the natives in the Mission of Vasiva use terms still more inelegant than the German *star snuff*. (*Relation Historique du Voy. aux Régions Equinox.*, t. ii., p. 513.) These same tribes term the pearly drops of dew which cover the beautiful leaves of the heliconia *star spit*. In the Lithuanian mythology, the imagination of the people has embodied its ideas of the nature and signification of falling stars under nobler and more graceful symbols. The Parcæ, *Werpeja*, weave in heaven for the new-born child its thread of fate, attaching each separate thread to a star. When death approaches the person, the thread is rent, and the star wanes and sinks to the earth. Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, 1843, s. 685.

* According to the testimony of Professor Denison Olmsted, of Yale College, New Haven, Connecticut. (See Poggend., *Annalen der Physik*, bd. xxx., s. 194.) Kepler, who excluded fire-balls and shooting stars from the domain of astronomy, because they were, according to his views, "meteors arising from the exhalations of the earth, and blending with the higher ether," expresses himself, however, generally with much caution. He says: "*Stellæ cadentes sunt materia viscida inflammata. Earum aliquæ inter cadendum absumuntur, aliquæ verè in terram cadunt, pondere suo tractæ. Nec est dissimile vero, quasdam conglomeratas esse ex materia fæculentâ, in ipsam auram ætheream immixta: exque ætheris regione, tractu rectilineo, per ærem trajicere, ceu minutos cometas, occultâ causa motus utrorumque.*"—Kepler, *Epit. Astron. Copernicanæ*, t. i., p. 80.

† *Relation Historique*, t. i., p. 80, 213, 527. If in falling stars, as in comets, we distinguish between the head or nucleus and the tail, we shall find that the greater transparency of the atmosphere in tropical climates is evinced in the greater length and brilliancy of the tail which may be observed in those latitudes. The phenomenon is therefore not necessarily more frequent there, because it is oftener seen and continues longer visible. The influence exercised on shooting stars by the character of the atmosphere is shown occasionally even in our temperate zone, and at very small distances apart. Wartmann relates that on the occasion of a November phenomenon at two places lying very near