1736. But Newton was not unknown or despised in France till this time. In 1699 he was admitted one of the very small number of foreign associates of the French Academy of Sciences. Even Fontenelle, who, as we have said, never adopted his opinions, spoke of him in a worthy manner, in the *Eloge* which he composed on the occasion of his death. At a much earlier period too, Fontenelle did homage to his fame. The following passage refers, I presume, to Newton. In the *History* of the Academy for 1708, which is written by the secretary, he says,[10] in referring to the difficulty which the comets occasion in the Cartesian hypothesis: "We might relieve ourselves at once from all the embarrassment which arises from the directions of these motions, by suppressing, as has been done *by one of the greatest geniuses of the age*, all this immense fluid matter, which we commonly suppose between the planets, and conceiving them suspended in a perfect void."

Comets, as the above passage implies, were a kind of artillery which the Cartesian *plenum* could not resist. When it appeared that the paths of such wanderers traversed the vortices in all directions, it was impossible to maintain that these imaginary currents governed the movements of bodies immersed in them; and the mechanism ceased to have any real efficacy. Both these phenomena of comets, and many others, became objects of a stronger and more general interest, in consequence of the controversy between the rival parties; and thus the prevalence of the Cartesian system did not seriously impede the progress of sound knowledge. In some cases, no doubt, it made men unwilling to receive the truth, as in the instance of the deviation of the comets from the zodiacal motion; and again, when Römer discovered that light was not instantaneously propagated. But it encouraged observation and calculation, and thus forwarded the verification and extension of the Newtonian system; of which process we must now consider some of the incidents.

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[10] *Hist. Ac. Sc.* 1708. p. 108.