

## CHAPTER III.

### *ASTRONOMY.*

#### I. THE OLD SACRED THEORY OF THE UNIVERSE.

THE next great series of battles was fought over the relations of the visible heavens to the earth.

In the early Church, in view of the doctrine so prominent in the New Testament, that the earth was soon to be destroyed, and that there were to be "new heavens and a new earth," astronomy, like other branches of science, was generally looked upon as futile. Why study the old heavens and the old earth, when they were so soon to be replaced with something infinitely better? This feeling appears in St. Augustine's famous utterance, "What concern is it to me whether the heavens as a sphere inclose the earth in the middle of the world or overhang it on either side?"

As to the heavenly bodies, theologians looked on them as at best only objects of pious speculation. Regarding their nature the fathers of the Church were divided. Origen, and others with him, thought them living beings possessed of souls, and this belief was mainly based upon the scriptural vision of the morning stars singing together, and upon the beautiful appeal to the "stars and light" in the song of the three children—the *Benedicite*—which the Anglican communion has so wisely retained in its Liturgy.

Other fathers thought the stars abiding-places of the angels, and that stars were moved by angels. The Gnostics thought the stars spiritual beings governed by angels, and appointed not to cause earthly events but to indicate them.

As to the heavens in general, the prevailing view in the Church was based upon the scriptural declarations that a solid vault—a "firmament"—was extended above the earth,

