

REMARKS ON THE PROGRESS OF CELESTIAL
MECHANICS SINCE THE MIDDLE OF THE
CENTURY.

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THE application of mathematics to the solution of the problems presented by the motion of the heavenly bodies has had a larger degree of success than the same application in the case of the other departments of physics. This is probably due to two causes. The principal objects to be treated in the former case are visible every clear night, consequently the questions connected with them received earlier attention; while, in the latter case, the phenomena to be discussed must ofttimes be produced by artificial means in the laboratory; and the discovery of certain classes of them, as, for instance, the property of magnetism, may justly be attributed to accident. A second cause is undoubtedly to be found in the fact that the application of quantitative reasoning to what is usually denominated as physics generally leads to a more difficult department of mathematics than in the case of the motion of the heavenly bodies. In the latter we have but one independent variable, the time; while in the former generally several are present, which makes the difference of having to integrate ordinary differential equations or those which are partial. Thus it happens that, while the science of astro-mechanics is started by Newton, that of thermal conductivity receives its first treatment, at the hands of Fourier, more than a century later. In addition to these two causes, ever since the discovery of the telescope the application of optical means to the discovery of whatever might be found in the heavens has always had a fascination for mankind. And, as the ability to co-ordinate and correlate the facts observed much enhances the enjoyment of scientific occupation, it has resulted that many who began as observers ended as mathematical astronomers. Thus our science has had relatively a large number of cultivators.

A thoroughly satisfactory history of our subject is yet to be written. We have only either slight sketches of the whole, or elaborate treatments of special divisions of the science, and none of them coming down to recent times. Among the former may be mentioned Gautier's *Essai historique sur le pro-*