



Astronomy for Entertainment

Yakov Perelman

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Astronomy is a fortunate science; it needs no embellishments, said the French savant Arago. So fascinating are its achievements that no special effort is needed to attract attention. Nonetheless, the science of the heavens is not only a collection of astonishing revelations and daring theories. Ordinary facts, things that happen, day by day, are its substance. Most laymen have, generally speaking, a rather hazy notion of this prosaic aspect of astronomy. They find it of little interest, for it is indeed hard to concentrate on what is always before the eye.

Everyday happenings in the sky are the contents of this book, free from professional terminology with easy reading. Its purpose is to initiate the reader into the basic facts of astronomy. Ordinary facts with which you may be acquainted are couched here in unexpected paradoxes, or slanted from an odd and unexpected angle solely to excite the imagination and quicken your interest. The daily aspect of the science of the skies, its beginnings, not later findings that mainly form the contents of Astronomy for Entertainment. The purpose of the book is to initiate the reader into the basic facts of astronomy. Ordinary facts with which you may be acquainted are couched here in unexpected paradoxes, or slanted from an odd and unexpected angle. The theme is, as far as possible, free from "terminology" and technical paraphernalia that so often make the reader shy of books on astronomy.

Books on popular science are often rebuked for not being sufficiently serious. In a way the rebuke is just, and support for it can be found (if one has in mind the exact natural sciences) in the tendency to avoid calculations in any shape or form. And yet the reader can really master his subject only by learning how to reckon, even though in a rudimentary fashion. Hence, both in Astronomy for Entertainment and in other books of this series, the author has not attempted to avoid the simplest of calculations. True, he has taken care to present them in an easy form, well within the reach of all who have studied mathematics at school. It is his conviction that these exercises help not only retain the knowledge acquired; they are also a useful introduction to more serious reading.

This book contains chapters relating to the Earth, the Moon, planets, stars and gravitation. The author has concentrated in the main on materials not usually discussed in works of this nature. Subjects omitted in the present book, will, he hopes, be treated in a second volume. The book, it should be said, makes no attempt to analyze in detail the rich content of modern astronomy.

Unfortunately Y. Perelman never wrote the continuation he had planned for this book, as untimely death in warbound Leningrad in 1942 interrupted his labours.

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