

The smaller portions of matter which we have near us, and the larger, which appear as luminaries at a vast distance, different as they are in our mode of conceiving them, obey the same laws of motion; and these laws produce the same results; in both cases motion is perpetually destroyed, except it be repaired by some living power; in both cases the relative rest of the parts of a material system is the conclusion to which its motion tends.

4. It may perhaps appear to some, that this acknowledgment of the tendency of the system to derangement through the action of a resisting medium is inconsistent with the argument which we have drawn in a previous chapter, from the provisions for its stability. In reality, however, the two views are in perfect agreement, so far as our purpose is concerned. The main point which we had to urge, in the consideration of the stability of the system, was, not that it is constructed to last for ever, but that while it lasts, the deviations from its mean condition are very small. It is this property which fits the world for its uses. To maintain either the past or the future eternity of the world, does not appear consistent with physical principles, as it certainly does not fall in with the convictions of the religious man, in whatever way obtained. We conceive that this state of things has had a beginning; we conceive that it will have an end. But in the mean time we find it fitted, by a number of remarkable arrangements, to be the habitation of living creatures. The conditions which secure the stability, and the smallness of the perturbations of the system, are among these provisions. If the eccentricity of the orbit of Venus, or of Jupiter, were much greater than it is, not only might some of the planets, at the close of ages, fall into the sun or fly off into infinite space, but also, in the intermediate time, the earth's orbit might become much more eccentric; the course of the seasons and the average of temperature might vary from what they now are, so as to injure or destroy the whole