

ment, the most trivial operation out of the track of ordinary life. Delambre and Mechain, while laying their surveying chains along the ground, were frequently arrested and imprisoned in the municipal dungeons as "suspects," and became the involuntary victims of the mistrust of a people uneducated in the art of the engineer. Wholly absorbed in their peaceful labours, our two geometers remained strangers to the agitation which raged around them, and which, on more than one occasion, endangered their lives.

Delambre had not yet completed the system of triangulation between Dunkirk and Rodez, when he was excluded from the *Commission du Mètre*, and only obtained permission, as a favour, to finish himself the portion of the work which he had undertaken. Meanwhile, Mechain, arrested at Barcelona owing to the war which had suddenly broken out between France and Spain, determined the latitude of that town, and ascertained that that of Mont Jouy \* was three and a quarter seconds greater than the result he had forwarded to the Académie. This fatal error he durst not divulge, for fear of prejudicing the character of all his calculations, and the secret preying upon his mind, doomed him to a premature death. But when we reflect on the difficult conditions under which Delambre and Mechain pursued their trigonometrical labours—when we consider that they required to devote as much care and caution to the preservation of their lives and liberty as to the conduct of their measurements and angular surveys, we can easily excuse the error which cast a fatal shadow over the last days of the French geometer.

BIOT and ARAGO,† two names of imperishable renown in the annals of science, were entrusted with the responsibility of concluding Mechain's task, and brought it to a successful termination in 1806 to 1808. The reader will probably be familiar with the stirring story of Arago's sufferings; how he was regarded as a spy in the Balearic

\* [A fortified hill, south-west of the town, which commands the harbour.]

† [Jean Baptiste Biot was born at Paris, 21st April 1774; and died 3rd February 1862. His great works are "Traité Élémentaire d'Astronomie Physique" (Paris, 1805); and "Traité de Physique" (Paris, 1816).—Dominique Arago, born at Estagel near Perpignan, 26th February 1786, died 3rd October 1853; will be remembered as the founder of "chromatic polarization," and for his discoveries in electro-magnetism.]