

excellent review of Laplace's 'Mécanique céleste' by Playfair in the 'Edinburgh Review' of 1808.¹ "In the list of the mathematicians and philosophers to whom the science of astronomy for the last sixty or seventy years has been indebted for its improvements, hardly a name from Great Britain falls to be mentioned.² . . . Nothing prevented the mathematicians of England from engaging in the question of the lunar theory, in which the interests of navigation were deeply involved, but the consciousness that in the knowledge of the higher geometry they were not on a footing with their brethren on the Continent. This is the conclusion which unavoidably forces itself upon us. . . . We will venture to say that the number of those in this island who can read the 'Mécanique céleste' with any tolerable facility is small indeed. If we reckon two or three in London and the military

¹ 'Edinburgh Review,' vol. ii. p. 279, &c. John Playfair (1748-1819) was a native of Forfarshire, and Professor of Mathematics, and later of Natural Philosophy, at the University of Edinburgh. "Playfair was struck with the backwardness of the English mathematicians in adopting the results of the Continental analysts. While they boasted of Newton, they were unable to follow him, and the mantle of Newton had indeed passed over to France, where it rested ultimately on the shoulders of Laplace. Playfair accordingly set himself to diffuse among his countrymen a knowledge of the progress which science had been making abroad. This he did in a variety of ways,—by his articles in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' by his papers in the Transactions of learned societies, by his articles in the 'Edinburgh Review,' and by his class-teaching. As David

Gregory introduced the Newtonian philosophy, so Playfair introduced the Continental methods into the studies of the University of Edinburgh" (Sir A. Grant, 'The Story of the University of Edinburgh,' vol. ii. p. 302).

² Playfair here excepts his countryman, Colin Maclaurin (1698-1746), "in whose time the teaching of mathematics at Edinburgh reached a point which it cannot be said to have yet surpassed" (ibid., vol. ii. p. 299; cf. also vol. i. p. 271, where a programme published in 1741 is given of the mathematical and physical lectures at Edinburgh, which surpassed probably at that time the teaching of any other English or Continental university). Playfair might have excepted also Ivory and the Englishman Landen, both of whom were well known among Continental mathematicians.