

# SCIENCE

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PROFESSOR SIMON NEWCOMB AS AN  
ASTRONOMER

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PROFESSOR NEWCOMB has narrated at considerable length the personal incidents of his scientific career in his book "The Reminiscences of an Astronomer," and to that source the reader desirous of knowing them may be referred. Here it is intended to note only the scope and characteristics of his more important contributions to astronomy. While Professor Newcomb wished always to be accounted a mathematician, his work seems motivated by its possible application to astronomy, and no very weighty contribution from his pen has accrued to pure mathematics.

While still an assistant in the office of the American Ephemeris, then at Cambridge, Mass., Professor Newcomb began his career as an astronomer by discussing the question of the origin of the minor planets. Induced by a too great confidence in the law of Bode as to the relations of the mean distances of the major planets, Olbers had ventured to put forward the hypothesis that the minor planets were the fragments resulting from the disruption of a single major planet. This hypothesis necessitated the condition that the orbits of the minor planets at some past epoch must have had a point in common. By computing the secular variations of the elements of the minor planets, Professor Newcomb showed that at no time could this condition have been fulfilled. Thus there was no reason for entertaining the theory of Olbers.

After Professor Newcomb's appointment to a professorship of mathematics in the U. S. Navy and his removal to Washington, he was much engaged with the instruments

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