



Edmond Halley :
Commendatory Poem for
Isaac Newton's *Principia
Mathematica.*

BEHOLD! You grasp the Science of the Pole,
Earth's wondrous Mafs, how poif'd the mighty Whole,
Jove's Reckoning, the Laws, when first he made |
All Things' Beginnings, by his Will obey'd, }
Those the Creator as the World's Foundations laid. |
The fecret Chambers of the conquer'd Skies
Open to View. Hidden no longer lies
What binds the World's Frame, and the constant Force
Which rolls the farthest Planet in his Course.
Sol feated on the Throne commands that all
In Curves tendant to him fhall ever fall,
Nor does he fuffer the remoter Stars
Through the vast Void direct to urge their Cars;

But by Attraction seiz'd the Atoms run
In Gyres predestin'd to the central Sun.
Known now th' Ellipse that horrid *Comets* tread
We fear no more to see the streaming Head;
Hence we discover why her monthly Race
Phæbe performs with so unequal Pace,
And why to no Astronomer subject
Before, when she did Number's Rein reject.
We learn why the four Seasons cycling move,
But, still advancing, th' Equinoxes rove;
With what Pow'r wand'ring *Cynthia* compells
The Ebb and Flow of restless *Ocean's* Swells:
She draws slack Water from the marshy Land,
Then Ships beware the treach'rous shoaling Sand;
When changing Phase her roundest Light restores,
The Waves surge foaming to the furthest Shores.

What often rack'd the ancient Sophist's Brain,
What vex'd the loud-disputing Schools, in vain,
We see as clear before us in the Road,
When *Mathematics* drove away the Cloud.
No longer doubting in the Mists we stray;
Genius' high Summit grants to us the Way

To reach the bleffed Gods' Abodes and pierce
The lofty Limits of the Univerfe.

Mortals arife! Put earthly Cares behind
And know the Pow'rs of the heav'n-born Mind!
That Mind, whose Nature is fo far preferr'd
Above the mute Life of the grazing Herd.
Who Murder, Theft, and Perjury did caufe
To ceafe by the Commands of publick Laws,
Who wand'ring Peoples taught no more to roam,
But fettle, and build Walls about their Home,
Who blefs'd Mankind with Gift of *Ceres*' Grain,
Or from the Grape preff'd Remedy for Pain,
Or who th' Employment first of *Nile*'s Reed found,
To write, and fhew the eyes a painted Sound,
Thefe lefs raif'd human Life: for they but fought
Few Things to eafe th' unhappy mortal Lot.
We banquet with the Gods, permitted now
The Poles' Laws, the fixt Scheme of Things to know.
The Secrets funk in dark Earth are reveal'd,
And what paff Ages of the World conceal'd.

The Man who fhows fuch Wonders, help me praife,
You who with Nectar pafs your carelefs Days,

NEWTON unlocking Truth's clofe-fasten'd Chest,
NEWTON dear to the Muse, in whose pure Breast
Phæbus is present, and whose Mind inspires
With all of his divine, prophetic Fires.
Sing him, ye Muses, for Right can approve,
No Mortal nearer touch the Gods above.



(Translated by Otto Steinmayer. For John Herington.)

Additional note: My former advisor and good friend John Herington, Professor of Greek at Yale University, suggested in 1982 that I make this translation, and I have not substantially revised it since. A few of the mathematical expressions which Halley was skilled enough to render in Latin verse may not be translated with perfect accuracy. What I here translated as “seasons” and “equinoxes” (lines 22-23) are in the original Latin *nodi* and *auges*. *Nodi* does indeed mean “the points where the seasons begin,” (Lewis and Short cite Manilius 3.618); *auges* I could not find in any lexicon. At last I came across it in an old article on some point of Arabic astrology; but the context was obscure and my translation remained a guess. I. Bernard Cohen, Anne Whitman, and Julia Budenz, in their magnificent new translation of the *Principia* (Berkeley, 1999) render the same line—

Why the nodes regress, and why the upper apsides move forward.

I defer to Cohen's, Whitman's, and Budenz's superior scholarship; my poem here is old and I am reluctant to tinker with it, so I offer it to the reader here with this *caveat*.

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