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Sir William Cecil Dampier  
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A SHORTER HISTORY  
OF  
SCIENCE

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Plate I

ISAAC NEWTON

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A SHORTER HISTORY  
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SCIENCE

BY

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## PREFACE

The speed with which three editions of my larger book—*A History of Science and its Relations with Philosophy and Religion*—have been called for shows that many men are interested in the subjects with which it deals. Some, however, have found the philosophic part difficult to read, and have asked for a straightforward story of the growth of science reduced to its simplest terms.

It is impossible to ignore altogether the connexion of science with other activities, but description can, if we will, be confined to the more direct impacts. The Greek Atomists, besides speculating on the structure of matter, developed therefrom a mechanical theory of life. Conversely, the philosophy of Plato, as modified by Aristotle, laid too much stress on innate ideas and logical deduction to make a favourable background for the beginnings of inductive experimental science. To Newton and his immediate followers the Heavens declared the Glory of God, but Newton's work produced a very different effect on the minds of Voltaire and other eighteenth-century sceptics. Darwin's revival of the old theory of evolution on the new basis of natural selection not only suggested an alternative origin for mankind, but spread evolutionary doctrine far beyond the limits of biology. The recent revolution in physics has shaken the evidence for philosophic determinism which the older synthesis seemed to require. Such broad effects must be noticed, but the more technical aspects of philosophy may be passed by.

In writing this 'Shorter History', I have had two objects: firstly, to help the general reader, who wishes to know how science, which now affects his life so profoundly, reached its present predominance, and secondly, to meet the needs of schools. Those older schoolboys whose chief subjects are scientific should look at them also from a humanist standpoint, and realize their setting in other modes of thought, while those studying literature need some knowledge of science before they can be said to be well educated. For both groups, I believe that the history of science, the story of man's attempts to understand the

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*PREFACE*

mysterious world in which he finds himself, makes the best way of approach to common ground. Moreover, an opinion is growing that early specialization is dangerous, an opinion which leads to a desire to give even scholarship candidates a well-balanced education. I hope that this little book may be useful to schoolmasters who share my views, and lead many readers to study its longer prototype.

I wish to thank those who have allowed me to use their illustrations, and the Cambridge University Press for making publication possible in war-time. I must also thank my sister, Miss Dampier, for helping in the tedious work of preparing the index.

W. C. D.

*December* 1943