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Book Notice

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This work by the famous British mathematician and natural philosopher is a much augmented and modernized version of his previous book on the same topic published in 1910. It covers the history of the aether theories of light from Descartes to the beginning of the 20th century. The new development of the theory of light and electricity which we owe to Einstein since 1905, and to quantum dynamics since the 1930's is to be covered in a second volume by the same author which, for the present day reader, will prove of even greater interest. The efforts of more than two centuries devoted to a rational theory of the aether today look but like the overture to a drama unfolded during our own lifetime, and Whittaker's representation does not lack dramatic suspense. It is unfortunate that most professional physicists whose training would enable them to appreciate a work such as Whittaker's, tend to postpone their historical studies until a time when they themselves, like Sir Edmund, will be free of professional duties, whereas non-specialists interested in the historical development of scientific ideas will have some difficulty in following the detailed course of development from vague and generalized hypotheses to far-reaching and consistent theories reported in this monumental work.

*Alfred Landé*