

The speculations of Wright had been purely geometrical. He had drawn attention to the apparent unity of organisation in the stellar system, as established by the accumulation of stars in a certain belt, popularly called "the milky way." He also suggested that the whole system was moving in a certain direction. Kant pointed out the analogy with the solar system, in which, viewed from the centre, the planetary masses would likewise appear situated in a narrow belt, moving all in the same direction. From these data he proceeds to show how, taking for granted an initial movement and the action of gravitation, the formation of rings, like those of Saturn, can be explained; further, how these might be broken up and concentrated in satellites. In fact, he recognised how, under the influence of gravitation, the solar system might have been gradually formed out of matter which was previously scattered through the whole of that space which the system still occupies. Kant also descended somewhat further into detail, and proceeded to discuss the possible retardation of the earth's rotation through tidal friction.¹

¹ The tract in which Kant develops his views on this subject was occasioned by a prize offered by the Berlin Academy in 1754 for an answer to the question whether the time of revolution of the earth had suffered any retardation, and if so, through what causes? Kant did not compete for the prize, deeming his reflections not capable of being sufficiently perfected to deserve to be submitted. So he simply published them in a local Königsberg paper, from which they were later reprinted in the collected works, forming one of the first of Kant's

publications. At the end of this tract he announces his 'Cosmogonie' which appeared the following year with the title 'Natural History of the Heavens,' &c. Kant had the satisfaction of seeing many of his speculations verified by the subsequent discoveries of inductive research, notably through Sir William Herschel's observations of nebulae; and the German edition of Herschel's great memoir 'On the Construction of the Heavens' ('Phil. Trans.,' 1784), which appeared in Königsberg in 1791, by Sommer, contains an extract from Kant's