

# Theory of the Earth's Gravity Field

*Miloš Pick*

*Jan Pícha*

*Vincenc Vyskočil*

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OF SCIENCES

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GRAVITY FIELD

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# CONTENTS

Contents . . . . .	5
Preface . . . . .	13

## I. Introduction

by Jan Pícha

1. Gravimetry and Its Purpose. . . . .	15
2. A Short History of Gravimetry . . . . .	17

## II. Newton's Theory of Potential

by Miloš Pick

1. Introduction . . . . .	19
2. Attraction of Point Masses . . . . .	20
3. Volume Potential . . . . .	20
4. The First Derivative of the Volume Potential . . . . .	21
5. The Second Derivative of the Volume Potential . . . . .	22
6. Gauss's Formula . . . . .	23
7. Volume Potential at Improper Points (Infinitely Distant) . . . . .	24
8. Properties of the Volume Potential. . . . .	25
9. Surface Potentials . . . . .	25
10. Potential of a Double Layer . . . . .	26
11. Continuity of the Potential of a Double Layer. . . . .	27
12. The Normal Derivative of the Double-Layer Potential . . . . .	29
13. Potential of a Single Layer . . . . .	29
14. The Normal Derivative of the Potential of a Single Layer . . . . .	30
15. Properties of the Potential of a Single and a Double Layer (Review of Results). . . . .	33
16. Potential of the Centrifugal Force . . . . .	34
17. Chasles's Theorem. . . . .	35
*18. Physical Interpretation of Green's Second Theorem . . . . .	36

## III. Potential of Some Simple Formations, Approximate in Shape to the Figure of the Earth

by Miloš Pick

1. Potential of a Homogeneous Spherical Layer and Its Derivatives . . . . .	37
2. The Homogeneous Sphere . . . . .	38
3. Potential of a Homogeneous Triaxial Ellipsoid and Its First Derivatives for an Internal Point . . . . .	39

4. First Derivatives of the Potential and the Potential of a Homogeneous Triaxial Ellipsoid for an External Point . . . . .	42
5. Potential of a Homogeneous Rotational Ellipsoid and Its First Derivatives . . . . .	43
6. Potential of a Rotating Equipotential Rotational Ellipsoid Using the Solution of the First Boundary Problem . . . . .	45
7. Gravity of an Equipotential Ellipsoid . . . . .	47
8. Equilibrium Bodies . . . . .	50
9. An Ellipsoid as an Equilibrium Body . . . . .	50
10. Maclaurin's Ellipsoids . . . . .	51
11. Jacobi's Ellipsoids . . . . .	53
12. The Relation Between the Maclaurin and Jacobi Ellipsoids . . . . .	53
*13. Roche's Model . . . . .	55
14. Clairaut's Problem . . . . .	55
*15. Further Treatment of the Clairaut Theorem . . . . .	56
16. Variation of the Attracting Force with Depth (Saiey's Theorem) . . . . .	57
17. Gravity Potential of a Rotating Body, Approximate in Shape to the Figure of the Earth . . . . .	58
18. Clairaut's Theorem . . . . .	60
19. Gravity Potential of a Rotating Body . . . . .	60
20. Normal Spheroids . . . . .	63
21. Normal Gravity for Some Reference Ellipsoids . . . . .	67
22. Potential of a Homogeneous Spheroid . . . . .	68
*23. Convergence of Series for the Potential of a Triaxial Ellipsoid . . . . .	69
*24. Development of the Potential Into a Series According to Wavre . . . . .	70
25. Stokes's Theorem . . . . .	73
*26. Poincaré's Equation, Crudelli's Conditions . . . . .	74

#### IV. Equipotential Surfaces. Reductions

by Miloš Pick

1. Equipotential Surfaces . . . . .	77
2. Bruns's Equation . . . . .	80
3. The Plumb Line Curvature . . . . .	81
4. Variation of Gravity on the Rotational Ellipsoid with Height Above Sea Level . . . . .	84
5. Gravity Reduction in General . . . . .	85
6. The Faye Reduction . . . . .	87
7. The Bouguer Reduction . . . . .	87
8. Computation of the Gravity Topographic Correction . . . . .	89
9. Topographic Corrections. Determination of the Effect of the Inner Region . . . . .	93
10. The Rudzki Reduction . . . . .	96
11. The Prey Reduction . . . . .	98
12. Isostatic Reduction . . . . .	98
13. The Graaff-Hunter Reduction (Model Earth) . . . . .	101
14. Substitution of the External Gravity Field by the Potential of a Single Layer, Spread Over the Surface of the Sea . . . . .	102
15. Determination of the Figure of the Earth from the First Derivatives of the Gravity Potential . . . . .	104
16. Properties of the Disturbing Potential . . . . .	108

## V. Absolute Gravity Measurements

by Jan Pícha

1. Measurements of the Gravitational Constant . . . . .	110
2. Absolute Measurements of the Acceleration of Gravity . . . . .	113

## VI. Relative Measurements of the Acceleration of Gravity

by Jan Pícha

1. Relative Gravity Measurements with Pendulum Instruments . . . . .	120
1.1. Measurement of the Oscillation Period. . . . .	121
1.2. Corrections of the Oscillation Period . . . . .	124
a) Correction for the Clock Rate . . . . .	124
b) Correction for the Effect of the Medium Surrounding the Pendulum (Correction in Respect of Vacuum) . . . . .	124
c) Temperature Corrections . . . . .	126
d) Correction for an Infinitely Small Amplitude . . . . .	128
e) Correction for the Co-oscillation of the Stand . . . . .	130
f) Effect of the Pendulum Blade Camber . . . . .	132
g) Effect of the Geomagnetic Field . . . . .	134
1.3. Pendulum Instruments . . . . .	136
2. Statical Methods of Relative Gravity Measurements . . . . .	139
2.1. General Properties and the Theory of Gravimeters . . . . .	139
a) Calibration of Gravimeter by Adding a Weight . . . . .	147
b) Tilt Calibration . . . . .	147
c) Calibration of Gravimeter by Measuring at Points with Known Values of the Acceleration of Gravity . . . . .	148
2.2. Description of Some Types of Gravimeters . . . . .	148
a) Gravimeters with Metal Springs . . . . .	149
b) Quartz Non-astatic Gravimeters . . . . .	155
c) Quartz Astatic Gravimeters . . . . .	160
d) On the Methods of Measuring with Static Gravimeters . . . . .	163
2.3. Gravity Measurements at Sea . . . . .	165
2.4. Gravity Measurements in Aircraft . . . . .	168
2.5. Gravity Measurements Under Water and in Borholes . . . . .	170

## VII. Measurements of the Second Derivatives of the Gravity Potential . . . . . 171

by Jan Pícha

## VIII. Some Comments on the Anomalous Gravity Field

by Vincenc Vyskočil

1. Definition of a Gravity Anomaly . . . . .	179
2. Gravity Anomalies and the Investigation of the Structure of the Earth's Crust . .	180
2.1 Gravity Anomalies Used in Applied Geophysics . . . . .	180
2.2. On the Properties of Some Types of Anomalies . . . . .	182
3. Graphical Representation of the Anomalous Gravity Field . . . . .	185
4. Accuracy of Gravity Anomalies and of Gravity Maps . . . . .	187



4.1. Accuracy of Gravity Anomalies at Observation Points . . . . .	187
4.2. Theoretical Analysis of the Accuracy of Interpolated Values of Gravity Anomalies . . . . .	188
4.3. Accuracy of the Difference Between Gravity Anomalies at Two Points . . . . .	191
4.4. Estimate of the Accuracy of a Gravity Map. . . . .	192

## IX. Gravimetry and the Internal Structure of the Earth

by Vincenc Vyskočil

1. The Internal Structure of the Earth . . . . .	195
2. Some Physical Properties of the Earth's Body . . . . .	197
2.1. Density Inside the Earth . . . . .	197
2.2. Gravity, Pressure and Flattening of Equipotential Surfaces Inside the Earth . . . . .	201
3. Density of Rocks of the Earth's Crust . . . . .	203
*3.1. Fundamental Terms . . . . .	203
*3.2. Determination of Density by Weighing Rock Samples . . . . .	204
*3.3. Density Derived from Gravity Measurements . . . . .	206
*3.4. Densities of Most Common Rocks. . . . .	209
4. The Earth's Crust . . . . .	212
5. Correlation Between Gravity Anomalies, Elevations Above Sea Level and Depths of the Mohorovičić Discontinuity . . . . .	214
5.1. Fundamental Terms . . . . .	214
5.2. Correlation Between Gravity Anomalies $\Delta g$ and Elevations $h$ . . . . .	217
5.3. Isostasy and Correlation Between Gravity Anomalies $\Delta g$ , Elevations $h$ and Depths of the Mohorovičić Discontinuity $H$ . . . . .	219
6. General Principles of the Geological Interpretation of Gravity Anomalies . . . . .	223
7. Application of the Gravimetric Method to Surveying Deposits of Usable Raw Materials . . . . .	224

## X. The Geoid

by Miloš Pick

A. The Geoid of a Regularized Earth . . . . .	226
1. A Regularized Earth . . . . .	226
2. Theory of the Regularized Geoid . . . . .	228
3. Stokes's Formula for an External Point . . . . .	230
*4. Pizzetti's Formula . . . . .	233
*5. Stokes's Formula for an External Point (cont.) . . . . .	234
*6. Stokes's Formula Derived by Solving the Third Boundary Problem . . . . .	234
*7. Malkin's Integral Equation . . . . .	236
*8. Determination of the Height of the Geoid (Summary of Results) . . . . .	237
*9. Idelson's Integral Equation . . . . .	239
*10. Molodenskii's, Malkin's and Monin's Integral Equations . . . . .	241
*11. Poincaré's Series . . . . .	247
*12. Stokes's Formula Without Using the Normal Gravity . . . . .	248
*13. Determination of the Figure of the Geoid with an Accuracy to Small Quantities of the First Order . . . . .	251
*14. Limiting the Effect of the Influence of Distant Zones on the Height of the Geoid . . . . .	252
*15. Potential and Mass of the Geoid . . . . .	254

16. Practical Application of the Stokes's Formula . . . . .	255
17. Deviations of the Plumb Line . . . . .	257
18. Vening Meinesz's Formulae . . . . .	258
19. Adjustment of Vening Meinesz's Formulae for Near Zones . . . . .	262
20. Practical Application of Vening Meinesz's Formulae . . . . .	264
21. Auxiliary Functions Necessary for Determining the Regularized Geoid . . . . .	268
22. Determination of the Position of the Reference Body Relative to the Real Earth . . . . .	271
*23. Influence of the Choice of the Normal Body on the Height of the Geoid and on the Deviations of the Plumb Line . . . . .	272
*24. Influence of the Choice of the Geodetic System on the Height of the Geoid and on the Deviations of the Plumb Line . . . . .	274
25. The Mean Value of Normal Gravity . . . . .	277
*26. The Figure of the Regularized Geoid Computed from Horizontal Gradients of Gravity . . . . .	279
27. Determination of the Mean Value of a Gravity Anomaly . . . . .	280
<b>B. Theory of the Unregularized Geoid . . . . .</b>	<b>282</b>
28. The Unregularized Geoid . . . . .	282
*29. Moiseev's Determination of the Shape of the Unregularized Geoid . . . . .	284
*30. Malkin's Determination of the Shape of the Unregularized Geoid . . . . .	286
*31. Molodenskii's Determination of the Shape of the Unregularized Geoid . . . . .	288
*32. General Integral Equation for the Disturbing Potential of the Regularized and the Unregularized Earth . . . . .	289
 <b>XI. Determination of the Figure of the Earth Without Considering Hypotheses About Its Internal Composition</b> by Miloš Pick	
1. Determining the Figure of the Real Earth Generally . . . . .	293
2. Heights Above Sea Level . . . . .	294
*3. Molodenskii's Quasigeoid . . . . .	299
4. Solution of the Molodenskii's Equation by Successive Approximations (Second Method) . . . . .	303
*5. Modification of the Molodenskii's Method . . . . .	308
*6. The Integro-differential Equation of Molodenskii for $\zeta$ . . . . .	309
*7. The Linear Integral Equation for $T$ . . . . .	311
*8. The Mean Square Value of the Deflection of the Vertical for the Earth . . . . .	312
*9. Computation of the Vertical Gradient of a Gravity Anomaly . . . . .	313
*10. Bjerhammar's Method . . . . .	315
*11. Generalization of the Theory of Normal Heights . . . . .	317
*12. Determination of the Figure of the Earth by Means of the Second Vertical Gradients of the Disturbing Potential . . . . .	321
 <b>XII. Time Variations of the Gravity Field</b> by Jan Pícha	
1. Causes of Variations of Gravity with Time . . . . .	323
2. Tidal Potential and Tidal Acceleration . . . . .	325
*3. Static Tides on the Surface of an Absolutely Solid Earth . . . . .	328

4. Oscillations of the Vertical Due to the Action of Tidal Forces on the Surface of an Absolutely Solid Earth . . . . .	331
5. Notation of Tidal Waves . . . . .	336

### **XIII. Observations of Tides of the Earth's Crust**

by Jan Pícha

1. Introductory Comments and the Theory of the Horizontal Pendulum . . . . .	338
1.1. Direct, Indirect and Secondary Effects. Love's Constants . . . . .	343
2. Instruments for Tidal Measurements . . . . .	345
2.1. The Quartz Horizontal Pendulum of Verbaandert and Melchior . . . . .	345
2.2. The Photoelectric Ostrovskii Tiltmeter . . . . .	346
2.3. The Lettau Horizontal Double Pendulum . . . . .	348
2.4. The Vertical Pendulum for Tidal Measurements . . . . .	348
3. Installation of Tiltmeter Sets . . . . .	350
4. Measurements of Azimuths . . . . .	352
5. Determination of the Sensitivity of Horizontal Pendula . . . . .	358
6. Errors due to Instruments and to the Recording Equipment . . . . .	366
7. Processing of Tidal Observations . . . . .	369

### **XIV. Fundamental Mathematical Principles of Gravimetric Interpretation**

by Vincenc Vyskočil

1. General Comments . . . . .	372
2. Separation of the "Regional" and "Local" Components of the Anomalous Gravity Field . . . . .	373
2.1. Review of Methods . . . . .	373
2.2. The "Mean Value" Method . . . . .	374
*2.3. Expression of the Regional Field by a Mathematically Definable Surface . . . . .	375
*2.4. Transformation of the Anomalous Gravity Field to a Certain Height Above the Earth's Surface . . . . .	376
*2.5. Stressing the Effect of Anomalous Masses at Small Depths by Means of the Vertical Gravity Gradient . . . . .	377
*2.6. The "Second Derivative" Method . . . . .	378
2.7. Concluding Remarks . . . . .	382
3. Initial Formulae for Gravimetric Interpretation . . . . .	383
4. Direct and Inverse Gravimetric Problems for Simple Gravitating Bodies . . . . .	387
4.1. A Sphere . . . . .	387
4.2. A "Two-dimensional" Cylinder and a Material Straight Line . . . . .	390
*4.3. "Two-dimensional" Prisms, Oblique and Vertical Steps . . . . .	392
*4.4. An Infinitely Long, Horizontal, Material Plane Belt . . . . .	395
*4.5. A Right Parallelepiped . . . . .	398
5. Gravitating Bodies of Irregular Shape . . . . .	400
5.1. The Direct Problem . . . . .	400
5.2. Determination of the Total Mass and of the Coordinates of the Centre of Mass of a Gravitating Body . . . . .	402
*5.3. Estimate of the Depth of the Upper Boundary of a Gravitating Body . . . . .	406

6. Shape of the Density Interface Determined from the Anomalous Gravity Field . . . . .	410
6.1. Shape of the Interface Determined Along a Profile with Boreholes . . . . .	410
6.2. Investigation of the Shape of the Bed of a Sedimentary Basin Without Reference Boreholes . . . . .	411
6.3. Condensation of Anomalous Masses Bound to a Density Interface Into a Horizontal Plane . . . . .	411
7. Computation of Subsurface Anomalies (Analytical Continuation Downward) . . . . .	414
7.1. Principle of the Method . . . . .	414
7.2. Computation of a Subsurface Anomaly by Means of a Taylor Development . . . . .	415
7.3. The Method of Finite Differences (Method of Nets) . . . . .	416
*7.4. The Method of Computing Subsurface Anomalies by Means of a Development Into a Fourier Series . . . . .	417
*8. Shape of the Mohorovičić Discontinuity Determined from the Various Characteristics of the Outer Gravity Field (by M. Pick) . . . . .	422
9. Some Comments on the Quantitative Interpretation of Gravity Anomalies . . . . .	424

## **XV. Substitution of the Earth's Body by a Reference Surface**

by Miloš Pick

1. Representation of a Part of an Ellipsoid on Another by the Translation Method . . . . .	425
2. Transformation from One Reference Surface to Another by Projection Along the Normal to the Former Surface (Projection Method) . . . . .	426
3. Longitudinal Distortion in the Projection Method . . . . .	429
4. Deflections of the Vertical and the Laplace Equation . . . . .	430
5. Relations Between Deflections of the Vertical and the Geographic Coordinates . . . . .	434
6. Determination of Six Degrees of Freedom of a Reference Body . . . . .	436
7. Transformation of Cartesian Coordinates into Geodetic Coordinates . . . . .	437

## **XVI. Astronomical and Astrogravimetric Levelling**

by Miloš Pick

1. Astronomical Levelling (a General Treatment) . . . . .	439
2. Astrogravimetric Levelling (a General Treatment) . . . . .	441
3. Molodenskii's Astrogravimetric Levelling . . . . .	443
4. Molodenskii's Elliptical Transparency . . . . .	447
5. Other Methods of Evaluating the Fundamental Equation of Astrogravimetric Levelling . . . . .	450
6. Astronomical and Astrogravimetric Levelling in Czechoslovakia . . . . .	452

## **Appendix**

by Miloš Pick

1. Auxiliary Mathematical Relations . . . . .	453
2. On Some Types of Improper Integrals . . . . .	454
3. The $r$ -function . . . . .	455
4. Spherical Inversion of a Function . . . . .	457
5. The Harmonic Function . . . . .	458
6. Gauss's Theorem . . . . .	459

7. Gauss's Integral . . . . .	460
*8. Curvilinear Orthogonal Coordinate Systems in Space. . . . .	461
*9. Molodenskii's Operators . . . . .	462
10. Laplace's Expression . . . . .	464
11. Green's Theorem . . . . .	466
12. Orthogonality of Functions . . . . .	468
13. Spherical Functions . . . . .	468
14. Series for the Function $1/r$ . . . . .	470
15. Development of the Function $Y(\theta, \varphi)$ Into a Series of Spherical Functions . . . .	471
*16. Solution of the Laplace's Equation for a Sphere . . . . .	472
*17. Sum of Series of Spherical Functions. . . . .	473
18. Sums of Certain Series of Spherical Functions (Review of Results). . . . .	476
*19. Boundary Problems in General . . . . .	479
*20. Green's Function . . . . .	480
*21. Properties of Green's Function $G_1$ . . . . .	482
*22. Green's Function for a Sphere . . . . .	482
*23. Potential of an Inhomogeneous Spherical Layer . . . . .	485
*24. Potential of an Inhomogeneous Spherical Double Layer . . . . .	487
*25. Solution of the Dirichlet's Problem for a Sphere Using Surface Integrals . . . .	488
*26. The Second Boundary Problem (Neumann's Problem) . . . . .	489
*27. Neumann's Functions for a Sphere (Internal Problem) . . . . .	491
*28. Neumann's Function (External Problem) . . . . .	493
*29. Solution of Neumann's Problem for a Sphere Using Spherical Functions . . . .	493
*30. The Third Boundary Problem for a Sphere . . . . .	495
*31. Integral Equations. . . . .	496
*32. The Application of Integral Equations to the Solution of Boundary Problems (Summary of Results) . . . . .	498
References . . . . .	501
Author Index . . . . .	523
Subject Index . . . . .	528

## PREFACE

*This book is intended to be a textbook for university students studying geophysics and geodesy. However, it can also serve as a suitable aid to specialists and students of related branches of science (geology, astronomy, physics, etc.).*

*The contents were chosen with a view to the subject matter of university lectures in this field. In order to avoid excessive length, the contents of some of the chapters had to be restricted, and the book is particularly oriented to the problems of physical geodesy. Other trends in gravimetric research, e.g., the problems of applied gravimetry, are only outlined. However, the authors tried to give the reader a good general survey of gravimetry, the relevant methods of research, and of its applications. In order to help the reader who only wishes to acquire an overall picture of gravimetry, the more sophisticated sections of the book are marked with an asterisk. These sections may be omitted when the book is read for the first time.*

*As a background for some of the mathematically more difficult parts of the book, an appendix is included with a review of the necessary mathematical theorems and formulae. The appendix is intended only for this purpose and, therefore, only the relations used in this book are included. It was not the intention of the authors to present a comprehensive summary of the equations of mathematical physics.*

*Having studied the relevant chapters of the book, the reader should be able to draw on the monographs recommended in the list of references and other books and specialized papers, expanding his knowledge accordingly.*

*The book is divided into chapters, denoted by Roman numerals, followed by the appendix, and individual chapters are subdivided into sections. Equations are numbered consecutively in the whole book.*

*The authors are aware that like any book of this type, the present publication is not and cannot be perfect and complete. A constant stream of new scientific papers is being turned out, and it can easily happen that by the time the book is published, some of the data will be outdated, or some of the ideas and concepts disproved. Should the reader find any mistakes in the text, the authors would appreciate hearing about them.*

*The authors would like to thank the scientific editor of this book, Prof. T. Kolbenheyer, PhD., Academician of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, and also the reviewer, Prof. E. Buchar, PhD., Corresponding Member of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, for their efforts in reading and studying the manuscript, and for their valu-*

*able comments. They would also like to express their gratitude to K. Pěč, PhD., J. Kašpar, PhD., and P. Velkoborský, PhD., for carefully reading the manuscript. Some parts of the book were also discussed with M. I. Yurkina and V. F. Ereemeev.*

M. Pick, J. Pícha, V. Vyskočil

Prague, August 1970

# I. INTRODUCTION

## 1. Gravimetry and Its Purpose

Geophysics, like geology, geodesy, geography and geochemistry, ranks among the sciences dealing with the earth. Broadly defined, geophysics deals with and investigates physical phenomena and properties of the whole earth or of its more extensive regions. Certain branches of geophysics, in its broader sense, have now become independent sciences, *e.g.*, the physics of the atmosphere (meteorology), the science of continental waters (hydrology), the physics of the seas and oceans (oceanography), and the science of glaciers (glaciology).

In this work the authors will consider geophysics in the narrower sense of the word, *i.e.*, the physics of the solid part of the earth's body, in particular the lithosphere. Geophysics narrowly defined, is concerned with bodies of water and the gaseous shell only to the extent that these influence problems pertaining to the whole earth.

Geophysics is further subdivided into such areas as gravimetry (the science of the earth's gravity field), geomagnetism (the science of the earth's magnetism), seismology (the science of earthquakes and related phenomena), geoelectricity (the science of the earth's electricity), radiometry (the science of the earth's radioactivity), and research into the ionosphere (*i.e.*, the region of the earth's atmosphere above about 60 km, in which the ions and electrons are of substantial physical significance). Gravimetry is thus a subdivision of geophysics.

Gravimetry as an independent scientific branch began to evolve only at the end of the last century. However, its roots go back to the times of those celebrated pioneers of classical mechanics, G. Galileo and I. Newton (16th and 18th centuries). A number of outstanding 18th and 19th century scientists (*e.g.*, A. C. Clairaut, G. Stokes, H. Bruns and F. R. Helmert) worked on various fundamental gravimetric problems concerned in particular with the application of the theory of potential to research into the earth's body. Nevertheless, the term gravimetry (from the Latin *gravis* = heavy and the Greek *metrein* = to measure) only became established in science in the 20th century. The name is not quite accurate and it does not fully express the tasks of this branch of geophysics. The gravimetrist not only must measure gravity, search for new methods of measurement and construct gravimetric instruments, but he must also solve many other fundamental gravimetric problems theoretically and practically.

Among the most important problems of contemporary gravimetry is the study of the figure and the dimensions of the earth's body (the geoid and its external gravity



field). This is also related to determining the correct constants in the formula derived theoretically for the normal distribution of the acceleration of gravity over the earth's body, and to the explanation of the anomalies of the actual gravity field of the earth with respect to the theoretical field. Since the distribution of the real field of gravity over the surface of the earth is closely connected with the structure and composition of the whole earth's body, especially with its crust, the results of gravimetric surveys contribute to a great extent to knowledge in this area.

It is known that numerous geotectonic movements, which sometimes change the physical face of the earth's surface considerably, are generated and take place in the earth's crust. It follows that the earth's crust is not in equilibrium. Treatment of the important problem of the equilibrium of the earth's crust (the problem of isostasy) is another significant gravimetric task.

The earth's crust is also acted upon by attracting forces due to the masses of celestial bodies, of which the moon and the sun have the largest effects. These disturbing forces result in periodical movements of the earth's crust called the tides of the solid crust. Similarly, the same forces act on the seas and oceans, creating sea tides (generally known as flood and ebb), and on the gaseous shell of the earth causing atmospheric tides. In this way, small changes in the magnitude and direction of the acceleration of gravity which can be observed by very sensitive instruments, take place.

Apart from these periodic changes there remains the unsolved problem of the secular changes of the acceleration of gravity which may be due to various geotectonic or geochemical processes in the earth or to a very slow variation of the flattening of the earth, etc.

Of great economic importance is the problem of applying gravimetry to surveying and investigating deposits of useful minerals and raw materials, *e.g.*, various ores, coal, oil, salt and ceramic materials. This requires a constant search for and thorough elaboration of suitable new methods of measuring and interpreting data.

From this list of some of the more important gravimetric problems it can be seen that gravimetry is closely related to geodesy and geology. As compared with geodesy which uses geometric methods to investigate the figure of the earth, gravimetry employs physical methods for the same problem. Geology uses applied gravimetry in the investigation of the geological structure of the upper parts of the earth's crust, and gravimetric methods are employed in prospecting. Besides being interrelated with other branches of geophysics, gravimetry is also intimately connected with physics, mathematics, astronomy and other related sciences.