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In 1876 the South Kensington Museum held a major international exhibition of scientific instruments and equipment, both historical and contemporary. Many of the items eventually formed the basis of collections now held at London's Science Museum. In May 1876, organisers arranged a series of conferences at which leading British and European scientists explained and demonstrated some of the items on display. The purpose was to emphasise the exhibition's goal not merely to preserve archaic treasures (such as Galileo's telescopes or Janssen's microscope) but to juxtapose them with current technology and so inspire future scientific developments. Volume 1 of the proceedings is devoted to physics and mechanics. The contributors include William Thomson (Baron Kelvin), John Tyndall, Francis Galton, James Clerk Maxwell, J. A. Froude and Thomas Stevenson, all of whom have other works reissued in the Cambridge Library Collection, which also includes the full catalogue of the exhibition itself.

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