



## Spinning tops (The romance of science)

*John Perry*

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Excerpt: ...92 Fig. 41. 93 and the fifth e is empty (Fig. 41). You see that if I twist these suspending wires and release them, a vibratory motion is set up, just like that of the balance of a watch. Observe that the glass with water vibrates quickly, its effective moment of inertia being merely that of the glass itself, and you see that the time of swing is pretty much the same as that of the empty glass; that is, the water does not seem to move with the glass. Observe that the vibration goes on for a fairly long time. The glass with sand vibrates slowly; here there is great moment of inertia, as the sand and glass behave like one rigid body, and again the vibration goes on for a long time. In the oil and treacle, however, there are longer periods of vibration than in the case of the water or empty glass, and less than would be the case if the vibrating bodies were all rigid, but the vibrations are stilled more rapidly because of friction. Boiled (f) and unboiled (g) eggs suspended from wires in the same way will exhibit the same differences in the behaviour of bodies, one of which is rigid and the other liquid inside; you see how much slower an oscillation the boiled has than the unboiled. Even on the table here it is easy to show the difference between boiled and unboiled eggs. 94 Roll them both; you see that one of them stops much sooner than the other; it is the unboiled one that stops sooner, because of its internal friction. I must ask you to observe carefully the following very distinctive test of whether an egg is boiled or not. I roll the egg or spin it, and then place my finger on it just for an instant; long enough to stop the motion of the shell. You see that the boiled egg had quite finished its motion, but the unboiled egg's shell alone was stopped; the liquid inside goes on moving, and now renews the motion of the shell when I take my finger away. It was argued that if the earth were fluid inside, the effective moment of inertia of the shell...

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