

ceived with great applause. Mr. Whiston neither doubted of the truth of the deluge, nor of the authenticity of the sacred writings. But, as physics and astronomy occupied his principal attention, he mistook passages of holy writ for physical facts, and for results of astronomical observations; and so strangely jumbled divinity with human science, that he has given birth to the most extraordinary system that perhaps ever did or ever will appear.

## P R O O F S

OF THE

## THEORY OF THE EARTH.

## ARTICLE III.

*Of Burnet's Theory\*.*

MR. BURNET is the first author who discovered enlarged views of the present subject, and who treated of it in a systematic manner. He was a man of genius and of taste: His work acquired great reputation, and was of course, criticised by many of the learned, and, among others, by Mr. Keill, who scrutinizing the subject as a geometer, demonstrated the errors of Burnet's theory in a treatise entitled, *An examination of the Theory of the Earth*. Mr. Keill likewise refuted the system of Whiston; but he treated the latter in a manner very different from the former. He even appears, in many

\* Thomas Burnet. *Telluris theoria sacra, orbis nostri originem et mutationes generales, quas aut jam subiit, aut olim subiturus est, complectens.* Londini 1681.

particulars,

particulars, to adopt the opinions of Whiston; and considers the notion, that the deluge was occasioned by the tail of a comet as exceedingly probable. But, to return to Burnet: His book is written with elegance. He knows how to paint the grandest images and the most magnificent scenes. His plan is elevated; but, being defective in proper materials, he often fails in the execution. His reasonings and his proofs are feeble; but the boldness with which he writes makes the reader lose sight of all his imperfections.

He begins with alleging, that the earth, before the deluge, was very different from what it is now. It was at first, says he, a fluid mass, composed of matters of every species, and of all kinds of figures, the heaviest of which descended to the centre, and formed a hard and solid body. The waters took their station round this body; and all lighter fluids rose above the water. Thus, between the coat of air, and that of water, a coat of oily matter was interposed. But, as the air was then full of impurities, and contained great quantities of earthy particles, these gradually subsided upon the coat or stratum of oil, and formed a crust composed of earth and oil: This crust was the first habitable part of the earth, and the first abode of man and other animals. The land thus formed was light, fat, and adapted to cherish the tenderness of the original germs. The surface of the earth was level  
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and uniform, without mountains, seas, or other inequalities. But it remained in this state about sixteen centuries only; for the heat of the sun gradually drying the crust, produced, at first, superficial fissures or cracks only; but, in process of time, these fissures penetrated deeper, and increased so much in their dimensions, that, at last, they entirely perforated the crust. In an instant, the whole earth split in pieces, and fell into the great abyss of waters which it formerly surrounded. This wonderful event was the universal deluge.

But all these masses of earth, in falling into the abyss, carried along with them vast quantities of air, and they dashed against each other, and accumulated and divided so irregularly, that great cavities filled with air were left between them. The waters gradually opened passages into these cavities, and, in proportion as the cavities were filled with the water, the surface of the earth began to discover itself in the most elevated places; and, at last, the waters appeared no where but in those extensive valleys which contain the ocean. Thus our ocean is a part of the ancient abyss; the rest of it remains in the internal cavities, with which the sea has still a communication. Islands and sea-rocks are the small fragments, and continents are the large masses of the ancient crust. As both the rupture and fall of this crust were effected in a sudden and confused manner, it is not surprising that  
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the surface of the present earth should be full of mountains, gulfs, plains, and irregularities of every kind.

This specimen is sufficient to give an idea of Burnet's system. It is an elegant romance, a book which may be read for amusement, but cannot convey any instruction. The author was ignorant of the chief phenomena of the earth, and a man of no observation. He has drawn every thing from imagination, which often acts both against truth and reason.

# P R O O F S

OF THE

## THEORY OF THE EARTH.

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### ARTICLE IV.

*Of the System of Woodward\*.*

OF this author it may be said, that he wanted to build an immense edifice upon a foundation less firm than sand, and to construct a world with dust; for, he asserts, that the earth, at the time of the deluge, suffered a total dissolution. In perusing his book, the first idea which presents itself is, that this dissolution was effected by the waters of the great abyss. He alleges, that, at the command of God, the abyss suddenly opened, and diffused such an enormous quantity of water on the surface, as was sufficient to cover the tops of the highest mountains; and

\* An Essay towards the Natural History of the Earth, by John Woodward.