

James Hutton, the author of the famous *Theory of the Earth*, was the son of a merchant, and was born in Edinburgh on 3rd June 1726. He received an excellent education at the High School and University of his native city. His strong bent for chemical science induced him to select medicine as a profession. He studied at Edinburgh, Paris, and Leyden, and took his degree at Leyden in 1749, but on his return to Scotland he did not follow out his profession. Having inherited an estate in Berwickshire from his father, he went to reside there, and interested himself in agriculture and in chemical and geological pursuits. The success of an industrial undertaking in which he had a share afforded him ample means, and in 1768 he retired to Edinburgh, where he lived with his three sisters. He actively engaged in scientific inquiry, and enjoyed the cultured social intercourse open to him in Edinburgh. The literary fruits of his life in the country include several papers on meteorology and agriculture, and a large philosophical work.

From his early days he had always taken a delight in studying the surface forms and rocks of the earth's crust, and had lost no opportunity of extending his geological knowledge during frequent journeys in Scotland, England, in Northern France, and the Netherlands. On his tours into the neighbourhood of Edinburgh he was often accompanied by his friends, who realised the originality of many of Hutton's views on geological subjects, and begged him to put them into writing. At last Hutton set himself to the work of shaping his ideas into a coherent, comprehensive form, and in 1785 read his paper on the "Theory of the Earth" before the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Three years later it was published in the *Transactions*.

The publication of the work attracted little favourable notice. This may have been due partly to the title, which was the same as that of so many valueless publications, and partly to the involved, unattractive style of writing; in larger measure, however, it was due to the fact that the learning of the schools had no part in Hutton's work. Hutton's thoughts had been borne in upon him direct from nature; for the best part of his life he had conned them, tossed them in his mind, tested them, and sought repeated confirmation in nature before he had even begun to fix them in written words, or cared to think of anything but his own enjoyment of them.