

Probably no man realised then that this essay would afterwards be regarded as marking a turning-point in the history of geology. For some years it remained without attracting notice from friend or foe.¹

For this neglect various causes have been assigned. The title of the Memoir was perhaps unfortunate. The words "Theory of the Earth" suggested still another repetition of the endless speculations as to the origin of things, of which men had grown weary. System after system of this kind of speculation had been proposed and had dropped into oblivion; and no doubt many of his contemporaries believed Hutton's "Theory" to be one of the same ill-fated brood. His friend Playfair admits that there were reasons in the construction of the Memoir itself why it should not have made its way more speedily into notice. Its contents were too condensed, and contained too little explanation of the grounds of the reasoning. Its style was apt to be prolix and obscure. It appeared, too, in the *Transactions* of a learned society which had only recently been founded, and whose publications were hardly yet known to the general world of science.

¹ It does not appear to be generally known that Desmarest, departing from his usual practice of not noticing the work of living writers, wrote a long and careful notice of Hutton's Memoir of 1785 in the first volume of his *Géographie Physique*, published in 1794-1795. He disagrees with many of Hutton's views, such, for instance, as that of the igneous origin of granite. But he generously insists on the value of the observations with which the Scottish writer had enriched the natural history of the earth and the physical geography of Scotland. "It is to Scotland," he says, "that Hutton's opponent must go to amend his results and substitute for them a more rational explanation" (p. 750).