

from the air and water than the earth, it happens that when they perish, they return to the earth more than they have taken from it. Besides, forests collect the rain water, and by stopping the vapours increase their moisture; so in a wood which is preserved a long time, the stratum of earth which serves for vegetation increases considerably. But animals restoring less to the earth than they take from it, and men making enormous consumption of wood and plants for fire, and other uses, it follows that the vegetable soil of inhabited countries must diminish, and become, in time, like the soil of Arabia Petrea, and other eastern provinces, which, in fact, are the most ancient inhabited countries, where only sand and salt are now to be met with; for the fixed salts of plants and animals remain, whereas all the other parts volatilise, and are transported by the air.

Let us now examine the position and formation of the interior strata: the earth, says Woodward, appears in places that have been dug, composed of strata placed one on the other, as so many sediments which necessarily fell to the bottom of the water; the deepest strata are generally the thickest, and those above the thinnest, and so gradually lessening to
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