

appealed to if anybody ventured to doubt the possibility of our being able to carry back our researches to the creation of the present order of things.”¹ Hutton destroyed these characters, which were considered by many as sacred, and declared that in the economy of the world he could find “no traces of a beginning nor signs of an end.” And yet, as Lyell has shown, his principles were only imperfectly carried through, for though he maintained that “the strata which now compose our continents have once been beneath the sea, and were formed out of the waste of pre-existing continents,”² he imagined that when the decay of old continents had furnished the material for new ones these were upheaved by violent and paroxysmal convulsions. He therefore required “alternate periods of general disturbance and repose, and such he believed had been and would for ever be the courses of nature.”³ A strange mixture of the genetic and cyclical views of natural phenomena! Professor Huxley⁴ has explained these seeming inconsistencies in the theory of Hutton, whom, together with Sir Charles Lyell, he has described as having founded the “uniformitarian” school of geology, by the influence which the discoveries of physical astronomy, brought out at that time by Laplace and his contemporaries, had upon Hutton. Thus Hutton writes: “From seeing revolutions of the planets, it is concluded that there is a system by which they are intended to continue those revolutions. But if the succession of worlds

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Hutton.

¹ See Lyell, ‘Principles,’ 3rd ed vol. i. pp. 90, 91.

² Ibid., p. 89. ³ Lyell, p. 92.

⁴ Huxley, on “Geological Re-

form,” quotes largely from Hutton’s ‘Theory of the Earth’ (1758) and Playfair’s ‘Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory’ (1802).