

**Letter from William Byrd, Lincoln's Inn, London, to Dr. John Woodward, 1697
August 14: autograph manuscript signed. Transcription by Early Modern
Manuscripts Online (EMMO). MS X.c.50, Folger Shakespeare Library,
Washington, DC.**

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No. 52.

Mr Byrd 14 Aug 97.

To Dr Woodward

These

Mr Byrd. Aug. 14. 97

About the Notions of the Americans in

Virginia Concerning the universal

Deluge, Dissolution of the Earth. &c.

Dr Woodward

According to your desire I have here sent you the Indian account of the manner how shells & other marine bodies came to be repositied in the bowels of the Earth, and at great distance from their original habitation. And indeed if your quarrelsome adversaries did but know it, they might with equal probability assert that you pillaged some part of your Book from the Indians as well as from the Ancients. Their notions concerning that matter are not very disagreeable, as appears by the following Instance. An Indian priest came one day to an Englishman's house, that happened at that time to be sinking of a well, & amongst other things he threw up several shells which seemed to be the Spolia of some fish, & asked the Indian how it came about that they should straggle so far from their proper Element, and be lodged so deep in the Earth? I admire says the Indian that you should be an English man & not know that, I'll tell you presently how it came to pass. And so taking a Pail, and having put into it a little dirt, he filled it up with water, now you must know a multitude of years ago (says he) there happened a terrible Deluge that drowned all the world except an old man & his wife, (& then with a stick stirring the dirt and water together) thus says he by the means of some violent convulsion was the Earth and the water jumbled together, and when that ceased the Earth presently subsided and all shells & other heavy Bodies sunk down along with it, & each took its place according to their its gravity. And these shells which you dug up, have lain where you found them out of harm's way, ever since. This remarkable story I had from a minister who was told it by the man himself that was digging the well, so that there's a great deal of reason to believe 'tis true. And so much I can say upon my own knowledge that many of them have a tradition of a Deluge. but I must confess I never received from any of them such extraordinary Instance of Indian Philosophy as this I have here mentioned. I am very truly

Doctor Your humble Servant

William Byrd

Lincoln's Inn the 14th of August 97

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