

**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 B[y]rd 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 bodys came to be repositid
in *the* bowels of the Earth, and at great distance from their originall habitation.
And indeed if your quarrelsome adversarys did but know it, they might with
equal probability assert that you pillag'd some part of your Book from *the*
Indians as well as from *the* Ancients. Their notions conc[er]ning that matter are
not very disagreeable, as appears by the following Instance. An Indian priest
came one day to an Englishmans house, *that* happend at *that* time to be sinking
of a well, & amongst other things he threw up several shels *which* seemd to be
the Spolia of some fish, & askt *the* Indian how it came about that they shou'd
straggle so far from their proper Element, and be lodg'd so deep in *the* Earth?
I admire says *the* Indian *that* you shou'd be an English man & not know that,
I'll tell you presently how it came to pass. And so takeing a Paile, and haveing
put into it a little dirt, he fill'd it up with water, now you must know a
multitude of years ago (says he) there happen'd 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 wase
the Earth and *the* water jumbled together, and when that ceas'd *the* Earth presently
subsided and all shells & other heavy Bodys 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 ^{em} out of harms 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 theres a great deale of reason to believe 'tis true. And so much I
can say upon my own knowledge that many of 'em have a tradition of a Deluge.
but I must confess I neuer recieud from any of em such extraordinary Instance
of Indian Philosophy as this I haue here mentiond. I am very truly

Dr Your humble Servant

William Byrd

Lincoln In *the* 14th of August 97

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