

**A LETTER CONCERNING
EARTHQUAKES, WRITTEN
IN THE YEAR 1693**

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A Letter Concerning Earthquakes, Written in the Year 1693 by John Flamsteed

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JOHN FLAMSTEED

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H 6 No. 5

A

LETTER

CONCERNING

EARTHQUAKES,

Written in the Year 1693,

By the late celebrated Astronomer,

Mr. JOHN FLAMSTEED, Math. Reg. F. R. S.

TO A

GENTLEMAN then residing at *Turin* in *Savoy*,

On Occasion of

The Destruction of *Catanea*, and many other
Cities, Towns and Villages, in *Sicily*, in the
Year 1692.

L O N D O N :

Printed for A. MILLAR, opposite *Catbarine-street*
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Regent L. L. Hubbard

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Advertisement.

THE late Earthquakes having occasioned several Attempts to account for the natural Causes of a Phenomenon so extraordinary in itself, and so unusual in this Part of the World, the Curious will probably thank me for giving them this Opportunity of seeing the late famous Mr. FLAMSTEED'S Sentiments on that interesting Subject. The Historical Circumstances which he has collected will, I imagine, prove generally entertaining: But I need say no more in Recommendation of this Piece, than to assure the Reader that it is genuine, and printed from a Copy taken under the Author's Eye, and by him sent inclosed in the following Letter to a Friend.

The Observatory, *May 1, 1693:*

“ **Y**OU will easily pardon the Faults of the inclosed Copy of my Letter concerning Earthquakes when I have told you 'tis your Niece's Hand, and her first Performance of this Kind: The last Paragraph she would needs omit, as not material, tho' I thought it most so, because I thereby covenant with my Friends not to suffer any Copy of it to be conveyed to the Press; foreseeing it would draw a troublesome Tribe of Objectors upon me, who would never be satisfied so

A. 2

“ long

“ long as they could wield a Pen, and engage me to
“ give them Answers; tho’ my whole Time is too
“ little for the Work on my Hands, which I would
“ not have intermitted, and have therefore resolv’d
“ that if any Copy of it do find its way to the Press,
“ and draw Objections on me, I will not be oblig’d
“ to take any Notice of them. I shall be in Town,
“ God willing, on *Wednesday* Morning next, and
“ then wait on you to settle the real Concern which
“ was but just mention’d at our last Meeting.

I am, Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

JOHN FLAMSTEED.

T O

Mr. Charles Chamberlaine, Merchant,

at his House in *Leaden-Hall*

Street,

LONDON.



A

LETTER

Concerning the

NATURAL CAUSES

O F

EARTHQUAKES.

Royal Observatory at *Greenwich*, April 10, 1693.

S I R,



THE Account you have sent your Friends of the late dreadful *Sicilian* Concussions, are, like those of an Historian, large and particular enough as to the Damages done by them to that at present unhappy Island. I could wish they had been accompanied with Particulars of the State of the Air before, at, and immediately after them; or such other Circumstances, as by the Sequel of

B

this

this Letter you find remarkable in Earthquakes.

For, not many Years since, discoursing with some ingenious Merchants who had liv'd long at *Smyrna* (where they happen more frequently than with us) they acquainted me with several Circumstances attending them; which seem'd also to intimate, that the Earth itself was not at all moved, excepting near those Places where Noises were heard under Ground, and Eruptions happened, such as we hear of now from *Sicily*, and lately had Accounts of from *Jamaica*, where a like dreadful Earthquake happen'd the first of *June* last. A Sea Captain, my Neighbour Captain *Guy*, was ashore in that Island when it began; and his Relations confirm all that was told me by our *Smyrna* Merchants. *September* the 8th last, we had a small Earthquake here, and I have since met with a Book of *Keckerman's*, concerning such another that happen'd just 91 Years before, *September* the 8th. 1601. at two a Clock in the Morning. From hence, and from the Relations I had from those who felt the above-mentioned, I have gathered the following Circumstances of Earthquakes. What I have deduced from them will, perhaps, appear strange to you, at first; but when you have consider'd of it, I am apt to believe you will not think it wholly unreasonable. The Circumstances are these.

I. That Earthquakes always happen in calm Seasons. This *Keckerman* affirms, and backs

it with the Consent of *Aristotle* and *Pliny*. The 8th Day of *September* last, was a very calm Day here, but cloudy. My Sea Captain, who was ashore at *Jamaica* when the Earthquake began, and the printed Relations agree, that it was a calm, clear Day there as could be; and our *Smyrna* Merchants say, that theirs always happen in calm, still Weather.

II. That a small, hollow Noise in the Air always precedes them, so near (see the Account of another, *Philosophical Transactions*, Numb. 151. Page 311.) that it rather seems to accompany them. This Noise was heard by many that lived in the out Streets and Alleys of *London*, remote from the Noise and Tumults of the greater Streets. *September* the 8th last, my Servant, who sat alone in the Kitchen, heard it plainly; and feeling the Shocks attending it, knew it to be an Earthquake, having heard the like Noise in an Earthquake that happened at *Endon* in *Staffordshire*, and in many Places of *Cheeshire*, six or seven Years before, and about the same Time of the Year.

III. That they are felt at Sea as well as on Land. Our Merchants say, that though the Waters in the Bay of *Smyrna* lie level and smooth as a Pond, yet Ships riding there feel the Shocks very sensibly, but in a very different Manner from the Houses at Land; for they heave not, but they tremble, their Masts shiver as if they would fall to pieces, and their Guns start in their Carriages, tho' the Surface of the Sea lie all the Time calm and unmov'd. In