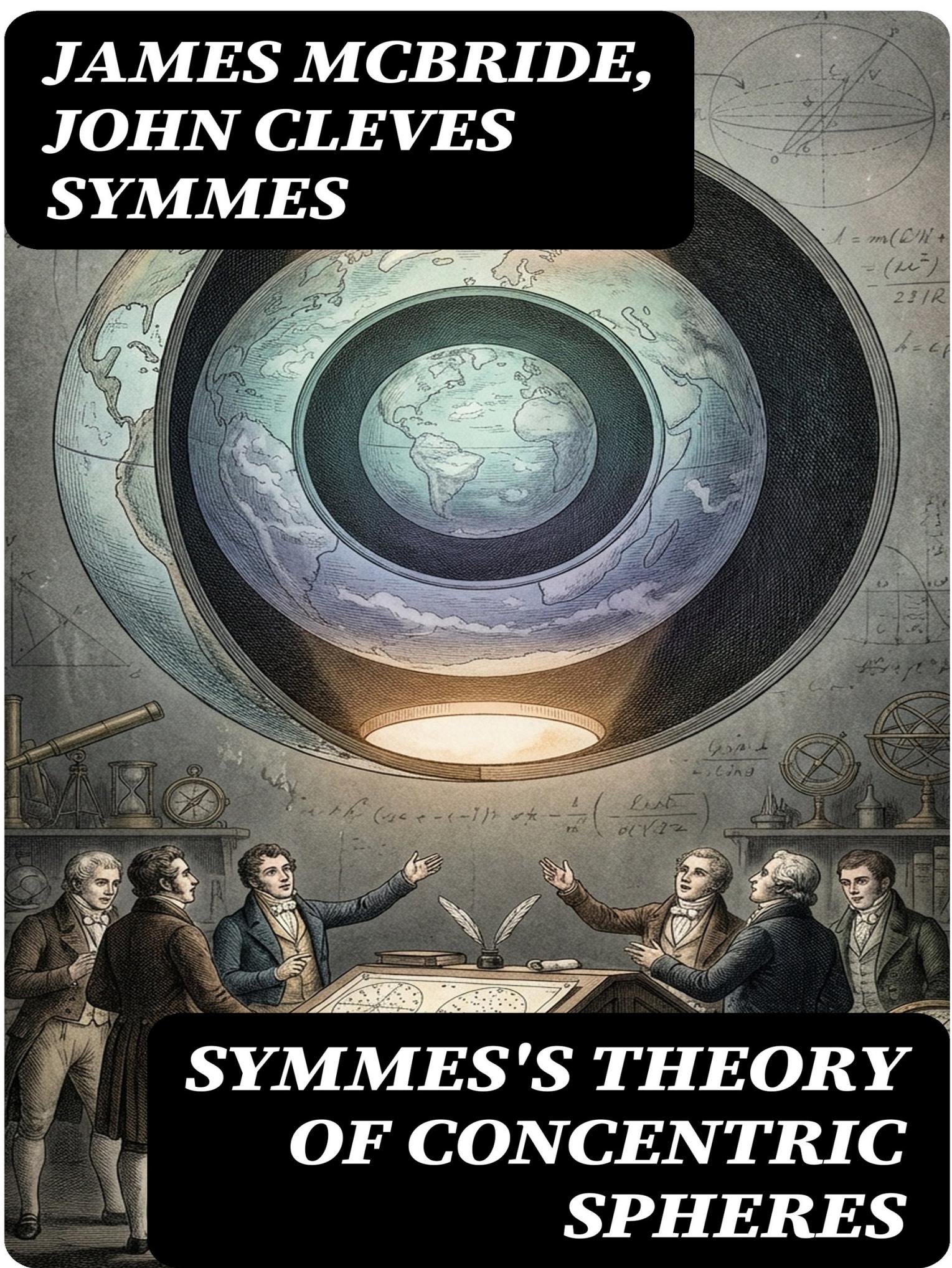
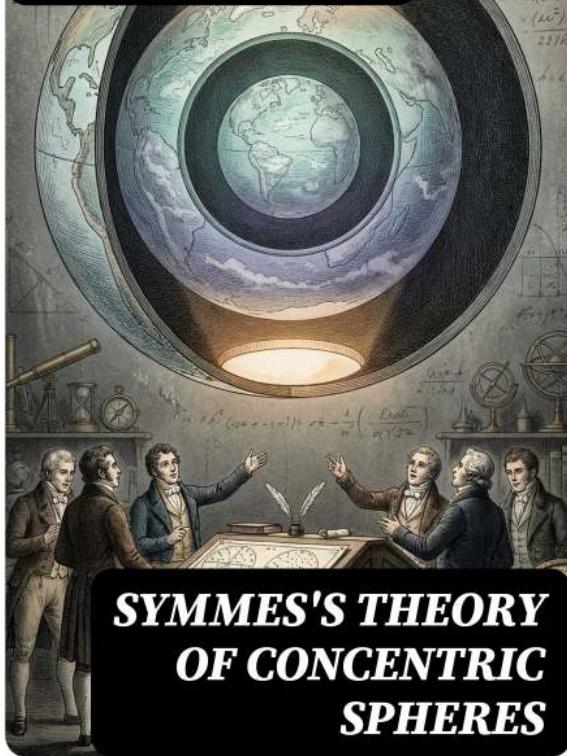


JAMES MCBRIDE, JOHN CLEVES SYMMES



SYMMES'S THEORY OF CONCENTRIC SPHERES

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SYMMES**



**SYMMES'S THEORY
OF CONCENTRIC
SPHERES**

James McBride, John Cleves Symmes

Symmes's Theory of Concentric Spheres

Enriched edition. Demonstrating that the Earth is hollow, habitable within, and widely open about the poles

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Aria Caldwell

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THE THEORY
OF
CONCENTRIC SPHERES.

CHAPTER I.

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Containing an introductory glance at some of the different Theories and Opinions which have been advanced respecting the formation of the Earth, and the reception which those Theories met with from the world when first promulgated.

It often happens, that those who have been early taught to believe a certain set of principles and doctrines as true, whether in philosophy, religion, or politics, adhere to them with the utmost pertinacity during the remainder of their lives. Any new theory, or principle, is resisted with peculiar energy; and, however inconsistent or untrue their favorite systems may be, they are disposed to make principles and facts bend to them; and would sooner call in question the general and immutable laws of nature, than the correctness of their own opinions. Perhaps this pertinacious adherence to prevalent and received opinions has retarded the progress of philosophic improvement more than the want of bold, original, and enquiring genius.

In former times those who cultivated science, or rather those who were called learned, generally based their philosophy on the doctrines of Aristotle; which, as they had been taught to reverence them from their infancy, had become almost interwoven with their constitutions. Hence, though time has unfolded to us their errors, during several

centuries, suspicion never hinted their fallibility. The doctrine of the revolutions of the earth, and other planets; of gravitation, magnetism, and other properties now known to belong to matter; have each in their turn met with a strong opposition from the most learned men living at the time of their discovery. But, notwithstanding this opposition, in all ages, a few bold, enquiring minds have had the firmness to dissent from the established doctrines of the schoolmen, and to lay the foundation of new systems, the correctness of which subsequent improvements in science have more or less demonstrated to the world.

Although nearly six thousand years have elapsed since man has been placed upon the earth, he yet knows but little of its formation. Notwithstanding all our enterprise, all our boasted acquirements, and discoveries, its true form yet remains uncertain; and although admitted that it is not quite eight thousand miles in diameter, we still have never explored its extent. A space of nearly forty degrees of latitude remains as little known to us, as if it were a part of the surface of Saturn, or an orb revolving round a star of the eighth magnitude. We know nothing of the inhabitants of those regions, or what kind of animate beings exist in them[1q].

It was a prevailing opinion among the ancients, the correctness of which they for ages never called in question, that the temperate zones of our globe were alone habitable. —The torrid zone they imagined was composed of nothing but sandy deserts, scorched up by the vertical and insupportable beams of a burning sun. The frigid zones,

they believed were begirt with eternal snows, and "thick ribbed ice," which rendered them inaccessible to man, and incapable of supporting animal or vegetable life. Hence none ventured to approach them.

Subsequent discoveries have, however, taught us the errors of the ancients[2q]. We now know that the torrid zone teems with organic life; and possesses, in many parts, a population more dense than the temperate, and is equally well adapted to its support: nay, we even find the temperature of that region to be such that it contains mountains capped with perpetual snows, which the beams of a July sun do not dissolve. It has also been ascertained that the frigid zones are partially inhabited: but it seems that a certain timid dread, perhaps in part attributable to the prejudices imbibed from our ancestors, has prevented our exploring the extent of those regions. However, as far as civilized man has yet ventured to penetrate towards the poles, we find that plants grow, flowers bloom, and human beings make a permanent residence; nay, even the untutored savages who reside there tell us that other human beings reside yet further to the north; and animals are known to migrate in that direction. Reasoning then from analogy, and from what we know, we have no ground to conclude that such a vast extent of surface has been created by an all-wise Providence for no other purpose, than to be eternally clothed with mountains of ice. Such a conclusion comports not with the general economy *we do know* to exist throughout his works.

We are constrained to acknowledge, notwithstanding our improvements in science, that, comparatively, we know but little of the economy of nature. Within a few years past, almost an entire revolution has taken place in the world respecting the philosophy of light and heat—a change which affects the theory both of their nature, and of their causes:—They are now believed to be two distinct things, and that the sun communicates neither, but merely gives activity, in some manner not yet known, to the principles, or matter, of light and heat with which our elements abound. If this be the case, as I believe is now admitted by the learned world, we cannot undertake to say, that the intensity or the absence of either, is necessarily dependant alone on the altitude of the sun, under any particular latitude; or on our nearness to, or remoteness from, the centre of the system:—For aught we know, both may be connected with arrangements that require but few of the sun's rays to make them answer the purposes of organic life. For aught we can tell, the planet Georgium Sidus[1], which rolls eighteen hundred millions of miles distant from the orb of day, may, nevertheless, be favoured with as brilliant light, and as genial warmth as our little globe; and for aught we know the interior of this planet, in the concavity of the spheres, under the equator, may enjoy the same light and heat that fructify and bless the equatorial climes on the convex surface.

During a period of several thousand years the ancients were of opinion that the earth was a perfect plane, at rest, and supported below by an unknown something; that it was bounded on all sides by an impassable barrier, and covered with the blue canopy of heaven, in which the sun, moon,

and stars performed their diurnal revolutions for the sole use and service of a few frail mortals. They believed that the sun, every morning rose out of the Eastern sea; and in the evening plunged into the Western ocean; that the stars were lighted up in the evening by some kind deity, and extinguished before the appearance of the sun. For ages none doubted the correctness of such a theory. At length, however, from an attentive examination of the regular appearances and revolutions of the heavenly bodies, some of the Babylonians adopted the opinion that the earth was spherical; revolving at regular periods round the sun, as the centre of the universe. In this they were followed by Pythagoras and others. But those efforts of genius, for the most part, met no other reward than the execrations of the exasperated multitude. Such innovations were deemed an impious crime against the gods, and could only be atoned for by the sacrifice of their lives. In those times the people of every nation, like the untutored Indian of our North Western wilderness at this day, considered their own country to be situated in the centre of the world, and they, the most favoured people. Even in later times, when the system of the Babylonians, and that of Pythagoras, were revived by Copernicus; and, when new discoveries respecting the form and revolutions of the earth, and other parts of the universe, were made by Galileo, not more than two hundred years since, we find an ignorant and bigoted world alarmed at such opinions. We find Galileo, that incomparable philosopher, cited before the court of Inquisition, accused of heresy, and thrown into prison. The