

able, that it connects natural and civil history in one uninterrupted series.

When we measure the effects produced in a given time by causes still acting, and compare them with those which the same causes have produced since they have begun to act, we are enabled to determine nearly the instant at which their action commenced; which is necessarily the same as that in which our continents assumed their present form, or that of the last sudden retreat of the waters.

It must, in fact, have been since this last retreat of the waters, that our present steep declivities have begun to disintegrate, and to form heaps of debris at their bases; that our present rivers have begun to flow, and to deposit their alluvial matters; that our present vegetation has begun to extend itself, and to produce soil; that our present cliffs have begun to be corroded by the sea; that our present downs have begun to be thrown up by the wind: just as it must have been since this same epoch, that colonies of men have begun, for the first or second time, to spread themselves, and to form establishments in places fitted by nature for their reception. I do not here take the action of volcanoes into account, not only because of the irregularity of their eruptions, but because we have no proofs of their not having been able to exist un-