

It is clear that the beds of lignite in the Western Isles, and the shales with leaves, indicate long pauses here and there in the activity of many craters. Vegetation on a large scale had time to flourish. After an unknown lapse of time, the vast inclined plateaux of lava, above which the lofty craters rose, are still, in Antrim, from 600 to 900 feet thick, and more than 3,000 feet in Mull. The denuded edges of the several lava-streams now form a wonderful series of terraces, rising tier upon tier, like Titanic steps, high on the hills on both sides of the Sound of Mull, and the splendid columnar basalt of Fingal's Cave, in Staffa, is known to all tourists among the Inner Hebrides. The same terraced forms are prominent in Skye, and in many of the smaller islands. But where are the craters from which these vast volcanic piles of lavas and ashes were ejected? They are all gone and utterly wasted away, and only their deep-seated roots remain to mark the sites, above which mountains grew by accretion, as high as Etna, which is growing even now. It is a remarkable circumstance, and worthy to be noted, that these deep-seated centres of crystalline rocks are now apt to form some of the highest portions of the islands. They have been bared by denudation, and their hardness helps to preserve them.

Long before these extreme denudations took place, when the islands formed part of a wide-spreading territory, old river-beds intersected it, running through an ancient land, formed of Laurentian, Cambrian, and Silurian rocks, that spread far to the west, north, and east.

These rivers scooped out valleys in the Miocene lavas and tufas, which were again partly filled by torrents of basalt and obsidian. In the case of the