

especially to the south, by a deep ravine. It is capped with a cake of columnar basalt, which of course was once in a melted state, and, like all lava-streams, rolled along the ground ever seeking its lowest levels. A first glance is enough to convince us that this basaltic cake is a mere fragment, that its eastern and southern edges have been largely cut away, and that it once extended southwards across what is now the deep gorge of Villar. Since the eruption of the basalt, therefore, the whole of this gorge has been excavated. But what agent could have worked so mighty a change? We bethink us, perhaps, of the sea; and picture the breakers working their way steadily inland through the softer granite. But this supposition is untenable, for it can be shown on good grounds that, since the volcanic eruptions of this district began, the country has never been below the sea. It is with a feeling almost of reluctance that we are compelled to admit, in default of any other possible explanation, that the erosion of the valley has been the work of the stream that seems to run in a mere rut at the foot of the slopes. How tardy must be the working of such an agent, and how immeasurably far into the past does the contemplation of such an operation carry us! This illustration of the power of running water, however, though the first, was by no means the most striking which occurred in the course of my rambles in Auvergne. The same fact stood out with a kind of oppressive reality in the Haute-Loire, to which reference will be made on a subsequent page.

The basalt of Pradelle recalled many of the basaltic hills in various parts of Scotland. I could have supposed myself under one of the cliffs that look out upon the deep fjords of Skye, or below the range of crags on the shores of the Forth, over which Alexander III. lost his life, or even