

But none of these desultory researches, interesting and important though they were as landmarks in the progress of science, bore immediate fruit in any broad and philosophic outline of the natural history of the globe. Men were still trammelled by the belief that the date of the creation of the world and its inhabitants could not be placed farther back than some five or six thousand years, that this limit was fixed for us in Holy Writ, and that every new fact must receive an interpretation in accordance with such limitation. They were thus often driven to distort the facts or to explain them away. If they ventured to pronounce for a natural and obvious interpretation, they laid themselves open to the charge of impiety and atheism, and might bring down the unrelenting vengeance of the Church.

Such was the state of inquiry when the Scottish Geological School came into being. The founder of that school was James Hutton, a man of a singularly original and active mind, who was born at Edinburgh in 1726, and died there in 1797. Educated for the medical profession, but possessed of a small fortune, which gave him leisure to follow his favourite pursuits, he eventually devoted himself to the study of Mineralogy. But it was not merely as rare or interesting objects, nor even as parts of a mineralogical system, that he dealt with minerals. They seemed to suggest to him constant questions as to the earlier conditions of our planet, and he thus was gradually led into the wider fields of Geology and Physical Geography. Quietly working in his study here, a favourite member of a brilliant circle of society, which included such men as Black, Cullen, Adam Smith, and Clerk of Eldin, and making frequent excursions to gather fresh data and test the truth of his deductions, he at length matured his immortal *Theory of*