

of the rising land. These depressions are slowly dug deeper and wider, until at last the ancient elevated sea-bed is worn into a system of hills and mountains, valleys and glens. The land thus modelled may remain stationary for a vast interval, but it is all the while undergoing continual degradation of its surface. In the end it may once more be worn away down to the sea-level. Movements of subsidence may afterwards carry it down far below that level and allow it to be covered over with newer deposits. The sites of its highest ridges or loftiest mountains may thus be buried beneath piles of their own ruin, as they slowly sink under the sea. If, now, there should once more be a renewed elevation of this area into dry land, these later accumulations would be exposed to a similar waste, and a new series of denudations would be begun by the air, rains, streams, ice, and the sea, new valleys would be excavated, and new hills would be left standing out from them. By such a process of ceaseless change thus summarily stated, carried on during many successive geological periods, the present scenery of our country appears to have been produced.

In the succeeding chapters, I propose to attempt to trace in some detail the history of this process as manifested in the hills and valleys of Scotland. Though we may understand the general character of a series of changes in nature, it is sometimes by no means an easy task to follow out the details of the successive stages, and this difficulty is vastly increased when the changes were completed long ago, and when, in consequence, their memorials are obscure and incomplete. Such, however, is the task now before us. In entering upon it, I feel that it is possible in the meanwhile merely to grope the way. The only light which can be taken with us is that of existing nature. Without its help all would be utter darkness, but under its direction we may be