

We passed the summer and autumn of 1823 in one of the wildest and least accessible districts of the north-western Highlands. The nearest public road at that period was a long day's journey away. Among the humbler people we met with only a single man turned of forty who understood English. It was, in truth, a wild, uncultivated region, brown and sterile, studded with rock, blackened with morasses, and cursed with an ever-weeping climate. The hills of hard quartz rock—of all the primary formations the most unfavourable to vegetation—seemed at least two-thirds naked; and their upper peaks, bleached by sun and storm, showed, from the pale hue of the stone, as if ever covered by a sprinkling of fresh fallen snow. The Atlantic, speckled by the northern Hebrides, stretched away from an iron-bound coast; and here and there, though far between, a group of dark-coloured cottages, that rather resembled huge molehills than human dwellings, occupied some of the deeper inflections, where, for a short interval, the cliffs gave place to a strip of sand or pebbles, or an outlying group of skerries formed a sort of breakwater to ward off the violence of the sea. Every little village had its few boats and its few green patches of cultivation. Some of the latter, scarcely larger than onion beds, seemed to stand out from amid the brown heath like islands in the ocean; and both the boats and the patches served as indices to show how the poor inhabitants of so barren a region contrived to live. Could we travel back into the past, amid the rich fields of the Lothians, for full ten centuries, we would fail to arrive at so primitive a state of things with regard to the common arts of life as existed only nineteen years ago in this wild district. In the little straggling village in our immediate neighbourhood every man was a fisherman, and in some degree an agriculturist; and yet there was neither horse nor plough among all its twenty families. The ground was turned up by the long-handled spade, still