

deep, but often thickly-wooded ravines, and with fragments of ancient basalt now and then protruding by the roadside, or along the upper edge of a steep bank. The country, however, remains somewhat bare and uninteresting; nor until one begins to descend towards the basin of the Loire, and catches sight of the range of volcanic hills and cones that encircle Le Puy, does its interest revive.

Le Puy is one of the most picturesque towns in France, built round a conical hill, which rises in the valley between the River Borne and another tributary of the Loire. An abrupt crag of breccia, crowned with a bronze statue of the Virgin, overhangs it on the north; while lower down in the plain a tall massive column of the same rock supports the small and seemingly inaccessible church of St. Michel. The country rises rapidly on all sides, so that Le Puy lies embosomed among hills—vast piles of lava, and cones of ash formed by many different eruptions, sweeping away south into the heights of Mont Mezen and the long plateau which here separates the waters of the Allier from those of the Loire.

The geologist could hardly pitch upon a locality where more may be learned in so narrow a compass. Le Puy lies in the centre of another Tertiary lake, some twenty miles long, and twelve or fourteen broad. This lake occupied a hollow in the great granitic framework of the country, and, like the Limagne d'Auvergne, gave rise to the slow accumulation of fine marls, limestones, and sandstones, which attained a united thickness of hundreds of feet. Over the top of these horizontal strata, lavas and ashes were erupted to a depth of three or four hundred feet, so as wholly to cover up the lacustrine deposits, and obliterate the site of the lake. Since these events, the Loire and its tributaries have been ceaselessly at work in deepening and widening