

by stripping off the thick piles of rock beneath which they have lain preserved during so vast a cycle of geological revolutions. I shall here describe a fragment of this earliest land, and allude to some of the geological problems which it suggests.

In the north-west of Scotland, along the seaboard of the counties of Ross and Sutherland, a peculiar type of scenery presents itself, which reappears nowhere else on the mainland. Whether the traveller approaches the region from the sea or from the land, he can hardly fail to be struck by this peculiarity, even though he may have no specially geological eye for the discrimination of rock-structures. Seen from the westward or the Atlantic side, as, for example, when sailing into Loch Torridon, or passing the mouths of the western fjords of Sutherlandshire, the land rises out of the water in a succession of bare rounded domes of rock, crowding behind and above each other as far as the eye can reach. Not a tree or bush casts a shadow over these folds of barren rock. It might at first be supposed that even heather had been unable to find a foothold on them. Gray, rugged, and verdureless, they look as if they had but recently been thrust up from beneath the waves, and as if the kindly hand of nature had not yet had time to clothe them with her livery of green. Strange, however, as this scenery appears when viewed from a distance, it becomes even stranger when we enter into it, and more especially when we climb one of its more prominent heights and look down upon many square miles of its extent. The whole landscape is one of smoothed and rounded bosses and ridges of bare rock, which, uniting and then separating, inclose innumerable little tarns (Fig. 20). There are no definite lines of hill and valley; the country consists, in fact, of a seemingly inextricable laby-