

departed. He has been regarded as probably of a Non-Aryan race, of which perhaps the modern Basques are lineal descendants, isolated among the fastnesses of the Pyrenees by the advance of younger tribes. Traces of his former presence in Britain have been conjectured to be recognisable in the small dark Welshmen, and the short swarthy Irishmen of the west of Ireland.

When the earliest Neolithic men appeared in this region, Britain may have still been united to the continent. But the connection was eventually broken. It is obvious that no event in the geological history of Britain can have had a more powerful influence on its human history than the separation of the country as a group of islands cut off by a considerable channel from direct communication with the mainland of Europe. Let us consider for a moment how the disconnection was probably brought about.

There can be no doubt that at the time when Britain became an island, the general contour of the country was, on the whole, what it is still. The same groups of mountains rose above the same plains and valleys, which were traversed by the same winding rivers. We know that in the glacial and later periods considerable oscillations of level took place; for, on the one hand, beds of sea-shells are found at heights of 1200 or 1300 feet above the present sea-level; and, on the other hand, ancient forest-covered soils are now seen below tide-mark. It was doubtless mainly subsidence that produced the isolation of Britain. The whole area slowly sank, until the lower tracts were submerged, the last low ridge connecting the land with France was overflowed, and Britain became a group of islands. But unquestionably the isolation was helped by the ceaseless wear and tear of the superficial agencies which are still busy at the same task. The slow