

but sure washing of descending rain, the erosion of water-courses, and the gnawing of sea-waves, all told in the long degradation. And thus, foundering from want of support below, and eaten away by attacks above, the low lands gradually diminished, and disappeared beneath the sea.

Now, in this process of separation, Ireland unfortunately became detached from Britain. We have had ample occasion in recent years to observe how much this geological change has affected our domestic history. That the isolation of Ireland took place before Britain had been separated from the continent may be inferred from a comparison of the distribution of living plants and animals. Of course, the interval which had then elapsed since the submergences and ice-sheets of the glacial period must have been of prodigious duration, if measured by ordinary human standards. Yet it was too short to enable the plants and animals of Central Europe completely to possess themselves of the British area. Generation after generation they were moving westward, but long before they could all reach the north-western seaboard, Ireland had become an island, so that their further march in that direction was arrested, and before the subsequent advancing bands had come as far as Britain, it too had been separated by a sea channel which finally barred their progress. Comparing the total land mammals of the west of Europe, we find that while Germany has ninety species, Britain has forty, and Ireland only twenty-two. The reptiles and amphibia of Germany number twenty-two, those of Britain thirteen, and those of Ireland four. Again, even among the winged tribes, where the capacity for dispersal is so much greater, Britain possesses twelve species of bats, while Ireland has no more than seven, and 130 land birds to 110 in Ireland. The same discrepancy is traceable in the flora, for while the