

appears changed. Gaelic is now the vernacular tongue. There are few or no villages. The houses, built of boulders gathered from the soil and held together with mere clay or earth, are covered with frail roofs of ferns, straw, or heather, kept down by stone-weighted ropes of the same materials. Fireplaces and chimneys are not always present, and the pungent blue smoke from fires of peat or turf finds its way out by door and window, or beneath the begrimed rafters. The geological contrast of structure and scenery which allowed the Teutonic invaders to drive the older Celtic people from the coast-line, but prevented them from advancing inland, has sufficed during all the subsequent centuries to keep the two races apart.

On the north-western coasts of the island there are none of the fringes of more recent formations which have had so marked an influence on the east side. From the north of Sutherland to the headlands of Argyle the more ancient rocks of the country rise steep and rugged out of the sea, projecting in long bare promontories, for ever washed by the restless surge of the Atlantic. Here and there the coast-line sinks into a sheltered bay, or is interrupted by some long winding inlet that admits the ebb and flow of the ocean tides far into the heart of the mountains. Only in such depressions could a seafaring people find safe harbours and fix their settlements. When the Norsemen sailed round the north-west of Scotland they found there the counterpart of their own native country—the same type of bare, rocky, island-fringed coast-line sweeping up into bleak mountains, winding into long sea-lochs or fjords beneath the shadow of sombre pine-forests, and to the west the familiar sweep of the same wide blue ocean. So striking even now is this resemblance, that the Scot who for the first time sails along the western seaboard of