

hypothesis was accepted and reiterated for centuries, without apparently any effort being made to test or verify it by actual observation of nature. Certain vague and more or less obvious inferences were drawn as to ancient changes in land and sea, and some of these changes were correctly referred to the agencies that produced them. Yet the epigene forces of nature were but partially comprehended, while the hypogene activities were entirely misunderstood. Not even the faintest suspicion had yet dawned on the minds of men as to the long succession of events in the great terrestrial evolution which geology has revealed. In short nothing in this department of knowledge had yet been accumulated to which the name of science could be applied.

In one important respect, however, a momentous forward step had been taken in the intellectual progress of mankind. The primeval belief that Nature was governed by impulsive and capricious divinities, interfering continually with the sequence of events, had for centuries disappeared from the creed of all reflective men, though it still found rhetorical expression among the poets. In its place had come a more or less definite recognition that the world is regulated by laws which, invariable and impartial in their operation now, had been at work from the beginning. The spread of this more enlightened conception was happily untrammelled by any active opposition either from a jealous priesthood or from popular animosity. Each philosopher was at liberty to hold and to express the views which he chose to adopt, and while the old religion of classic paganism