

288 *Hutton's elaboration of his Theory*

No more admirable environment could possibly have inspired a geologist than that in which Hutton now began to work more sedulously at the study of the former changes of the earth's surface. But he went far afield in search of facts, and to test his interpretation of them. He made journeys into different parts of Scotland, where the phenomena which engaged his attention seemed most likely to be well displayed. He extended his excursions likewise into England and Wales. For about thirty years, he had never ceased to study the natural history of the globe, constantly seeking to recognise the proofs of ancient terrestrial revolutions, and to learn by what causes they had been produced. He had been led to form a definite theory or system which, by uniting and connecting the scattered facts, furnished an intelligible explanation of them. But he refrained from publishing it to the world. He had communicated his views to one or two of his friends, perhaps only to Dr. Black and Mr. Clerk, whose judgment and approval were warmly given to him. The world, however, might have had still a long time to wait for the appearance of his dissertation, had it not been for the interest that he took in the foundation of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, which was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1783.¹ At one of

¹The Royal Society had been preceded by the Philosophical Society, out of which it sprang. Edinburgh at that time was famous for the number of its clubs and convivial meetings, at some of which Black and Hutton were constant companions. Various anecdotes have been handed down of these two worthies and their intercourse, of which the following may suffice as a specimen. "These attached friends agreed in their opposition to the usual vulgar prejudices, and frequently discoursed together upon the absurdity of many generally