

as now, in succession. On the grounds, therefore, already explained, we must infer that a mass so many thousand feet in thickness must have required an immense series of ages anterior to our historical periods for its growth; yet the whole must be regarded as the product of a modern portion of the tertiary epoch. Such, at least, is the conclusion that seems to follow from geological data, which show that the oldest parts of the mountain, if not of posterior date to the marine strata around its base, were at least of coeval origin.

Some geologists contend, that the sudden elevation of large continents from beneath the waters of the sea have again and again produced waves which have swept over vast regions of the earth.* But it is clear that no devastating wave has passed over the forest zone of Etna since any of the lateral cones before mentioned were thrown up; for none of these heaps of loose sand and scorix could have resisted for a moment the denuding action of a violent flood. To some, perhaps, it may appear that hills of such incoherent materials cannot be of very great antiquity, because the mere action of the atmosphere must, in the course of several thousand years, have obliterated their original forms. But there is no weight in this objection; for the older hills are covered with trees and herbage, which protect them from waste; and in regard to the newer ones, such is the porosity of their component materials, that the rain which falls upon them is instantly absorbed; and for the same reason that the rivers on Etna have a subterranean course, there are none descending the sides of the minor cones.

No sensible alteration has been observed in the form of these cones since the earliest periods of which there are memorials; and there seems no reason for anticipating that in the course of the next ten thousand or twenty thousand years they will undergo any great alteration in their appearance, unless they should be shattered by earthquakes or covered by volcanic ejections.

In other parts of Europe, as in Auvergne and Velay, in France, similar loose cones of scorix, probably of as high antiquity as the whole mass of Etna, stand uninjured at inferior elevations above the level of the sea.

* Sedgwick, Anniv. Address to Geol. Soc., p. 35. Feb. 1831.