

security of property under the best government; industry cannot be assured of reaping the fruits of its labour; and the most daring acts of outrage may occasionally be perpetrated with impunity, when the arm of the law is paralysed by the general consternation. It is hardly necessary to add, that the progress of civilization and national wealth must be retarded by convulsions which level cities to the ground, destroy harbours, render roads impassable, and cause the most cultivated valley-plains to be covered with lakes, or the ruins of adjoining hills.

Those geologists who imagine that, at remote periods ere man became a sojourner on earth, the volcanic agency was more energetic than now, should be careful to found their opinion on strict geological evidence, and not permit themselves to be biassed, as they have often been, by a notion, that the disturbing force would probably be mitigated for the sake of man.

I shall endeavour to point out in the sequel, that the general tendency of subterranean movements, when their effects are considered for a sufficient lapse of ages, is eminently beneficial, and that they constitute an essential part of that mechanism by which the integrity of the habitable surface is preserved, and the very existence and perpetuation of dry land secured. Why the working of this same machinery should be attended with so much evil, is a mystery far beyond the reach of our philosophy, and must probably remain so until we are permitted to investigate, not our planet alone and its inhabitants, but other parts of the moral and material universe with which they may be connected. Could our survey embrace other worlds, and the events, not of a few centuries only, but of periods as indefinite as those with which geology renders us familiar, some apparent contradictions might be reconciled, and some difficulties would doubtless be cleared up. But even then, as our capacities are finite, while the scheme of the universe may be infinite, both in time and space, it is presumptuous to suppose that all sources of doubt and perplexity would ever be removed. On the contrary, they might, perhaps, go on augmenting in number, although our confidence in the wisdom of the plan of Nature should increase at the same time; for it has been justly said, that the greater the circle of light, the greater the boundary of darkness by which it is surrounded.\*

\* Sir H. Davy's *Consolations in Travel*, p. 246.