

that runs round the northern margin of the Highlands from the coast of Banffshire to the far headlands of Caithness. Though now mostly stripped off from the continuation of the same low grounds eastward into Aberdeenshire, the Old Red Sandstone is left in many little patches, and not improbably at one time covered most or all of these plains, even as far south as Aberdeen, if not quite to the broad tract of the same formation in Kincardineshire. On the west side of the Highlands, lies the broken chain of the Inner Hebrides with its green terraced hills of Tertiary lavas. Considered broadly, therefore, the area of the Highlands may be looked upon as a kind of island of ancient crystalline masses set in a sea of younger formations. I shall now proceed to describe its component rocks and their distinctive outer features, beginning with the oldest, and will then give an account of the manner in which they have been arranged.

The oldest rock of the Highlands is a massive gneiss, representative of that ancient series which is grouped under the name of Archæan. It varies considerably in texture and colour. Some portions are structureless like a granite, others are finely schistose, and between these two extremes every gradation may be found. It contains also many veins of pegmatite and dykes of diabase, as well as seams of dark hornblende and hornblendic gneiss, which doubtless represent what were once intruded veins. Almost everywhere it is marked by great toughness and durability. There could have been no fitter material for the foundation-stone on which the geological structure of Britain should be built up.

The areas occupied by this rock are readily recognisable even at some distance by their singularity of contour. They do not occupy much space in the general area of the Highlands, being, indeed, confined to the north-western