

of the level would be a matter of so much interest, and where fixed and ancient works afford so many means of measuring its variations, the mean level of the sea is constant. There has, therefore, never been a universal lowering, nor a universal encroachment, of the waters of the ocean. In some places, indeed, such as Scotland, and various parts of the Mediterranean, evidence has been thought to have been found, that the sea has risen, and that it now covers shores which were formerly above its level*.

Volcanoes.

The action of volcanoes is still more limited, and more local, than any of those which have yet been mentioned. Although we have no precise idea of the means by which nature keeps up these violent fires at such great depths, we can judge decidedly, by their effects, of the changes which they may

* Mr Stevenson, in his observations upon the bed of the German Ocean and British Channel, maintains that the level of the sea is continually rising, and has been very sensibly elevated within the last three centuries. Fortis asserts the same of some parts of the Adriatic sea. But the example of the Temple of Serapis, near Pouzzola, proves that the margins of that sea are, in many places, of such a nature as to be subject to local risings and fallings. On the other hand, there are thousands of quays, roads, and other works, made along the sea-side by the Romans, from Alexandria to Belgium, the relative level of which has never varied. Note K.