

far exceeded in number and variety, by the relics of the beings whose mineralized skeletons we now propose to investigate. Although every one is familiar with the external appearance of the shells cast up by the waves on the shores of our island, and of those which, from their varied colours and elegant forms, are preserved in the cottage of the peasant, and in the mansion of the rich, but few persons are conversant with the nature of the animals that secreted and inhabited these beautiful and enduring structures. The organization even of the oyster, mussel, whelk, &c., is known only to the naturalist. Appearing to the un instructed eye as a shapeless gelatinous mass, there is nothing to arrest the attention, or excite the imagination. Yet the beings which secreted, and were protected by these durable cases, are objects of the highest interest, and offer a rich field of instructive investigation.

Except as shedding some light on the structure and ecomony of their inhabitants, shells, in the estimation of the naturalist, are the least interesting part of the organization of the Mollusca ; but to the geologist, from their permanent nature, and the proofs they yield of the conditions under which the strata that contain them were deposited, they are important in the highest degree. It has even been found convenient to classify formations, in which fossil shells largely prevail, by the relative numerical proportion of the recent and extinct