

soil of Egypt, the alluvial deposit of the Nile is advancing very generally upon the desert; and that, upon the whole, the balance is greatly in favour of the fertilizing mud.*

No mode of interment can be conceived more favourable to the conservation of monuments for indefinite periods than that now so common in the region immediately westward of the Nile. The sand which surrounded and filled the great temple of Ipsambul, first discovered by Burckhardt, and afterwards partially uncovered by Belzoni and Beechey, was so fine as to resemble a fluid when put in motion. Neither the features of the colossal figures, nor the colour of the stucco with which some were covered, nor the paintings on the walls, had received any injury from being enveloped for ages in this dry impalpable dust.†

At some future period, perhaps, when the pyramids shall have perished, the action of the sea, or an earthquake, may lay open to the day some of these buried temples. Or we may suppose the desert to remain undisturbed, and changes in the surrounding sea and land to modify the climate and the direction of the prevailing winds, so that these may then waft away the Libyan sands as gradually as they once brought them to those regions. Thus, many a town and temple of higher antiquity than Thebes or Memphis may reappear in their original antiquity, and a part of the gloom which overhangs the history of the earlier nations be dispelled.

Whole caravans are said to have been overwhelmed by the Libyan sands; and Burckhardt informs us that "after passing the Akaba, near the head of the Red Sea, the bones of dead camels are the only guides of the pilgrim through the wastes of sand."—"We did not see," says Captain Lyon, speaking of a plain near the Soudah mountains, in Northern Africa, "the least appearance of vegetation; but observed many skeletons of animals, which had died of fatigue on the desert, and occasionally the grave of some human being. All these bodies were so dried by the heat of the sun, that putrefaction appears not to have taken place after death. In recently expired animals I could not perceive the slightest offensive smell; and in those long dead, the skin with the hair on it remained unbroken and perfect, although so brittle as to break with a slight blow. The sandwinds never cause these carcasses to change their places; for, in a short time, a slight mound is formed round them, and they become stationary."‡

Towns overwhelmed by sand floods.—The burying of several towns and villages in England, France, and Jutland, by blown sand is on record; thus, for example, near St. Pol de Leon, in Brittany, a whole village was completely buried beneath drift sand, so that nothing was seen but the spire of the church.§ In Jutland marine shells adhering to sea-weed are sometimes blown by the violence of

* See p. 262.

† Stratton, Ed. Phil. Journ., No. v. p. 62.

‡ Travels in North Africa in the

Years 1818, 1819, and 1820, p. 83.

§ Mém. de l'Acad. des Sci. de Paris, 1772. See also the case of the buried church of Eccles, above, p. 294.