

ordinary burial we add those of individuals lost by shipwrecks, we shall find that, in the course of a single year, a great number of human remains are consigned to the subaqueous regions. I shall hereafter advert to a calculation by which it appears that more than five hundred *British* vessels alone, averaging each a burthen of about 120 tons, are wrecked, and sink to the bottom, *annually*. Of these the crews for the most part escape, although it sometimes happens that all perish. In one great naval action several thousand individuals sometimes share a watery grave.

Many of these corpses are instantly devoured by predaceous fish, sometimes before they reach the bottom; still more frequently when they rise again to the surface, and float in a state of putrefaction. Many decompose on the floor of the ocean, where no sediment is thrown down upon them; but if they fall upon a reef where corals and shells are becoming agglutinated into a solid rock, or subside where the delta of a river is advancing, they may be preserved for an incalculable series of ages.

Often at the distance of a few hundred feet from a coral reef, where wrecks are not unfrequent, there are no soundings at the depth of many hundred fathoms. Canoes, merchant vessels, and ships of war may have sunk and have been enveloped, in such situations, in calcareous sand and breccia, detached by the breakers from the summit of a submarine mountain. Should a volcanic eruption happen to cover such remains with ashes and sand, and a current of lava be afterwards poured over them, the ships and human skeletons might remain uninjured beneath the superincumbent mass, like the houses and works of art in the subterranean cities of Campania. Already many human remains may have been thus preserved beneath formations more than a thousand feet in thickness; for, in some volcanic archipelagos, a period of thirty or forty centuries might well be supposed sufficient for such an accumulation. It was stated, that at the distance of about forty miles from the base of the delta of the Ganges, there is a circular space about fifteen miles in diameter where soundings of from 600 to 800 feet sometimes fail to reach the bottom. (See above, p. 267.) As during the flood season the quantity of mud and sand poured by the great rivers into the Bay of Bengal is so great that the sea only recovers its transparency at the distance of sixty miles from the coast, this depression must be gradually shoaling, especially as during the monsoons, the sea loaded with mud and sand, is beaten back in that direction towards the delta. Now, if a ship or human body sink down to the bottom in such a spot, it is by no means improbable that it may become buried under a depth of a thousand feet of sediment in the same number of years.

Even on that part of the floor of the ocean to which no accession of drift matter is carried (a part which probably constitutes, at any given period, by far the larger proportion of the whole submarine area), there are circumstances accompanying a wreck which favour the conservation of skeletons. For when the vessel fills suddenly