

CHAPTER II.

The Old Red Sandstone. — Till very lately its Existence as a distinct Formation disputed. — Still little known. — Its great Importance in the Geological Scale. — Illustration. — The North of Scotland girdled by an immense Belt of Old Red Sandstone. — Line of the Girde along the Coast. — Marks of vast Denudation. — Its Extent partially indicated by Hills on the Western Coast of Ross-shire. — The System of Great Depth in the North of Scotland. — Difficulties in the way of estimating the Thickness of Deposits. — Peculiar Formation of Hill. — Illustrated by Ben Nevis. — Caution to the Geological Critic. — Lower Old Red Sandstone immensely developed in Caithness. — Sketch of the Geology of that County. — Its strange Group of Fossils. — Their present place of Sepulture. — Their ancient Habitat. — Agassiz. — Amazing Progress of Fossil Ichthyology during the last few Years. — Its Nomenclature. — Learned Names repeated unlearned Readers. — Not a great deal in them.

“THE Old Red Sandstone,” says a Scottish geologist, in a digest of some recent geological discoveries, which appeared a short time ago in an Edinburgh newspaper, “has been hitherto considered as remarkably barren of fossils.” The remark is expressive of a pretty general opinion among geologists of even the present time, and I quote it on this account. Only a few years have gone by since men of no low standing in the science disputed the very existence of this formation — system rather, for it contains at least three distinct formations — and but for the influence of one accomplished geologist, the celebrated author of the *Silurian System*, it would have been probably degraded from its place in the scale altogether. “You must inevitably give up the Old Red Sandstone,” said an ingenious foreigner to Mr. Murchison, when on a visit to England about four years ago, and whose celebrity among his