

grass and lichen, curious to explore a locality so new to me. The tract, though a primary one, forms one of the tamer gneiss districts of Scotland; and I found the nearer hills comparatively low and confluent, and the broad valley in which lay my uncle's cottage, flat, open, and unpromising. Still there were a few points to engage me; and the more I attracted myself to them, the more did their interest grow. The western slopes of the valley are mottled by grassy tomhans,—the moraines of some ancient glacier, around and over which there rose, at this period, a low widely-spreading wood of birch, hazel, and mountain ash,—of hazel, with its nuts fast filling at the time, and of mountain ash, with its berries glowing bright in orange and scarlet. In looking adown the hollow, a group of the green tomhans might be seen relieved against the blue hills of Ross; in looking upwards, a solitary birch-covered hillock of a similar origin, but larger proportions, stood strongly out against the calm waters of Loch Shin and the purple peaks of the distant Ben-Hope. In the bottom of the valley, close beside my uncle's cottage, I marked several low swellings of the rock beneath, rising above the general level; and, ranged along these, there were groupes of what seemed to be huge boulder stones, save that they were less rounded and water-worn than ordinary boulders, and were, what groupes of boulders rarely are, all of one quality. And on examination I ascertained that some of their number, which stood up like broken obelisks, tall, and comparatively narrow of base, and all hoary with moss and lichen, were actually still connected with the mass of rock below. They were the wasted upper portions of vast dikes and veins of a gray, large-grained sienite, that traverse the fundamental gneiss of the valley, and which I found veined, in turn, by threads and seams of a white quartz, abounding in drusy cavities, thickly lined along their sides with sprig crystals. Never had I seen such lovely crystals on the shores of Cromarty, or anywhere else. They were clear and transparent as the purest spring water, furnished each with six sides, and sharpened atop into six facets. Borrowing one of Cousin George's hammers, I soon filled a little