

water, passed into a semi-fluid state, became strangely waved and contorted, and assumed in its composition a highly crystalline character. Such is peculiarly the case with the fundamental or gneiss deposits of the period. In the overlying mica schist there is still much of contortion and disturbance; whereas the clay-slate, which lies over all, gives evidence, in its more mechanical texture, and the regularity of its strata, that a gradual refrigeration of the general mass had been taking place, and that the close of the Azoic period was comparatively quiet and cool. Let us suppose that during the earlier part of this period of excessive heat the waters of the ocean had stood at the boiling point even at the surface, and much higher in the profounder depths, and further, that the half-molten crust of the earth, stretched out over a molten abyss, was so thin that it could not support, save for a short time, after some convulsion, even a small island above the sea-level. What, in such circumstances, would be the aspect of the scene, optically exhibited from some point in space elevated a few hundred yards over the sea? It would be simply a blank, in which the intensest glow of fire would fail to be seen at a few yards distance. An inconsiderable escape of steam from the safety-valve of a railway engine forms so thick a screen, that, as it lingers for a moment, in the passing, opposite the carriage windows, the passengers fail to discern through it the landscape beyond. A continuous stratum of steam, then, that attained to the height of even our present atmosphere, would wrap up the earth in a darkness gross and palpable as that of Egypt of old,—a darkness through which even a single ray of light would fail to penetrate. And beneath this thick canopy the unseen deep would literally “boil as a pot,” wildly tempested from below; while from time to time more deeply-seated convulsion would upheave sudden to the surface vast tracts of semi-molten rock, soon again to disappear, and from which waves of bulk enormous would roll