

upon it, availing myself, as I crept along, of every little protuberance and hollow, I at length stood within six or eight feet of the young birds. From that point, however, a smooth shelf, without projection or cavity, descended at an angle of about forty, to the nest, and terminated abruptly, without ledge or margin, in the overhanging precipice. Have I not, I asked, crept along a roof of even a steeper slope than that of the shelf? Why not, in like manner, creep along it to the nest, where there is firm footing? I had actually stretched out my naked foot to take the first step, when I observed, as the sun suddenly broke out from behind a cloud, that the light glistened on the smooth surface. It was encrusted over by a thin layer of chlorite, slippery as the mixture of soap and grease that the ship-carpenter spreads over his slips on the morning of a launch. I at once saw there was an element of danger in the way on which I had at first failed to calculate; and so, relinquishing the attempt as hopeless, I returned by the path I had come, and thought no more of robbing the raven's nest. It was, however, again attempted this season, but with tragic result, by a young lad from Sutherland named Mackay, who had previously approved his skill as a cragsman in his native county, and several times secured the reward given by an Agricultural Society for the destruction of young birds of prey. As the incident was related to me, he had approached the nest by the path which I had selected: he had paused where I had paused, and even for a longer time; and then, venturing forward, he no sooner committed himself to the treacherous chlorite, than, losing footing as if on a steep sheet of ice, he shot right over the precipice. Falling sheer for the first fifty feet or so without touching the rock, he was then turned full round by a protuberance against which he had glanced, and descending for the lower half of the way head foremost and dashing with tremendous force among the smooth sea-stones below, his brains were scattered over an area of from ten to twelve square yards in extent. His only companion—an ignorant Irish lad—had to gather up the fragments of his head in a napkin.