

remote age of the world as the same grey indurated blocks of stone that we find them now; and busy Madreporites, —Isastræa and Thamnastræa,—whose species have long since perished, built up their stony cells on the solid foundations which the masses furnished. Nay, within the close compressed folds of these flagstones lay their many various fossils,—glittering scale, and sharp spine, and cerebral buckler,—in exactly the same state of keeping as now; and had there been a geologist to take hammer in hand in that Oolitic period, when the spikes of the *Pinites Eiggensis* were green upon the living tree, and the *Equisetum columnare* waved its tall head to the breeze, he would have found in these stones the organisms of a time that would have seemed as remote then as it does in the present late age of the world. We may well apply to this incalculably ancient Old Red system what Wordsworth says of his old Cumberland beggar,—

‘ Him from my childhood have I known; and then
He was so old, he seems not older now.’

This glimpse, through the medium of the high antiquity of the Oolite, of an antiquity vastly higher still,—that of the Old Red Sandstone,—may well impress us with the enormous extent of those tracts in time with which the geological historian is called on to deal. There are some of the lesser planets that seem to the naked eye quite as distant as many of those fixed stars whose parallax the astronomer has failed to ascertain; but when they come into a state of juxtaposition, and the moveless star is seen dimly through the atmosphere of the moving planet, we are taught how enormous must be those tracts of space which intervene between them, and keep them apart. And it is thus with the periods of the geologist. Even the comparatively near are so distant, that the remote seem scarce more so; but the dead and stony antiquity of one system, seen as if through the living nature of another, enables us, in at least