

a whole platform give evidence, both in their state of keeping and in their contorted attitude, that they all died at once, and died by violent death. We see them still presenting over wide areas the stiff curved outline,—a result of the unequal contraction of the muscles,—which, as in the case of recently netted herrings, marks that dissolution had been sudden. We find, too, that their remains did not suffer from the predatory attacks of other fishes : it would seem as if all the finny inhabitants of wide tracts of sea had been at once cast dead to the bottom, so that not an individual survived, to prey upon the remains of his deceased neighbours. It was the first remark of Agassiz, when introduced to a collection of fossil fish from Orkney,—‘All these fish died by violent death,’—a remark which he again and yet again repeated when introduced to the Old Red ichthyolites of Cromarty and Moray. We have already seen that the oldest plant-covered land of which the geologist finds distinct and certain trace in this country was a land subject to incessant fluctuations of level, and to sudden and disastrous invasions of the sea ; and that, though suited for the production of a rank and luxuriant flora, whose numerous denizens lived without consciousness and died without suffering, or for animals fitted to enjoy the present without thought or fear of the future, and to whom life, so long as they lived, was pleasure, and death merely a ceasing to be, we conclude that it could have been no fitting home for creatures of a higher order, whose nature it is to look before and behind them,—before them with hope or with fear, behind them with satisfaction or regret. And these strange platforms of sudden death,—of no rare occurrence in the marine depths of the Old Red Sandstone,—show that the sea in these early times was not less subject to disastrous catastrophe than the land,—that that order of nature which we now term its fixed order, and on whose permanency our minds have been framed to calculate, was, if I may venture the expression,