

markets of the neighbouring towns, and still the supply keeps up ample as at first. Now the tracts of sand which they inhabit, if not properly quicksands, are at least extremely loose, especially when covered by the tide; and though the creatures succeed, so long as they live, in maintaining their proper place in them within a few inches of the surface, no sooner do they die than the shells begin gradually to sink downwards through the unsolid mass, till, reaching, at the depth of about six feet, a firmer stratum, they there accumulate, and form a continuous bed. The work of accumulation has been going on for many centuries; generation after generation has been dying, to undergo this process of burial,—this process of subarenaceous deposition, if I may so speak; and there are places in the estuary in which the shelly stratum has risen to within a foot or two of the surface. It forms a sort of quarry of shells; and when, about thirty years ago, there was a lime-work established in the neighbourhood, many thousand cart-loads were dug out and burned into lime. I had frequent occasion, some five or six years since, to pass through the estuary at seasons when the mere amateur would have perhaps stayed at home. There runs through it a stream of fresh water, that drains the flat fields and scattered lochans of Easter Ross; and on one of my winter journeys, after a sudden thaw, accompanied by heavy rains, I found the stream swollen to the size of a considerable river, and its bed excavated beneath the usual level some three or four feet, with the sectional line of sand and shells through which it had cut standing up over it like a wall. There was first, reckoning downwards, from a foot to eighteen inches of pure sand; and next, from two feet to two feet and a half of dead shells. The sandy tract all around, for many hundred acres in extent, used to be partially covered with water; every furrow of the ripples, and every depression of the surface, borrowed its full from the receding tide, and,