

The Moss of Kincardine, in the upper part of the valley of the Forth, appears to owe its existence, at least in one place, to the fact that the thick oak forest which once covered its site was felled by man. Below the moss the stumps and trunks of large trees were found crowded as thickly upon the clay as they could be supposed to have grown there. The roots were still fixed in the clay, as when the trees were in life, and the stems had been cut down at a height of about two feet and a half from the ground. Marks of a narrow axe were sometimes traced on the lower ends of the logs, completing the proof that the wood had been cleared by human agency.¹ Here we see how a district of fair woodland—the home, doubtless, of many a stag and hind, and the nesting-place of many a cushat dove and blackbird—has been turned by man into a waste of barren morass and mire—a place of shaking bog and stunted heath, where he cannot build his dwelling nor plant his crops, and from which he can extract nothing save fuel for his hearth. Such has been the condition of these districts for many a long century; and it is only within the last two or three generations that an exertion has been made, with much labour and cost, to strip off the covering of peat, and restore again to the light of day that old soil which nourished the early oak forest.

So long as the conditions of growth continue favourable for the marshy vegetation, peat continues to be formed, and the bogs become gradually thicker. But where these conditions change in such measure as to kill off the peat-producing mosses, the peat ceases to accumulate. Its surface, as it dries, becomes a fit soil for other plants, notably for heather, which extends completely over it and sends its

¹ Tait, *On the Mosses of Kincardine and Flanders*. *Trans. Roy. Soc., Edin.*, iii. p. 266.