

CHAPTER XLIX.

IMBEDDING OF THE REMAINS OF MAN AND HIS WORKS IN
SUBAQUEOUS STRATA.

Drifting of human bodies to the sea by river inundations — Destruction of bridges and houses — Loss of lives by shipwreck — How human corpses may be preserved in recent deposits — Number of wrecked vessels — Fossil skeletons of men — Fossil canoes, ships, and works of art — Chemical changes which metallic articles have undergone after long submergence — Imbedding of cities and forests in subaqueous strata by subsidence — Earthquake of Cutch in 1819 — Berkeley's arguments for the recent date of the creation of man — Concluding remarks.

I SHALL now proceed to inquire in what manner the mortal remains of man and the works of his hands may be permanently preserved in subaqueous strata. Of the many hundred million human beings which perish in the course of every century on the land, every vestige is usually destroyed in the course of a few thousand years; but of the smaller number that perish in the waters, a considerable proportion must frequently be entombed under such circumstances, that parts of them may endure throughout entire geological epochs.

The bodies of men, together with those of the inferior animals, are occasionally washed down during river inundations into seas and lakes. (See pp. 726—728.) Belzoni witnessed a flood on the Nile in September, 1818, where, although the river rose only three feet and a half above its ordinary level, several villages, with some hundreds of men, women, and children, were swept away.* It was before mentioned that a rise of six feet of water in the Ganges, in 1763, was attended with a much greater loss of lives. (See above, p. 266.)

In the year 1771, when the inundations in the north of England appear to have equalled the floods of Morayshire in 1829, a great number of houses and their inhabitants were swept away by the rivers Tyne, Can, Wear, Tees, and Greta; and no less than twenty-one bridges were destroyed in the courses of these rivers. At the village of Bywell the flood tore the dead bodies and coffins out of the churchyard, and bore them away, together with many of the living inhabitants. During the same tempest an immense number of cattle, horses, and sheep, were also transported to the sea, while the whole coast was covered with the wreck of ships. Four centuries before (in 1338), the same district had been visited by a similar continuance of heavy rains followed by disastrous floods, and it is not improbable that these catastrophes may recur periodically, though after uncertain intervals. As the population increases, and buildings and bridges are multiplied, we must expect the loss of lives and property to augment.†

Fossilization of human bodies in the bed of the sea. — If to the hundreds of human bodies committed to the deep in the way of

* Narrative of Discovery in Egypt, &c., London, 1820. † Scots Mag., vol. xxxiii., 1771.