

CHAPTER III

THE SEA AND ITS WORK ON THE SCOTTISH COAST-LINE

IN contemplating the gradual waste to which the surface of the earth is everywhere subjected, the observer is soon struck with the signal proofs of decay furnished by that outer border of the land which is washed by the sea. The abrupt cliffs that shoot up from high-water mark, the skerries that rise among the breakers a little way from the shore, and the sunken reefs that lie still farther out to sea—all tell of the removal of masses of solid rock. A little reflection leads us to perceive that the abrading power of the sea must be confined to that upper part of the water which is affected by winds and tides, and that in the deeper abysses there is probably no sensible erosion of hard rock, though the currents there may be capable of carrying along fine ooze and silt.

The waste which takes place along the line where land and sea meet has a twofold character. In the first place, there is a direct abrasion by the sea itself, and it is this loss which is now to be considered. But, in the second place, cliffs and precipitous banks overlooking the waves are subject to that never-ceasing atmospheric waste described in the last chapter ; and the sea, in many places, does little