

the Somme, in which the bones of fossil mammalia are frequent, nor to the uppermost fresh-water strata forming the bottom of a large part of the Haarlem Lake, in which it is not pretended that such acids occur.

The primitive inhabitants of the Valley of the Somme may have been too wary and sagacious to be often surprised and drowned by floods, which swept away many an incautious elephant or rhinoceros, horse and ox. But even if those rude hunters had cherished a superstitious veneration for the Somme, and had regarded it as a sacred river (as the modern Hindoos revere the Ganges), and had been in the habit of committing the bodies of their dead or dying to its waters — even had such funeral rites prevailed, it by no means follows that the bones of many individuals would have been preserved to our time.

A corpse cast into the stream first sinks, and must then be almost immediately overspread with sediment of a certain weight, or it will rise again when distended with gases, and float perhaps to the sea before it sinks again. It may then be attacked by fish of marine species, some of which are capable of digesting bones. If, before being carried into the sea and devoured, it is enveloped with fluviatile mud and sand, the next flood, if it lie in mid channel, may tear it out again, scatter all the bones, roll some of them into pebbles, and leave others exposed to destroying agencies; and this may be repeated annually, till all vestiges of the skeleton may disappear. On the other hand, a bone washed through a rent into a subterranean cavity, even though a rarer contingency, may have a greater chance of escaping destruction, especially if there be stalactite dropping from the roof of the cave or walls of a rent, and if the cave be not constantly traversed by too strong a current of engulfed water.