New York, the growth of the continent was toward the south, the rocks of the Lower Silurian must lie to the north of Niagara Falls, and the rocks of the Devonian to the south. From either of these regions trace a line parallel with the axis of the lake waters—omitting Lake Superior—and we have the geographical boundary of a system of rocks, or one of the shore-lines of the ancient continent.

It is a curious fact that the great lakes were excavated along the outcrops of the formations instead of across them. It is not an unaccountable fact, for the lines of least resistance must have run along the trends of the most friable strata. Lake Michigan is scooped out from Devonian formations; and the same is true of Lake Erie. Lake Ontario is excavated in Lower Silurian strata; and the same is true of Georgian Bay, Green Bay, and the Wisconsin lakes farther south—Winnebago, Horicon, and Albion. The basin of Lake Huron is underlaid by Devonian and Upper Silurian rocks. It seems to be two basins coalesced; and but for the peninsula of Niagara limestone separating it from Georgian Bay, it would be three basins blended in one. Lake Champlain also conforms to the trend of Lower Silurian strata, but the small meridional lakes of Central and Western New York are plowed across the formations. They are a kind of inland fiords, worked out perhaps rather by the action of the glacier than by that of the floods which followed.

The influence of these vast inland accumulations of fresh water upon the comfort and happiness of man is strikingly beneficent and providential. They serve as equalizers of summer and winter temperatures. In winter they may be regarded as vast reservoirs of warmth—great natural stoves or heaters, which continue to impart their warmth to the frigid winds that move over them, and thus transfer their influence to the contiguous lands. This is a provision