

the dry land. The very agents that are working there now would evidently produce these features, if allowed long enough time for the task.

Fortunately we are not left to mere conjecture on this subject. The material removed from the surface of the land finds its way to rivers which transport it to the sea, where it finally settles down upon the sea-bottom. The amount of it annually removed in this manner is a measurable quantity, and has been ascertained with some approach to accuracy by a determination of the proportion of sediment in the water of some of the larger rivers of the globe. The Mississippi, as a typical river, draining a vast region wherein the climates, rocks, and elevations greatly vary, may probably be taken to represent a tolerably fair average of river-action. This stream has been ascertained to carry every year into the Gulf of Mexico a quantity of mineral sediment equivalent to the lowering of its whole drainage basin by $\frac{1}{8000}$ th part of a foot of rock. At this rate, an amount of material equal to the loss of one foot from the surface of the whole basin would be worn away and carried to the sea in 6000 years. And if the average height of North America be taken at 748 feet, and if we could suppose the present rate of degradation in the Mississippi basin to be continued over that continent, then the whole mass of North America would be reduced to the sea-level in about four and a half millions of years.

We have no reason to suppose that the general lowering of the surface of the land is advancing more rapidly now than it formerly did. Indeed, there are grounds for inferring that the rate may once have been faster than it is now. But even at the present rate, we are forced to admit that as every part of the land is undergoing degradation, no portion of its actual surface can possibly be of great antiquity. Ter-