Relatively few of these bodies are highly insoluble; very many are exceedingly soluble in water. Apart from their electrolytic dissociation and hydrolysis, which will be later discussed, the chemical changes wrought upon such dissolved substances in solution are commonly very unimportant. For chemical inertness, depending upon great stability, is a most significant characteristic of water, and undoubtedly a highly advantageous one as well.

On the whole the best evidence for the efficiency of water as a solvent of inorganic substances is to be found in the data of geology. Of all geological agents water appears to have been by far the most active within the periods of which investigation is made possible by the geological record.[1] Rainfall, the movement of surface streams and of water beneath the ground, and wave action, all contribute to the work of disintegration, sedimentation, etc., partly by dissolution of soluble material, partly by mechanical action. But mechanical action is itself much increased by the loosening which earlier dissolution has caused. In this manner the great solvent power of water throughout its meteorological cycle largely contributes to the mobil-

[1] Geikie, "Textbook of Geology," pp. 447–597.