

shells, were the same, or nearly the same, as those now living. Yet if we fix our thoughts on any one portion of this period—on the lapse of time, for example, required for the recession of the Niagara from the escarpment to the Falls,—how immeasurably great will its duration appear in comparison with the sum of years to which the annals of the human race are limited! Had we happened to discover strata, charged with fluviatile shells of recent species, and enclosing the bones and teeth of a Mastodon, near a river at the bottom of some valley, we might naturally have inferred that the buried quadruped had perished at an era long after the canoes of the Indian hunter had navigated the North American waters. Such an inference might easily have been drawn respecting the fossil tusk of the great elephantine quadruped, which I saw taken out of the shell-marl on the banks of the Genesee River near Rochester (see p. 19.). But fortunately on the Niagara, we may turn to the deep ravine, and behold therein a chronometer measuring rudely, yet emphatically, the vast magnitude of the interval of years, which separate the present time from the epoch when the Niagara flowed at a higher level several miles further north across the platform. We then become conscious how far the two events before confounded together,—the entombment of the Mastodon, and the date of the first peopling of the earth by man,—may recede to distances almost indefinitely remote from each other.

But, however much we may enlarge our ideas of the time which has elapsed since the Niagara first began to drain the waters of the upper lakes, we have seen that this period was one only of a series, all belonging to the present zoological epoch; or that in which