

CHAPTER VII.

Pine Barrens of Virginia and North Carolina.—Railway Train stopped by Snow and Ice.—The Great Dismal Swamp.—Soil formed entirely of Vegetable Matter.—Rises higher than the contiguous firm Land.—Buried Timber.—Lake in the Middle.—The Origin of Coal illustrated by the Great Dismal.—Objections to the Theory of an ancient Atmosphere highly charged with Carbonic Acid.

Dec. 23. 1841.—FROM Williamsburg we went to Norfolk in Virginia, passing down the James river in a steamer, and from Norfolk by railway to Weldon in North Carolina, passing for eighty miles through a low level country, covered with fir trees, and called the Pine Barrens. On our way we were overtaken by rain, which turned to sleet, and in the evening formed a coating of ice on the rails, so that the wheels of the engine could take no hold. There was a good stove and plenty of fuel in the car, but no food. After a short pause, the engineer backed the locomotive for half a mile over that part of the rail from which the snow and ice had just been brushed and scraped away by the passage of the train; then, returning rapidly, he gained sufficient momentum to carry us on two or three miles farther, and, by several repetitions of this manœuvre, he brought us, about nightfall, to a small watering station, where there was no inn, but a two-storied cottage not far off.

Here we were made welcome, and as we had previously dropped by the way all our passengers except two, were furnished with a small room to ourselves, and a