

tricts lying more to the south. Nevertheless, the presence of the transition saliferous earths may not be doubted, for rock salt occurs profusely in the shallower soils of many parts of the African desert. The working of the salt-beds is the staple of an active commerce between the deserts of the Sahara and those of the Soudan. In the southern belt of the wilderness the beds of rock salt are so thick that the natives use it for materials for constructing their houses. The region of the *natron lakes*, in Lower Egypt, and the oasis of Siwah, are equally celebrated in this respect.

In the northern Sahara, on the confines of the Atlas, various geological peculiarities tend to prove that it was anciently overflowed by a sea, which has been dispersed by a comparatively recent movement of elevation. The clayey and gypseous soil, the presence of sea salt and salts of magnesia, the abundant remains of shells of molluscs, whose congeners are now living in the Mediterranean—such, for instance, as the *cardium edule*—all demonstrate that the northern Sahara is the bed of an ancient sea, which, at one time, was part and parcel of the Mediterranean.

In the desert occur some considerable hollows, or depressions, which are filled with water some months in the year; these periodical lakes lie in the northern Sahara, and the Arabs designate them *Shotts*.*

The shifting sands which cover a great portion of the Sahara attain, in some places, to such a degree of thickness that no bottom has been found at 300 feet.

But how are these sands formed? How is the soil reduced into atoms not less minute than those which cover our sea-shores? To these questions different answers have been given.

It is probable that these masses of sand are the result of the spontaneous disintegration of the superficial rocks, and especially of the quartzose rocks. The soil is divided, under the action of the burning sun, into particles which become finer and yet finer, and the

* [See Rev. H. B. Tristram's "Great Sahara;" M. Charles Martins, "De Spitzberg au Sahara;" and General E. Daumas, "Le Grand Désert."]