

fertile as the Valley of the Mississippi. A great river watered it for a thousand miles, while a hundred tributaries dispensed fertility throughout the region which was then the garden, as it is now the desert, of the continent. That fertile plateau has been drained to death. Each stream has drilled a frightful chasm deep through the rocky foundations of the plain (Fig. 96, 97). The mother stream, the Colorado, dwarfed to a withered mockery of what it was, now creeps along at the bottom of a narrow gorge whose rocky walls rise, in places, more than a mile in height. From the brink of this appalling chasm, three hundred miles in length, your vision struggles down six thousand feet into the realm of twilight; and in this prison the attenuated Colorado—patriarch of American rivers—is wasting its senile energies from year to year, but, with “the ruling passion strong in death,” it is still carrying off the land, even though each season’s work sinks it into a deeper grave.

Such are the works of running streams and corroding waves. The record of their labors is the utterance of the destiny of the land. History inverted becomes prophecy. The doom of the mountains is engraven upon their rocky buttresses. Half the pride of the Alleghanies has already been removed. Rounded hill-top is dissolving into plain. Defiant granite, which buffeted the lightnings that rent Sinai, and frowned upon the flood that drowned “the world,” shall yet be brought down by the multitudinous pelting of rain, and the insidious sapping of frost. The mountains shall be wiped off. The continents shall be worn out. The rivers will have dug their graves. The ocean will have eaten up the land; and all there was of the dwelling-place of man will be a rocky islet, a ragged bluff, a sunken reef—the crumbs that fell from old Ocean’s meal.

There was a time when, by degrees, the continents were