the Loire is that which contains the greatest total thickness of coal-beds: the seams there are twenty-five in number. After those of the North—of the Saône-et-Loire and of the Loire—the principal basins in France are those of the Allier, where very important beds are worked at Commentry and Bezenet; the basin of Brassac, which commences at the confluence of the Allier and the Alagnon; the basin of the Aveyron, known by the collieries of Decazeville and Aubin; the basin of the Gard, and of Grand'-Combe. Besides these principal basins, there are a great many others of scarcely less importance, which yield annually to France from six to seven million tons of coal.

The seams of coal are rarely found in the horizontal position in which their original formation took place. They have been since much crumpled and distorted, forced into basin-shaped cavities, with minor undulations, and affected by numerous flexures and other disturbances. They are frequently found broken up and distorted by faults, and even folded back on themselves into zigzag forms, as represented in the engraving (Fig. 71, p. 167), which is a mode of occurrence common in all the Coal-measures of Somersetshire and in the basins of Belgium and the north of France. Vertical pits, sunk on coal which has been subjected to this kind of contortion and disturbance, sometimes traverse the same beds many times.