

rivers, which water the plains and bear the drainage out to sea. Drought and inundation succeed each other, and the same river which at one time carries fertility all over its valley, at another time, swollen into an impetuous flood, spreads across the plains, sweeping away farms and villages, and burying the soil under sheets of sterile gravel and sand. The operations of such streams as the Rhone, the Po, the Tiber, the Danube, the Achelous and the Peneius were not only watched by the inhabitants along their banks but became the subjects first, of widely diffused legendary tales, and afterwards of philosophical discussion. On the south side of the great sea, the Nile, with its mysterious sources and its unfailing annual rise, furnished an inexhaustible source of wonder and speculation.

Further, all round the basin of the Mediterranean the younger geological formations, upraised from the sea, now underlie many of the plains and rise high along the flanks of the hills. In these deposits, shells and other remains of sea-creatures have been preserved in such vast numbers as could not fail to arrest attention even in the infancy of mankind. Since the organisms are obviously like those still living in the neighbouring sea, the inference could readily be drawn that the sea had once covered the tracts of land where these remains had been left. This conclusion was reached by some of the earliest Greek philosophers, and there can be little doubt that it led to those wide views of the vicissitudes of Nature which were adopted in later centuries by their successors.