

Curves of the Mississippi. — The river traverses the plain in a meandering course, describing immense curves. After sweeping round the half of a circle, it is carried in a rapid current diagonally across the ordinary direction of its channel, to another curve of similar shape. Opposite to each of these, there is always a sand-bar, answering, in the convexity of its form, to the concavity of "the bend," as it is called.* The river, by continually wearing these curves deep, returns, like many other streams before described, on its own tract, so that a vessel in some places, after sailing for twenty-five or thirty miles, is brought round again to within a mile of the place whence it started. When the waters approach so near to each other, it often happens at high floods that they burst through the small tongue of land, and insulate a portion, rushing through what is called the "cut off," so that vessels may pass from one point to another in half a mile to a distance which it previously required a voyage of twenty miles to reach. As soon as the river has excavated the new passage, bars of sand and mud are formed at the two points of junction with the old bend, which is soon entirely separated from the main river by a continuous mud-bank covered with wood. The old bend then becomes a semicircular lake of clear water, inhabited by large gar-fish, alligators, and wild fowl, which the steam-boats have nearly driven away from the main river. A multitude of such crescent-shaped lakes, scattered far and wide over the alluvial plain, the greater number of them to the west, but some of them also eastward of the Mississippi, bear testimony to the extensive wanderings of the great stream in former ages. For the last two hundred miles above its mouth the course of the river is much less winding than above, there being only in the whole of that distance one great curve, that called the "English Turn." This greater straightness of the stream is ascribed by Mr. Forshey to the superior tenacity of the banks, which are more clayey in this region.

The Mississippi has been described as a river running on the top of a long hill or ridge which has considerable elevation above the surrounding low grounds. The banks, in fact, although liable to be overflowed during the highest floods, rise several yards above the general level of the alluvial plain, so that they form on each side two long stripes of land about two miles broad and parallel to the winding course of the river. They are inclined gently towards the low swamps which are in some parts permanently under water, but are rarely more than fifteen feet below the summit level of the bank. It is therefore a just observation of Flint that the picture commonly drawn of a river running on a hill is very far from a correct one, for the Mississippi really runs in a valley more than a hundred feet deep, and entirely below the level of all the neighbouring morasses.

The cause of the uniform upward slope of the river bank above the adjoining plain is this: when the waters charged with sediment pass over the banks in the flood season, their velocity is checked and

* Flint's Geog. vol. i. p. 152.