

they throw down immediately the coarser and more sandy matter with which they are charged. The fine particles of mud are carried farther on, so that at the distance of about two miles, a thin film of fine clay only subsides, forming a stiff unctuous black soil, which gradually envelopes the base of trees growing in the swamps.

Waste of the banks. — It has been said of a mountain torrent, that “it lays down what it will remove, and removes what it has laid down;” and in like manner the Mississippi, by the continual shifting of its course, sweeps away, during a great portion of the year, considerable tracts of alluvium, which were gradually accumulated by the overflow of former years, and the matter now left during the spring-floods will be at some future time removed. After the flood season, when the river subsides within its channel, it acts with destructive force upon the alluvial banks, softened and diluted by the recent overflow. Several acres at a time, thickly covered with wood, are precipitated into the stream; and large portions of the islands are frequently swept away.

“Some years ago,” observes Captain Hall, “when the Mississippi was regularly surveyed, all its islands were numbered, from the confluence of the Missouri to the sea; but every season makes such revolutions, not only in the number but in the magnitude and situation of these islands, that this enumeration is now almost obsolete. Sometimes large islands are entirely melted away — at other places they have attached themselves to the main shore, or, which is the more correct statement, the interval has been filled up by myriads of logs cemented together by mud and rubbish.”*

Rafts. — One of the most interesting features in the great rivers of this part of America is the frequent accumulation of what are termed “rafts,” or masses of floating trees, which have been arrested in their progress by snags, islands, shoals, or other obstructions, and made to accumulate, so as to form natural bridges reaching entirely across the stream. One of the largest of these was called the raft of the Atchafalaya, an arm of the Mississippi, which was certainly at some former time the channel of the Red River, when the latter found its way to the Gulf of Mexico by a separate course. The Atchafalaya being in a direct line with the general direction of the Mississippi, catches a large portion of the timber annually brought down from the north; and the drift trees collected in about thirty-eight years previous to 1816 formed a continuous raft, no less than ten miles in length, 220 yards wide, and eight feet deep. The whole rose and fell with the water, yet was covered with green bushes and trees, and its surface enlivened in the autumn by a variety of beautiful flowers. It went on increasing till about 1835, when some of the trees upon it had grown to the height of about sixty feet. Steps were then taken by the state of Louisiana to clear away the whole raft and open the navigation, which was effected, not without great labour, in the space of four years.

* Travels in North America, vol. iii. p. 361.