

primeval forests which cover the country, there occurs a friendly controversy between two of the party regarding the age of these vast woods. All the trees are of kinds unknown at home ; and, though loftier, many of them, than the great oaks of England, and not a few of them not less bulky, it is maintained by one of the disputants that they may yet have come under very different laws of growth, and may not be one twentieth part so old. These hoary forests, he argues, though it would require some three or four centuries to form such on the eastern shores of the Atlantic, may on its western shores be less than fifty years old ; nay, not only may the woods of the country be as of yesterday compared with those of England, but even its animals may be of such rapid growth, that the mouse-deer, though of ponderous bulk and size, may be in reality only a few months old ; and the oyster, which on the English beds takes from five to seven years, as shown by its annual *shoots*, to be fit for market, may in the American greatly larger species be equally mature in as many weeks. The disputant contends—and at this stage of the controversy contends truly—that they are furnished with no correct *unit* by which to measure the age of either the unknown plants or unfamiliar animals of the new country. Let us yet farther suppose that in the immediate neighbourhood of the infant settlement there is a small lake, which the settlers find it necessary for sanitary purposes to drain, and that they cut through, in the work, one of those deep mosses of Northern America in which the gigantic bones, and not unfrequently the entire skeletons, of the mastodon occur. Let us suppose that they first cut through several yards of solid peat,—that they then reach a tier of rather small tree-stumps sticking in the soil,—that a second tier of somewhat larger tree-stumps lies beneath,—that they then reach a third tier of still larger stumps,—that under the stratum of earth which underlies these they find a thick bed of marl composed chiefly of very