Geology brings us acquainted with the nature of the various strata that compose the terrestrial crust; it penetrates into the profundities of the globe, to enlighten us respecting its progressive formation and different modifications.

[*Physical Geography*, as an eloquent writer remarks,* is a description of the earth, the sea, and the air, with their inhabitants animal and vegetable, of the distribution of those organized beings, and the causes of that distribution. "Political and arbitrary divisions are disregarded, the sea and the land are considered only with respect to those great features that have been stamped upon them by the hand of the Almighty, and man himself is viewed but as a fellow-inhabitant of the globe with other created things, yet influencing them to a certain extent by his actions, and influenced in return."]

In the present work we shall confine ourselves to an examination of the superficial forms of the Earth, which, perhaps, may be justly entitled Physical Geography *proper*. We shall commence by considering the relative distribution of the continents and the waters.

In the early ages of our young world its surface was entirely covered by the primeval ocean. The formation of the continents by marine sediments, or by eruptions from the terrestrial interior, has since confined the waters within the great depressions of its solid crust—that is, its principal *basins*.

Strictly speaking, there exists but one single ocean, one single continuous liquid mass, spread all around the Earth, and bathing without interruption the icy shores of the two opposite poles. All the mediterraneans, the gulfs, the bays, the channels, are but detached, not isolated, portions of this universal sea. It is only, then, in deference to long-established custom, and to facilitate our daily usages, that geographers distinguish so many separate oceans, with their innumerable branches and ramifications—bays, straits, rivers, and streams.

* Mrs. Somerville, "Physical Geography," vol. i. chap. 1.