

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE EMPIRE OF REPTILES.

CONTINENTS have been developed, like organisms, from their primeval germs. Geologic force, like vital force, operates always toward the accomplishment of some definite end; and, notwithstanding its vicissitudes, there is little difficulty in perceiving how every phenomenon of one age has been contemplated and ministered to by the events of all preceding ages. The American Continent is not a single upthrow of volcanic force, but a gradual growth, beginning before the creation of the first animals and plants, and proceeding by a certain method through all the subsequent ages even to the present, and receiving from time to time such progressively improved existences as its physical circumstances permitted. At first it was an angulated ridge of land in the centre of the present continental area (Fig. 20). Then, by successive upheavals, belts of increment were added on the southeast and southwest, till the ancient ocean has been narrowed to its present limits. Like the exogenous growth of an oak, the increase has been always upon the outside. So the vast continent has been built up and configurated in accordance with a method as definite as that which has shaped the globe itself.

The empire of molluscs saw the greater portion of the continent the bed of the sea. The reign of fishes witnessed the emergence of only the extreme northeastern and northwestern portions of the United States (Fig. 55). In the earlier part of the reign of reptiles New England was a peninsula hemmed in by the broad estuary of the St. Law-