

CHAPTER XXII.

FORMER HIGHER LEVEL OF THE GREAT LAKES.

IN the spring of 1865, at the time of the memorable floods, I had occasion to pass over the Great Western Railway from Suspension Bridge to Detroit. From Chatham to the vicinity of Detroit this road runs within sight of Lake St. Clair. On this occasion the country was submerged almost as far as the eye could reach in every direction. Our engineer seemed to be practicing a new species of navigation—rather grallatorial than natatorial. The little lake had become rampant. Outraged by the long encroachments of the land, it had decided to assert again its ancient supremacy. Then I was reminded, if I had never been before, how slight a rise in the lake would submerge entire counties lying upon its borders.

A large part of this Canadian peninsula is scarcely above the ordinary level of the lakes. The whole region looks like an ancient swale and a more ancient lake bottom. The same is true of a considerable breadth on both sides of Lake St. Clair and the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers. Lake St. Clair itself—except when rampant—is little better than a marsh with a river running through it. Among navigators it is the opprobrium of the lakes. One never ceases to hear sailors talk about “the flats,” and Congress never ceases to be importuned to make another lake where Nature is in the very act of blotting one out. If the reader has ever taken a steam-boat trip through the lake, he could not avoid discovering that it is the very similitude of ostentatious learning—“all breadth and no depth.” The