

I ascend to the cupola of the magnificent state-house at Nashville, and take a survey of the surrounding country. On every side spread out the broadly undulating fields of grass and corn into the illimitable distance. A finer agricultural scene was never witnessed. A more beautiful landscape, diversified with broad clearings, waving crops, tufts of magnolia and poplar, shining mansions, withdrawing vales, and purple atmosphere, it has never been my privilege to gaze upon. What is the substratum of all this beauty of form and landscape? Descending to the ground, I find myself standing again upon the opened sepulchres of Lower Silurian populations. I go down to the bank of the Cumberland, and view the sharp-cut walls which frown above the muddy current a hundred feet below. Here is a deep perpendicular gorge chiseled by the river through the marble strata of the Trenton and Cincinnati groups. I set out upon an exploration of the charming country mapped before me from the dome of the Capitol. Traveling eastward for sixty miles, I pass continuously over an undulating exposure of the same strata. Here I find an outer wall four hundred feet high, which bounds this magnificent basin of Middle Tennessee on every side (Fig. 95). I climb to the top of this wall, and ascertain that it is at this point, the western termination of a series of overlying strata of Silurian and Devonian age, which to the west have been swept away, but toward the east form an elevated plateau, through which the streams have scored deep gorges four hundred feet down to the level of the central basin.

This "highland rim," as my scientific friend, Professor Safford, styles it, is forty miles wide. We come then to the foot of the Cumberland Mountains—or, more properly, Cumberland Table-land—and ascend a thousand feet over the outcropping edges of Lower Carboniferous strata, and