

as possible with water-breathing populations. The highest type of animals had been reached and its aquatic class had lived a striking career. Nature had now paused for the purification of the air for the next class. The plan of nature was blocked till this could be done.

The Power which had called matter and force into existence, could have made other disposition of this difficulty. The carbonic acid could have been combined with lime and fixed in limestones. It could have been banished from the planet. But carbon is precious. It is the basis of all our combustion. It warms and blazes in coal and petroleum, peat and gas. The carbon must be preserved for future use. Man would discover its utilities, though the age then passing had no use for it. Man was yet far off; but man was anticipated; man was involved in the plans of the world; man was prophesied in these preparations.

So vegetation was appointed to do the work and conserve the material. This explains the presence of coal-making trees upon the shores of the preceding epoch. They came by appointment, they were to fulfill a plan; they stood waiting by the border of a domain which had been promised them for a possession. All the conditions favored. This was not fortuitous; it was a preparation. Unlimited supplies of aliment pervaded the atmosphere. The marshy situation exhaled the abundant vapor in which vegetation delights. The earth in its comparative newness, retained the warmth to stimulate at the root. So tree-fern and herbaceous fern, calamite and sigillaria, begin work. Atom by atom, they selected the poison from the atmosphere, and, returning the oxygen, fixed the carbon in their tissues. Frond, stem, and root treasured up the fuel, impelled by the force of sunlight; every pound of vegetable answered to a given amount of solar force.

The work was begun. Generations of plants succeeding each other, fell prostrate at last, and added their substance to the growing bed of peat. Standing water protected the peat from decomposition. Now the skies again were lowering and forebodings of change trembled through the continent.