

altered the ancient table-land of Scandinavia, as will be illustrated in Book VII.

*Plains* are tracts of lowland (under 1000 feet in height) which skirt the sea-board of the continents and stretch inland up the river valleys. The largest plain in the world is that which, beginning in the centre of the British Islands, stretches across Europe and Asia. On the west, it is bounded by the ancient table-lands of Scandinavia, Scotland and Wales on the one hand, and those of Spain, France and Germany on the other. Most of its southern boundary is formed by the vast belt of high ground which spreads from Asia Minor to the east of Siberia. Its northern margin sinks beneath the waters of the Arctic Ocean. This vast region is divided into an eastern and western tract by the low chain of the Ural Mountains, south of which its general level sinks, until underneath the Caspian Sea it reaches a depression of about 3000 feet below sea-level. Along the eastern sea-board of America lies a broad belt of low plains, which attain their greatest dimensions in the regions watered by the larger rivers. Thus they cover thousands of square miles on the north side of the Gulf of Mexico, and extend for hundreds of miles up the valley of the Mississippi. Almost the whole of the valleys of the Orinoco, Amazon and La Plata is occupied with vast plains.

From the evidence of upraised marine shells, it is certain that large portions of the great plain of the Old World comparatively recently formed part of the sea-floor. It is likewise probable that the beds of some inclosed sea-basins, such as that of the North Sea, have formerly been plains of the dry land.

It is obvious, from their distribution along river-valleys, and on the areas between the base of high grounds and the