

it takes its rise as a mere brook, and, fed by innumerable similar torrents, dashes rapidly down the steep sides of the mountains, leaping from crag to crag in endless cascades, and growing every moment in volume, until it enters lower ground. 2. *The Valley Track*—where, now flowing through lower hills or undulations, the stream is found at one time in a wide fertile valley, then in a dark gorge, now falling headlong into a cataract, now expanding into a broad lake. This is the part of its career where it assumes the most varied aspects, and receives the largest tributaries. 3. *The Plain Track*—where, having quitted the undulating region, the river finally emerges upon broad plains, probably wholly or in great part composed of alluvial formations deposited by its own waters. Here winding sluggishly in wide curves, it may eventually bifurcate, as it approaches the sea and spreads through its delta, inclosing tracts of flat meadow or marsh, and finally, amid banks of mud and sand, passing out into the great ocean. In Europe, the Rhine, Rhone and Danube; in Asia, the Ganges and Indus; in America, the Mississippi and Amazon; in Africa, the Nile and Niger—illustrate this typical course of a great river.

If we draw a longitudinal section of the course of any such river or of any of its tributaries from its source, or from the highest peaks around that source, to its mouth, we find that the line at first curves steeply from the mountain crests down into the valleys, but grows less and less inclined through the middle portion, until it finally can hardly be distinguished from a horizontal line. This feature, however, is not confined to stream courses but belongs to the architecture of the continents.

It is evident that a river must flow, on the whole, fastest in the first portion of its course, and slowest in the last.