

carried out into the Adriatic. Hence, partly, no doubt, the remarkably rapid rate of growth of the delta of the Po. But in such cases, man needs all his skill and labor to keep the banks secure. Even with his utmost efforts, a river will now and then break through, sweeping down the barrier which it has itself made, as well as any additional embankments constructed by him, and carrying its flood far and wide over the plain. Left to itself, the river would incessantly shift its course, until in turn every part of the plain had been again and again traversed. It is indeed in this way that a great alluvial plain is gradually levelled and heightened. The most stupendous example of the gradual heightening of a plain by river deposits, and of the devastation caused by the bursting of the artificial barriers raised to control the stream, is that of the Hoang Ho or Yellow River. So frequently has this river changed its course across the great eastern plain, and so appalling has been the consequent devastation, that it has received the name of "China's sorrow." The last great inundation took place in the autumn of 1887, when hundreds of villages were submerged and more than a million human beings were drowned. Breaking down its frail embankment, the stream poured through the breach, which was some 1200 yards wide, and spread out over a width of 30 miles in a current ten to twenty feet deep in the middle.

(c) On River-banks and Flood-plains.—As is partly implied in the action described in the foregoing paragraph, alluvium is laid down on the level tracts or flood-plain over which a river spreads in flood. It consists usually of fine silt, mud, earth, or sand; though close to the channel, it may be partly made up of coarser materials. When a flooded river overflows, the portions of water which spread out on the plains, by losing velocity, and consequently power of transport, are compelled to let fall more or less of their mud and sand. If the plains happen to be covered with wood, bushes, scrub, or tall grass, the vegetation acts the part of a sieve, and filters the muddy water, which may rejoin the main stream comparatively clear. The height of the plain is thus increased by every flood, until, partly from