

Desmarest was probably of a procrastinating, possibly even of an indolent, temperament. Yet, when we consider the amount of work, official and scientific, which he accomplished, we must acquit him of such an imputation. His voluminous reports on the various industries of France show how actively and zealously he laboured in his official harness. But perhaps the best proof of his indefatigable industry was his colossal *Géographie Physique*, which he undertook as part of the famous *Encyclopédie Méthodique* founded by Diderot and D'Alembert. The exhaustive treatment of his subject may be inferred from the fact that after devoting to it four massive quarto volumes of from 700 to 900 pages each, he had only got to the letter N when death closed his labours.

The first volume of this great work is in many respects the most interesting. The author in his preface tells how he means to exclude from his task all discussion of theories of the earth, for, as he frankly confesses, he had long looked upon these theories as utterly opposed to the principles of Physical Geography. But on second thoughts, as unfortunately such theories really existed, having much the same relation to Physical Geography that fable bears to history, he had resolved to give a summary of the subject, thus conforming to the practice of some writers who begin their histories with a brief mention of the heroic times.¹ Accordingly he devotes the first volume to notices of the more important authors who had treated of his subject, excluding those who were still alive. He made, however, exceptions to

¹ *Géographie Physique*, vol. i. (1794), preface.