

cheria. The two latter are filamentous, whilst *Enteromorpha*, at first ribbon-like, may, when full-grown, become a hollow cylinder. As we shall see, *Algæ* are by no means excluded from the high marsh, but undoubtedly they are most abundantly produced at a lower level. They play an important part both mechanically as mud-binders, and, later, as manurial agents when they are washed up with the drift.

Between the two types of marsh no hard-and-fast line exists, for low marsh is continually in process of transformation into high by accretion of mud and the entry of other species of plants. At the same time the converse process is in operation, and high marsh gives place to low as a result of undercutting. This process is aggravated when from any cause, such as the disappearance of a protecting point of sand or shingle, some part of the marsh becomes exposed to increased scour by the sea. Under these altered conditions areas of high marsh may be rapidly degraded. In rare cases, as when shingle is washed to and fro on the actual surface, the tufty covering may be abraded to such an extent that the marsh suffers erosion superficially as well as by undercutting. However, increased local erosion is usually counterbalanced by increased accretion somewhere else. A marsh is always able to assimilate much greater quantities of silt than are normally forthcoming. This power to accrete depends on the mud-holding faculty of the vegetation, and is dealt with more fully in a separate section at page 198. The question is sometimes asked whether in process of time the level of a salt marsh may not be raised so high by silting that the sea is automatically excluded; in other words, whether a marsh may not naturally reclaim itself? So far as we know salt marshes are never reclaimed unless the sea is banked off either artificially by the construction of sea-walls, or naturally by the throwing up of shingle beaches or sand dunes. Provided the level of the land is not rising, the sea would never appear to abdicate the prerogative of undoing its own handiwork.

Peculiarities of Salt-marsh Vegetation.—The plants which inhabit salt marshes belong to two great classes of plants, the *Algæ* and the *Spermophytes* or higher plants.