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**A monograph of the Mollusca from the Great Oolite, chiefly from  
Minchinhampton and the coast of Yorkshire**

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A MONOGRAPH  
OF THE  
MOLLUSCA FROM THE GREAT OOLITE.

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GENERAL GEOLOGICAL REMARKS.

THE Minchinhampton district of the Great Oolite has produced by far the greater number of our illustrative specimens; and as the formation at that locality exhibits features of a very varied as well as comprehensive character, we may be excused for entering somewhat more into detail in our remarks upon it. The Great Oolite in this portion of Gloucestershire constitutes the uppermost rock of the Cotteswold Hills; it everywhere overlies the Fullers-earth, which, in turn, reposes upon the uppermost beds of the Inferior Oolite;—there is, therefore, a regular unbroken sequence of the Oolite rocks exposed on the flanks of the various deep valleys of denudation which pervade the district. The physical features of the district are strongly marked; the larger valleys have a mean depth of about 500 feet, and exhibit what can scarcely be met with in any other part of England; a single unbroken declivity comprising the Great Oolite, Fullers-earth, Inferior Oolite, and upper portion of the Lias. The Inferior Oolite at these escarpments has a thickness of about 230 feet, the Fullers-earth of 70 feet, and the different beds of Great Oolite of 120 feet; but of these latter, only about the lower 40 feet anywhere approach to the brow of the escarpments. The narrow and deep vale of Chalford, with its lateral branches, intersects the strike of the Great Oolite, and divides the fossiliferous portion of the district into two parts; another and wider valley, further south, likewise intersects the strike of the formation. In this are situated the villages of Woodchester, Hailsworth, and Avening; but here the amount of denudation, horizontally, has been more extensive; and as the Great Oolite is likewise much less fossiliferous, it need only be adverted to as supplying many additional positions, where the rock can conveniently be quarried by open-work excavations. It will, therefore, be perceived that the natural features of the district eminently conduce to the study of its organic remains.

The mineral masses which constitute this series of beds are exclusively of marine origin, the varying character of their organic contents being connected both with the mineral character of the deposit spread upon the floor of the ancient sea, and with its depth. These deposits may be conveniently divided into three groups :

1st. The Weatherstones;      2d. The Sandstones; and      3d. The Limestones.

The weatherstones, which are situated at the base of the formation, average about 40 feet in thickness. They consist of shelly sandstones, abounding with crystalline carbonate of lime, and having Oolitic grains irregularly and sparingly distributed throughout their mass. The variety of mineral character is so great, that no two quarries, or beds of the same quarry, or even distant parts of the same bed, are alike in structure, aspect, hardness, durability, or in the abundance of their included organic relics; and they appear to have constituted a deposit both littoral and formed in a shallow sea, exposed to the influence of tides and currents. The beds, which are sometimes of considerable thickness, consist of layers of testacea, in a fragmentary state, piled confusedly, but forming, obliquely, laminated surfaces, often interrupted and crossed by others which proceed in different directions. The shelly relics often constitute a considerable proportion of the whole mass; they are converted into crystalline carbonate of lime, which frequently fills the interior of the univalves; and it is to the abundance of this mineral, disseminated everywhere, that the weatherstones owe their superior durability upon exposure to the atmosphere. As a general rule, therefore, the beds which contain the greatest abundance of shells are those which are most fitted to resist the action of frost; water percolates their structure in much smaller quantity, and more slowly, and, on escaping, carries away but little lime in solution. The open joints of the Great Oolite, adjacent to the shelly beds, are therefore nearly free from the large stalactitical masses which load the joints of the freestone in the Inferior Oolite.<sup>1</sup> With the testaceous fragments are associated shells in a perfect condition, though frequently worn and abraded, the valves of the conchifera being rarely in apposition; also, palatal bones and teeth of fishes, portions of crustacea, spines of cidaris, ossicula of pentacrinites and asterias, rolled fragments of zoophytes, and dicotyledonous wood, the partitions of the beds disclosing not unfrequently the ripple-marks of a beach. It might be imagined that beds of such a littoral character would be unsuited to the propagation and development of the Cephalopoda; and it will occasion no surprise when we find that

<sup>1</sup> For economic purposes, the weatherstones are valuable on account of their durability. In proof of this, we may refer to the good state of preservation which the ancient part of the church at Minchinhampton exhibits, and which shows a care and judgment in the selection of materials not always to be found in modern edifices. It is rather a singular fact, that Caen and Minchinhampton, the two places which have produced by far the most extensive series of Great Oolite shells, are connected historically as well as geologically. Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror, founded the nuns of the Holy Trinity at Caen, of which body one of her daughters became a member. William endowed them with the manor of Minchinhampton, at which place they had a religious establishment. They built the church, and dedicated it to the Holy Trinity. It would seem that William despoiled the Saxon Countess Goda of the manor, which she possessed in the time of Edward the Confessor, and bestowed it upon the favorites of his wife.

examples of this class of carnivorous mollusks are here few, both as to number of species and of individuals. This fact, together with the circumstance that they do not mark any particular stratum, renders it highly probable that they were not associated, when living, with the denizens of these shelly beds, but, like dead shells of the recent *Spirulæ*, individuals occasionally floated upon the surface, and were wafted to some coast or shelly strand, often very distant from their real habitat. With the chambered shells such occurrences may have been common; the air-tight little vessel, separated by decomposition from the animal, would ride upon the wave, and only suffer injury upon striking the ground of the beach. A consideration of the gregarious habits of the several families of recent, and probably also of extinct Cephalopoda, would lead us to regard an occasional stray individual as having travelled from some colony more or less distant; but the beds of closely-packed Ammonites, of every stage of growth, which occur in certain of the Jurassic rocks, would appear to be the effect of occasional rapid earthy deposits, which took place during that seasonal period when the Mollusks, lying torpid and contracted within their shells, were at once entombed in that condition. We have also an explanation of the perfect condition which the Ammonites of these beds usually exhibit; the place of retirement would be exempt from the turbulence of a shallow sea, and exposed only to the deposit of mud or other fine sediment, which would protect the shells from injury. In the few Ammonites and Nautili of the weatherstone beds, we see the reverse of these conditions;—those large and fragile shells, exposed in that detrital deposit to every kind of attrition and accident, are very rarely perfect; seldom more than two continuous chambers can be found which have not been invaded by earthy sediment, and often large portions of shell are wanting altogether. The paucity of the Brachiopoda in these beds is also worthy of notice. Three species of *Terebratula* are found associated with nearly 400 species of Mollusks; and certain genera, which are peculiarly prominent in the Oolitic rocks generally, are mostly absent; of these genera, the *Pholadomyæ*, *Homomyæ*, *Cercomyæ*, *Myopsides*, *Gresslyæ* or *Pleuromyæ*, the *Arcomyæ* and *Ceromyæ*, being exceedingly rare. The greater number of these genera are not uncommon in the limestones or upper beds of the Great Oolite, and occasionally, also, in the lower beds or sandstones, when they are separate from any shelly deposit.

The section of the shelly beds, exhibited by the great quarry upon Minchinhampton Common, affords a clear view of their distinctive characters and order of superposition. The upper part consists of thinly-laminated stone, five or six feet in thickness; to this succeeds the beds usually termed planking, a designation implying a thin bedded stone, but occasionally consisting of beds of great thickness: fourteen feet would appear to be their utmost thickness. They mark the downward limit of our new genus *Purpuroidea*, in the lowest bed of which it is very abundant.

An uncertain and variable stratum, of a few inches, of sandy marl next succeeds, in which the few casts of bivalve shells hitherto found have the valves in apposition. To this succeeds thin-bedded yellowish sandstones, nearly destitute of shells, and worthless for

economic purposes: their thickness is about twelve feet. A soft, shelly sandstone, called *oven-stone*, next occurs: the shells increase in quantity downwards: about six feet will represent its thickness. To this succeeds the weatherstones, consisting of several beds, the aggregate thickness of which is about six feet. These lower beds are very shelly; but, owing to the greater hardness of the matrix, specimens cannot be extracted in any considerable number. The blue or brown clays of the Fullers-earth support the weatherstones, without any appearance of Stonesfield slate. It is also absent in several other limited shelly deposits; but, as a general rule, throughout the district, the Great Oolite, near to its base, has one or more beds, which possess all the essential characters of Stonesfield slate. A little higher in the series than the shelly beds, the limestones occur which cover continuously a very considerable area upon both sides of the vale of Chalford, and continue upwards, with various modifications of character, even to the Bradford clay. The lowest of this series is a very compact cream-coloured semi-siliceous, but argillaceous limestone, four feet thick, divided into two beds. It is usually destitute of organic remains; but in some localities contains casts of species of *Purpuroidea*, of several species of *Natica*; and, also, at a single locality, a dense colony of our new genus *Pachyrisma*, which has not hitherto been found in any other stratum. This limestone extends even to the vicinity of Cirencester, and was employed by the Romans to form tessaræ for their pavements, as noticed by Messrs. Buckman and Newmarch, in their new work on Corinium.<sup>1</sup> The base line of the white limestone is 60 feet above the Fullers-earth at Minchinhampton, and 45 feet, four miles to the east of that place, near to the railway (Sapperton tunnel); the measurements have been obtained by well-sinkings. Above this rock occurs a series of pale brown or chocolate-coloured limestones, sometimes compact, sometimes sandy, having between them an occasional uncertain band of marly clay. These clays are always fossiliferous, abounding in casts of bivalve shells, which have both valves generally united. The uppermost 40 feet of this series, owing to the worthless character of the stone, is very imperfectly exposed, our knowledge of it being chiefly derived from pits of no great size, opened for the repair of the roads. The eastern extremity of the railway tunnel (Sapperton) offers an extensive section of these beds, but their position does not allow of their being studied, except at a distance. The white limestone is exposed about the middle of the section. One of the road-side excavations, two miles east of Minchinhampton, and 90 feet above the Fullers-earth, has two beds of sandy limestone which is more than usually fossiliferous, they expose sections of *Nerinea*, *Pterocera*, *Natica*, *Cylindrites*, *Bulla*, *Purpuroidea*, several of the *Echinodermata*, &c. The bivalves, which are more numerous, comprise *Pholadomya*, *Homomya*, *Ceromya*, *Lucina*, and *Cercomya*. The shell is preserved in the condition of crystalline lime, but the interior mould only can be extracted entire. At three miles and a half east of Minchinhampton, a large excavation has a band of brown clay, which abounds with *Terebratula maxillata*, being almost the only fossil. This band is 115 feet above the

<sup>1</sup> 'Illustrations of the remains of Roman art in Cirencester, the site of Antient Corinium,' by Professor Buckman, F.G.S., and W. C. Newmarch. London, 1850.

Fullers-earth. In another direction, one mile south-east of the town, is a marly band, containing a dense colony of a species of *Terebratula*, which is likewise the sole fossil observed. This isolation of the *Terebratulæ* is worthy of notice; they occur but as a few stray individuals in the shelly beds of the formation: in one instance, indeed, a shelly quarry at Bussage, a little to the north of the vale of Chalford, contains a large assemblage of a smooth, undescribed species, but at that place the other genera suddenly disappear, and the *Terebratulæ* are either alone or accompanied only by a few small bivalve shells. The Bradford clay, marked by the *Terebratula digona*, has not been discovered nearer than the cuttings at the Tetbury road station, eight miles distant. The Great Oolite has now been traced upwards throughout the Minchinhampton district, but there yet remains a subdivision of the formation to be noticed; this consists of sandstones, nearly worthless for economic purposes, and of but little interest to the Palæontologist; they constitute the entire series of beds which underlie the limestones, and usually terminate downwards in Stonesfield slate, or have one or two beds which approach the slate in mineral character. These sandstones must be regarded as merely continuations of the Weatherstone beds, but are nearly or quite destitute of shelly detritus and crystalline structure; for it is a curious but undoubted fact that the shelly weatherstones never have the limestones incumbent upon them. All the quarrymen are aware of the fact from the experience which they have gained in the numerous trials for weatherstone. At Bussage an instance may be seen of a weatherstone quarry passing into a worthless sandstone on approaching the area covered by the limestone; occasionally, indeed, the sandstones disclose a cluster of *Pholadomyæ*, and in the vicinity of the Stonesfield slate contain some other bivalves which are never found in the shelly beds. Occasionally over some small areas good serviceable quarries of weatherstone are worked in situations where scarcely a single perfect shell can be procured; there is then a dense, finely comminuted, shelly detritus, and the rock abounds with calcareous spar, and becomes thick bedded; several quarries of this description have been worked in the parish of Avening with good success; in this condition the rock presents an exact counterpart to the *general* aspect of the freestone beds in the middle portion of the Inferior Oolite in Gloucestershire, except that perhaps in the latter formation the oolitic grains are rather more abundant.

One of the most forcible impressions conveyed to the mind by a survey of the testacea of this formation, when compared with that of the other members of the oolitic system, is the great scarcity of the Cephalopoda, so few indeed are they, that the entire number procured during the last twelve years may almost be counted. For this scarcity we think we can perceive a compensation in the appearance of several genera of zoophagous gasteropods, in such numbers as must effectually have checked any undue predominance which might have been acquired by the phytiphagous mollusca, in the absence of the Cephalopoda. When the *Phasianellæ* and *Naticæ*, which are now known to be zoophagous, are added to our species of flesh-eating mollusca, it will at once be perceived how amply nature provided for the maintenance of the balance of the testaceous animals during the deposition of the Great Oolite of England. The great mass of the testacea are bivalves, and in species they exceed, by about one fourth, the united number of the Gasteropoda, Cephalopoda, and Echinodermata.