

**On certain collections in the Bristol Museum : how they originated / by  
Spencer Geo. Perceval.**

**Contributors**

Perceval, Spencer George, 1838-1922.  
Royal College of Surgeons of England

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Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
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On Certain Collections in the  
Bristol Museum.

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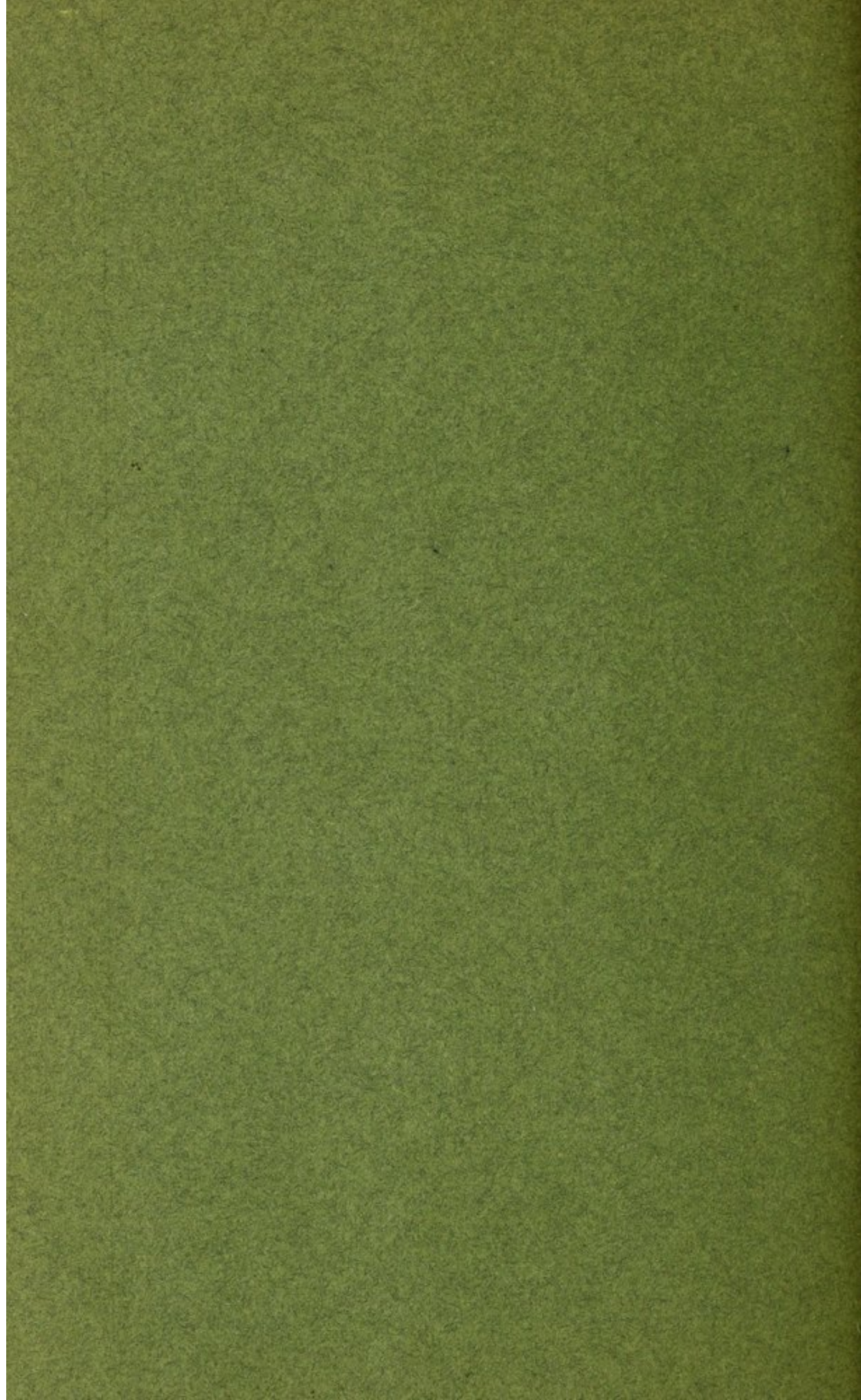
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HOW THEY ORIGINATED.

BY

SPENCER GEO. PERCEVAL.





27 West Mall  
Clifton  
BRISTOL

Jan: 21. 1867

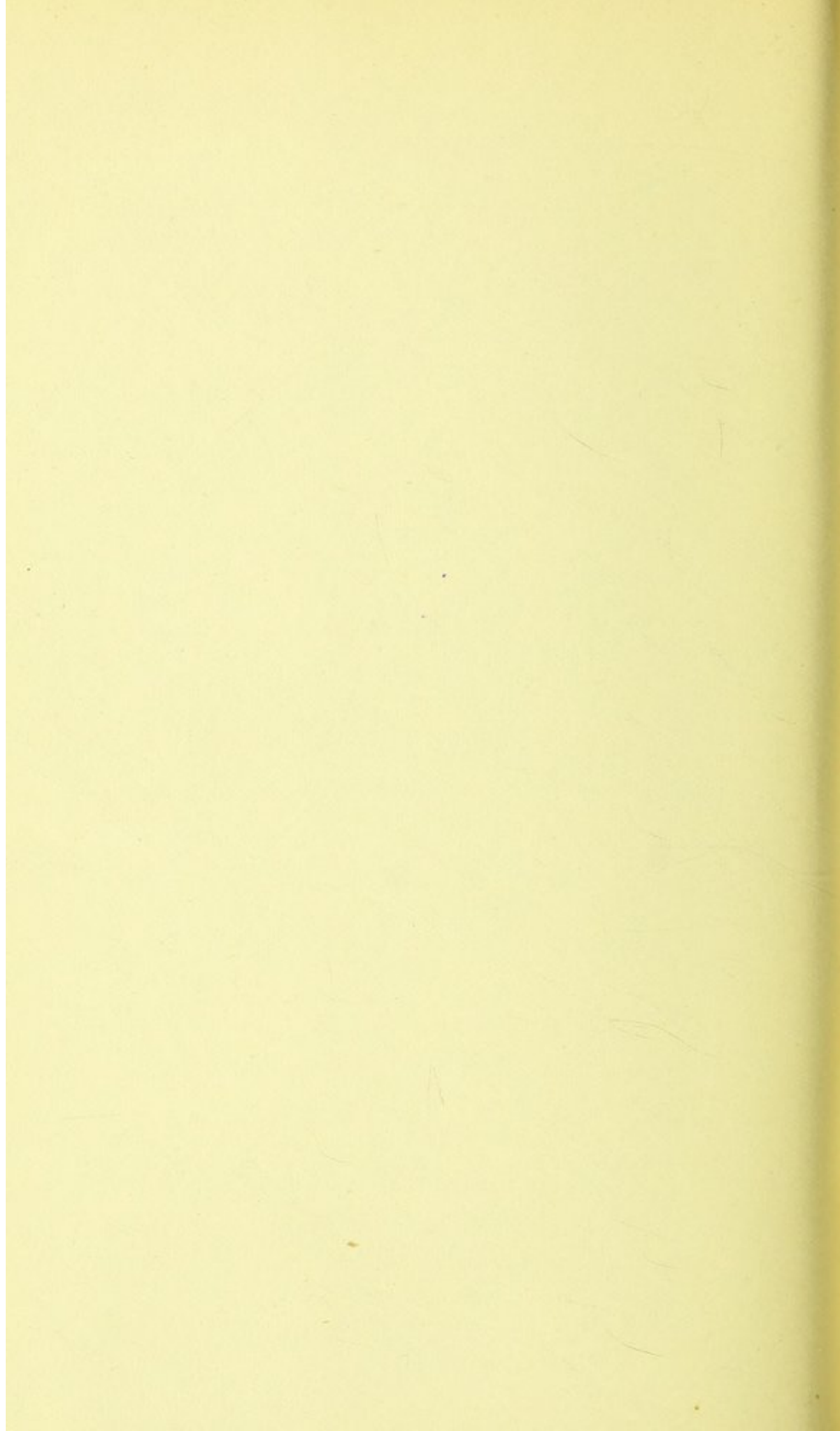
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Spencer, Geo. Perceval





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Bristol Museum.

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HOW THEY ORIGINATED.

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BY  
SPENCER GEO. PERCEVAL.



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# On certain Collections in the Bristol Museum.

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## How they Originated.

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By SPENCER GEO. PERCEVAL.

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*Reprinted from the "Bristol Times and Mirror"*  
*of Saturday, Jan. 5th, 1907.*

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I observe that a re-arrangement of the geological collections exhibited in the cases in the upper Museum has apparently commenced. It may therefore be as well to give information about certain portions of the collection, as little appears to be known by local geologists as to their histories.

### 1.—DEVONIAN FISH REMAINS.

The occurrence of fish remains in the old red sandstone at Portishead was discovered by the Rev. Bartholomew Blenkiron in the year 1862 or 1863. He was at the time living at Portishead. There is a notice of the discovery in the report of the first annual meeting of the Bristol Naturalists' Society, held on May 8th, 1863, as follows:

"On March the 5th Mr. William Sanders gave an account of the discovery of the remains of holoptychius in the old red sandstone at Portishead."

In Vol. II. of the society's Proceedings, new series, is an account, commencing on page 78, of an excursion of the Geological Section to Portishead on September 11th, 1867, in the course of which occurs the following statement:—

"Three or four years ago the Rev. Mr. Blenkiron, of Portishead, picked up on the beach a loose bit of rock, in which he detected the remains of fish scales," &c.



The most valuable specimens found at this locality were collected by the late Dr. Samuel Martyn. They consist of the fine examples of holoptychius scales exhibited in the cases which were presented by him to the Museum. In Vol. I., new series, 1874-6, at page 141, is a paper by Dr. Martyn, "On Fish Remains in the Bristol Old Red Sandstone," in which he gives an account of his discoveries at Portishead.

In 1878 Mr. Blenkiron, who was then living at Bath, presented, at my suggestion, to the Bristol Museum the specimens in his collection which were of most interest. They consisted of one or more specimens from the old red sandstone, and very interesting examples of trilobites from the dolomitised carboniferous limestone at Portishead.

Mr. Blenkiron died at Cheltenham on September 17th, 1905, aged 90.

## 2.—FOSSIL CORALS.

The magnificent collection of fossil corals is the finest in existence from the carboniferous limestone of Bristol. It includes the fine collection presented several years ago by the late Colonel A. M. Jones.

## 3.—MILLER COLLECTION OF FOSSIL CRINOIDEA.

J. S. Miller, the author of "A Natural History of the Crinoidea," 4to, 1821, was the first curator of the Bristol Museum. The specimens figured in his work were originally in the Museum. They have practically all disappeared, the few remaining specimens being, I presume, those that were considered not worth taking by the person who appropriated the rest. When the late Mr. E. B. Tawney was curator, 1872-78, I used frequently to discuss museum matters with him. He once said to me that it made him "morally sick" to think of the way in which the collections had been treated. Not only had the Miller specimens disappeared, but he also told me that he frequently found specimens missing that were referred to in scientific works. He would not tell me who was suspected of taking the Miller specimens, by which I concluded it was some well-known person. I have mentioned the matter at the British Museum, also to the principal London natural history



dealers, &c., in case any of the figured specimens should turn up. One thing alone is clear, that the specimens figured by Miller have, with the exception of the less important, disappeared from the Museum. In the Museum Library is preserved Miller's own copy of his work, with original drawings inserted. It is worth inspection.

#### 4.—THE CODONTOSAURUS REMAINS.

These remains were discovered in 1834, by Messrs. Riley and Stutchbury. The exposure of rock from which they were obtained used to be visible on the west side at the south end of Worrall Road. This exposure is represented in the maps which accompanied Wright's Bristol Directories of the years 1870 to 1874. At page 111 of Arrowsmith's Dictionary of Bristol, 1884, the locality is thus described: "Reptilian remains were found some years ago in a dyke of new red conglomerate, near Lower Belgrave Road, Durdham Down." The exposure in Worrall Road is no longer visible, having apparently been built over. The discovery is recorded in the "Transactions of the Geological Society," Series 2, Vol. V. (1840), Page 349. At Page 84 of "The West of England Journal of Science and Literature," 1835-6, is an article headed "Saurian Remains in the Magnesian Conglomerate of Durdham Down." The locality is described as the quarry east of Durdham Down, at this time no doubt open and accessible.

#### 5.—HIGGINS COLLECTION OF CERATODUS TEETH.

This wonderful collection, which had been formed by Mr. E. T. Higgins, M.R.C.S., I secured in 1873, with the assistance of Mr. Tawney, the curator, for the Bristol Museum, in order to prevent its being sold to the Americans. Not only would science in this country have been deprived of a collection which could be formed of equal extent but at one place on the surface of the earth, viz., at Aust, but the Bristol Museum would also have been deprived of the gigantic *Megalosaurus* bones from Aust, which had been lent by Mr. Higgins. The collection was eventually purchased for £250. Lists of the subscribers, with subscriptions, for distribution, were printed at the 'Times and Mirror'



office, and a copy should still be in the Museum. The subscribers included the Earl of Ducie and the principal residents in Bristol and the neighbourhood, a few of whom are still living.

The following letters, which I received from Mr. Higgins, are worth publishing, as illustrating the history of the collection:—

“24, Bloomsbury Street, London, W.C.,

“29th August, 1873.

“Dear sir,—The understanding between the Americans and myself is that if I cannot dispose of my Aust collection in England that they will take it at a price named (nearly £300). I would rather make a sacrifice to prevent its leaving England, and will, therefore, take for the whole collection £275, or £250 for the fish remains. I cannot say less, for, independent of time, etc., the collection has cost me over £400. I will leave the matter open for a month, and if, by the end of September, I hear nothing more, shall conclude it has dropped through.

“Yours ever,

“E. HIGGINS.”

“24, Bloomsbury Street,

“1st September, 1873.

“Dear sir,—The Aust collection consists of

“(1) Teeth of *Ceratodus*—about 300; I believe rather more.

“(2) Teeth and fin bones of *Hybodus*, *Acrodus*, *Nemacanthus*, etc. Vertebrae and teeth of *Ichthyosaurus*, *Plesiosaurus*, etc. Large Saurian bone of *Megalosaurus* (?) deposited in the Bristol Institution.

“For the fish remains, 1 and 2, I can obtain 280gs., and for the Saurian remains £15; but prefer to take less and keep them in England. I shall, indeed, be glad to see them in their right place—the Bristol Institution.

“I write to-day to try and get a recent *Ceratodus* to deposit with the fossil remains.

“Yours very truly,

“E. HIGGINS.”

These letters are now in the British Museum.

It is a great pity the collection was not bought by the British Museum. Seeing the direction in which the Bristol Museum has developed of late years, the progress of the local collections—chance donations excepted—having practically ceased, I much regret I did not propose that the Higgins Collection should not be presented, but



merely deposited in the Museum, in the names of the subscribers. The adoption of such a course would have been some sort of a protection. Certainly no subscriptions would have been forthcoming if it had been supposed that the collection was not safe for all time in the Bristol Museum, or if it had been contemplated that the collection at some future time might be used for effecting exchanges or for purposes of sale.

#### 6.—DURDHAM DOWN BONE FISSURE.

At Page 32 of the "Proceedings of the Bristol Naturalists' Society," Vol. V., New Series, 1885—8, occurs the following note in connection with E. Wilson's paper on "The Bone Cave or Fissure": "Mr. R. Etheridge, F.R.S., who was, I believe, resident in Bristol at the date of this discovery (1842), and who speaks from personal recollection, informs us that the cave or fissures occurred in one of the large quarries on the Down, between the Black Boy Inn, or corner of the Down, and Cook's Folly, in direct line. Is not this the large quarry which once existed in the middle of Durdham Down, near the reservoir, on the south side of the Stoke Bishop Road, and which was eventually filled up with the material taken from the excavation for the Cumberland Basin?" Wilson was quite right in conjecturing that the quarry in which the fissure occurred was in the centre of the Down. It was on the south side of the Stoke Bishop Road, and west of the central road leading to the Promenade and Sea Wall: a long quarry with parallel sides running north and south. The fissure I often saw before the quarry was filled in, in 1867, not with mud from Cumberland Basin, but with material obtained in deepening the Floating Harbour near Prince Street Bridge and in widening the river. For this information I am indebted to Mr. T. H. Yabbicom, the City Engineer.

With regard to Wilson's impression that the Fissure Quarry was filled in with mud from Cumberland Basin, on page 207 of Arrowsmith's Dictionary of Bristol (1884), it will be seen that the new works were proceeded with in 1872—3. The new entrance lock was opened July 19th, 1873. I am informed that the Quarry on the west side



of the Westbury Road, just north of the round clump of Fir Trees, was filled in, in 1873—no doubt with the mud from Cumberland Basin. In a pocket book for that year I have the following entry :—

February 17th—"Walked on to Downs (by Westbury) as far as Quarry filling in."

This was the Quarry in question.

With regard to the filling in of the Fissure Quarry, in 1867, I have the following entries :—

May 20th—"Went to Railway making to Quarry."

May 24th—"Went to big Quarry on Downs, on road to Stoke."

I was from home the greater part of the summer, but in August I find the following :—

August 23rd—"Rode on to Downs (from Henbury) by Stoke. Met Mr. D. at Quarry."

August 26th—"Rode by Stoke on to Downs. Went to Quarry. FILLED IN."

The Fissure Quarry must therefore have been filled in between the latter part of May and the latter part of August, 1867.

S. G. PERCEVAL.

January 1st, 1907.