

**MEMOIR ON THE MEGATHERIUM,  
AND OTHER EXTINCT GIGANTIC  
QUADRUPEDS OF THE COAST OF  
GEORGIA, WITH OBSERVATIONS  
ON ITS GEOLOGIC FEATURES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649223725

Memoir on the Megatherium, and other extinct gigantic quadrupeds of the coast of Georgia, with observations on its geologic features by William B. Hodgson

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**WILLIAM B. HODGSON**

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## P R E F A C E.

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I HAD been honored by an invitation from the National Institute, established at Washington, to read a paper before that body, on some subject connected with the progress of science. Having accepted that invitation, I was placed in the position of the traveller who had requested an interview with Mohammed Ali, the Pacha of Egypt. The traveller, not having previously arranged a subject of conversation to be held with His Highness, was at fault, during his audience. "Say something!" was the Viceroy's indulgent suggestion. There was, however, a high administrative import in that suggestion.

The wonderful organic remains which crowd and underlie the recent formation of the coast of Georgia, seemed to me a proper subject for this occasion, as one about which something might be said.

Residing at Savannah, in the midst of this fossil region, so attractive to geologists, my curiosity had naturally been directed to the subject. But, whilst

I might feel a general interest in the diffusion of knowledge, this required a special science, to which my pursuits had not led. Nor did my Cabinet possess the materials upon which such science is based. The phenomena of nature, demand careful and personal observation. I could not forget the *faux pas* of the learned Dr. Mitchell of New York, in his "observations on the geology of North America, appended to Cuvier's theory of the earth." "It seems now to be understood," he says, "that the level of the Sea of Marmora and of the Euxine, is so nearly the same, that the current sometimes runs through the Bosphorus, to replenish the Euxine, and then again to evacuate it." This singular conception is repeated in Sir Walter Scott's Count Robert of Paris, in which the returning tide is represented to have drifted the Crusaders' fleet up the Bosphorus. I shall not undertake to say that such alternation of current never did occur; but certainly, during a long residence on the Bosphorus, I found the hydrography of Othello to be correct:—

" Like to the Pontic sea,  
Whose icy current and compulsive course  
N'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on  
To the Propontic and the Hellespont."

My own deficiency of information regarding the fossil remains of Georgia, has been supplied by the obliging courtesy of others. Dr. I. C. Habersham of Savannah, who has long been known as a zealous

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collector, kindly favored me with the accompanying memorandum. He also sent by me, to the National Institute, several important bones of the Megatherium, which are now deposited in the Museum of that body. Those of the skull and astragalus were deemed so valuable, that the annexed drawings of them were made by an artist, under my direction. The unguis phalanx, still remains in his possession.

For the geographic chart of the geologic localities, I am indebted to Mr. Adams.

After I had prepared my paper from the materials to which I then had access, I was obligingly favored by J. Hamilton Couper, Esq., of Hopeton by Darien, with his observations on the geology of the sea-coast of Georgia, which are so full and completely scientific, that my own remarks might well have been suppressed. A synopsis of these observations was some time ago published in the London and Edinburgh philosophical journal; but their importance and value to science, now require them to be published in extenso, together with his map of geologic sections. This permission is yielded to my earnest request. The civic virtues of Mr. Couper, are not less universally admired, than his devotion to science. *Moribus ornat et emendat.*

The printing of this paper, was prompted by a recent visit to Savannah of Mr. Lyell, the eminent geologist, of London. In a conversation with that illustrious votary of science, he did me the honor to

ask, what had become of my manuscript. It is now printed in reply, and with the view, by private distribution, of suggesting a detailed and comprehensive geologic survey of the state of Georgia. Such a survey would develop her unrivalled mineral resources, and largely contribute to the science of palæontology.



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## FOSSIL REMAINS.

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THE geologic strata of this globe, and the organic remains which they envelope, are the enduring records of its antiquity. They are the medals and the vestiges of creation, by which its pre-human history is read, and which attest the rise and fall of animal Kingdoms, before the existence of man. Not obeliscal hieroglyphs, etruscan tablets, or parian chronicles, are more legible or more authentic, than these inscriptions upon nature's monuments.

The wide diffusion of fossil remains of the Mastodon and Mammoth, in North America, has contributed largely, to the progress of palæontology and geologic science. The existence of these fossil mammalia, was discovered a century ago, in the valley of the Ohio. More recently, another genus of extinct mammals was discovered, and which being first described by Mr. Jefferson, received from him the name of *Megalonyx*. Within the last twenty years, fossil bones of another gigantic quadruped have been discovered, along the sea-coast of Georgia, which by comparison with the skeleton of the same animal preserved at Madrid, has been found to be the

**Megatherium.** The investigations of science have proved it to be a congener of the *Megalonyx*, but of more wonderful size and construction. They both belong to the family of Gravigrades or Sloths.

The scientific investigations, the discovery and localities of these singular quadrupeds, must be interesting to general curiosity, and may be useful to the geologist. In the language of Mr. Owen's elaborate memoir on the *Mylodon robustus*, a gigantic Sloth, "the indications of an extensive family of most singular quadrupeds, once spread over the American Continents, from the latitude of New York to Patagonia, cannot, it is presumed, be pondered on without exciting the strongest interest, and desire to obtain further and more definite insight into their habits, their natural affinities, and the business assigned to them in the organic economy of a former world."

#### ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF DISCOVERY.

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THE first notice, *ex Cathedra*, of the fossil bones discovered near Savannah, was made by Dr. Samuel L. Mitchel, in a paper published in the annals of the Lyceum of natural history at New York. It was read, Nov. 17, 1823. He had, for the subject of his investigation and comparison, but one tooth and a part of another. These he did not hesitate to assign to the *Megatherium* of Cuvier. He remarked, "I can obtain no information as to their situation when discovered."

This information, however, was furnished, in the month of April of the same year, by an editorial article of the "Georgian" newspaper, published at Savannah, which anticipated, by several months, the announcement of Dr. Mitchell. The following extracts from that article, will, in part, supply this want of information, which was also a subject of regret to subsequent investigators whose papers will be noticed.

"These bones were found on Skiddaway island, in a cove between the plantations of Mr. Stark and Mr. Goodwin. They were partly exposed above the