

clams here in popular language, and, being thick and strong, afford a good material for road-making. From the same mud-bank we dug out a species of *Cyrena*, the only accompanying shell. In some places not far off, a *Neritina* is also met with. As a geologist, I was much interested by observing the manner in which these shells were living in the mud of the delta of the Alabama River. The deposits formed by the advance of this and other deltas along the northern shores of the Gulf of Mexico, will be hereafter characterized by such shells in a fossil state, just as, in the Pampas, Mr. Darwin and M. A. D'Orbigny found the brackish-water shell, called *Azara labiata*, marking far inland the position of ancient estuaries. And as, in South America, "the Pampean mud," described by Mr. Darwin,* is filled with the skeletons of the extinct *Megatherium*, *Toxodon*, and other strange mammalia, so in the modern delta of the Alabama, the quadrupeds now inhabiting the southern shores of the United States will hereafter be met with buried in the same assemblage of deposits of mud and sand as the *Gnathodon*. I was told that in a great morass which we saw near the lighthouse some cattle had lately perished, and for many days the turkey buzzards have been snatching parts of the dead carcasses out of the mud, watching their opportunity the moment the dogs, which are also preying on them, retire. Formerly the wolves used to prowl about these swamps in search of similar booty, tearing up portions of the mired cattle, and in this manner we may expect that, while some skeletons, which have sunk deep into the softer mud, may be preserved entire, the bones of others will be scattered about where the wolves have gnawed them, or birds of prey have picked off the flesh.

On our way back to the town, at places a mile and a half from the sea, I examined some large banks of fossil shells of the *Gnathodon*, lying as if they had been washed up by the waves at a time when the coast-line extended only thus far south. I also found that the city of Mobile itself was built upon a similar bed of shells, in which no specimens of the *Neritina* occurred; but I was told by Mr. Hale, that he has met with them in banks

* Geolog. Obs. on S. America (1846), p. 99.