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NOTES ON THE HISTORY
OF
PETROLEUM OR ROCK OIL.

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Public attention has lately been drawn to the petroleum furnished by the oil wells in Canada and the United States, and we have therefore thought it well to bring together some few facts which may serve to explain the origin of this and of similar substances, including naphtha, petroleum or rock oil, and asphalt or mineral pitch, all of which are forms of bitumen, the one being solid and the others fluid at ordinary temperatures. These differences are, in many cases at least, due to subsequent alterations; the more liquid of these substances are mixtures of oils differing in volatility, and by exposure to the air become less fluid, and partly by evaporation, partly by oxydation from the air, eventually become solid and are changed into mineral pitch. These substances, which are doubtless of organic origin, occur in rocks of all ages, from the Lower Silurian to the tertiary period inclusive, and are generally found impregnating limestones, and more rarely, sandstones and shales. Their presence in the lower palæozoic rocks, which contain no traces of land plants, shows that they have not been in all cases derived from terrestrial vegetation, but may have been formed from marine plants or animals: the latter