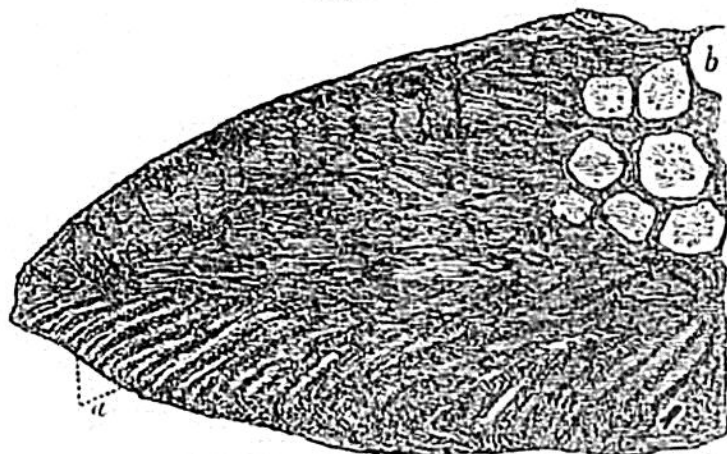


Fig. 417.

Posterior part of hind fin or paddle of *Ichthyosaurus communis*.

Mr. Conybeare was enabled, in 1824, after examining many skeletons nearly perfect, to give an ideal restoration of the osteology of this genus, and of that of the *Plesiosaurus*.\* (See figs. 415, 416.) The latter animal had an extremely long neck and small head, with teeth like those of the crocodile, and paddles analogous to those of the *Ichthyosaurus*, but larger. It is supposed to have lived in shallow seas and estuaries, and to have breathed air like the Ichthyosaur, and our modern cetacea.† Some of the reptiles above mentioned were of formidable dimensions. One specimen of *Ichthyosaurus platyodon*, from the lias at Lyme, now in the British Museum, must have belonged to an animal more than 24 feet in length; and another of the *Plesiosaurus*, in the same collection, is 11 feet long. The form of the *Ichthyosaurus* may have fitted it to cut through the waves like the porpoise; but it is supposed that the *Plesiosaurus*, at least the long-necked species (fig. 416), was better suited to fish in shallow creeks and bays defended from heavy breakers.

In many specimens both of Ichthyosaur and Plesiosaur the bones of the head, neck, and tail are in their natural position, while those of the rest of the skeleton are detached and in confusion. Mr. Stutchburg has suggested that their bodies after death became inflated with gases, and, while the abdominal viscera were decomposing, the bones, though disunited, were retained within the tough dermal covering as in a bag, until the whole, becoming water-logged, sank to the bottom.‡ As they belonged to individuals of all ages, they are supposed, by Dr. Buckland, to have experienced a violent death; and the same conclusion might also be drawn from their having escaped the attacks of their own predacious race, or of fishes, found fossil in the same beds.

For the last twenty years, anatomists have agreed that these extinct saurians must have inhabited the sea; and it was urged that, as there are now chelonians, like the tortoise, living in freshwater, and others,

\* Geol. Trans. Second Series, vol. i. pl. 49.

† Conybeare and De la Beche, Geol. Trans. 1st Ser. vol. v. p. 559; and Buckland, Bridgw. Treatise, p. 203.

‡ Quarterly Geol. Journal, vol. ii. p. 411.