

THE AMERICAN INITIATIVE IN METHODS OF DEEP-SEA DREDGING.

THE published records respecting the use of dredges for natural-history purposes carry us back to scarcely more than a century and a quarter ago, when Otho Frederick Müller, a prominent Danish naturalist, began his studies of the aquatic life inhabiting the coasts of Norway and Denmark below the shore-level. The dredge he used, a very simple affair, was, so far as we know, the first one ever devised for the special needs of the naturalist; and yet, with only a single important modification, as to the shape of the frame, it has been handed down to our time as the most efficient appliance for the ordinary purposes of dredging.

As described and figured in 1779, it consisted of a plain rectangular iron frame, with all four sides of equal length, and bevelled to sharp edges in front, forming the mouth-piece to a large and open net. Four handles extended forward from the angles, and met in a single ring for the attachment of the drag-rope. The principal defect of this dredge consisted in its very wide mouth, permitting the easy escape of specimens, both while dragging and during the hauling-in.

Although Müller's researches were confined to shallow water, apparently not exceeding a depth of thirty fathoms, they established a precedent for subsequent operations, and afforded proof of the value of submarine collecting.

This new field of exploration did not, however, begin to enlist the active services of working naturalists to any extent until about the third or fourth decade of the present century, since which time the interest in marine zoölogical research has rapidly increased, and our knowledge of the sea-bottom has been extended to the deepest known areas. For the first thirty or forty years, the improvement in methods of work scarcely kept pace with the progress of knowledge regarding the inhabitants of the sea; and it is only within the past fifteen years that the methods of deep-sea dredging have been at all perfected.

To Dr. Robert Ball of Dublin, who was afterwards associated with Professor Edward Forbes in his memorable explorations, has generally been given the credit of having devised, about 1838, the improved form of naturalists' dredge, in nearly the same shape in which it is used to-day. However that may be, it was about the year last mentioned that both European and American naturalists entered actively into the study of the sea-bottom; and the history of their various exploits down to the pres-

ent time affords an exceedingly interesting chapter upon which the subject of our paper permits us to touch but slightly.

It may be well to remark, however, that the character and results of European, and especially British, exploration are much more widely and popularly known than are those of our own country. The reason is obvious. The active mercantile pursuits of a young and progressive people have naturally made them less appreciative of scientific facts and results than the inhabitants of many older countries, where business interests have fewer claims upon all classes. There has been but a slight demand for popular writings upon such an unpractical subject, and the plodding naturalist has generally been content to record his observations and methods where they were accessible only to his brother-workers. For this reason, American naturalists have not received the credit which is their due, either at home or abroad; and much of the honor that justly belongs to them has passed into other hands.

So far as concerns the general public, this is not to be wondered at, when we consider that the only popular accounts of deep-sea dredging explorations obtainable in this country are of English origin. But the same excuse does not hold good for the working naturalists of any country, including our own; as the progress of American deep-sea research, and the improvements in methods for carrying it on, have in nearly all instances been duly and promptly recorded in the proper channels to insure wide and timely distribution.

Since the very beginning of activity in this branch of investigation, American workers have not been far behind those of any European country; and their record is as creditable. Dredging was carried on by the Wilkes U. S. exploring expedition during the early part of its cruise, beginning in 1838; and at about this same time a few of our most earnest naturalists were using the dredge at home. The late Dr. William Stimpson, one of the most intelligent observers in this branch, and whose name is closely linked with several important explorations, began his career in Boston harbor between 1848 and 1850; his first instructions having been received from Dr. W. O. Ayres, who began dredging fully ten years before. Stimpson's researches were largely conducted under government auspices; and the collection of submarine specimens resulting from his labors, distributed over many portions of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, was probably one of the very largest of its kind that had been made, up to the time of its unfortunate destruc-

tion by fire at Chicago, in 1871. The loss of these collections, and of all the voluminous manuscript reports treating of them, followed by the sad death of the author, has deprived our country of a most important chapter in the history of submarine exploration.

The sixth decade of this century, however, brought out many additional investigators; and a fresh impetus was given to the work, which has since been expanded and developed to such an extent as to establish, beyond all question, American precedence in the methods of deep-sea research at least, both as regards dredging and sounding.

From among the more energetic and successful of our modern dredgers may be mentioned Prof. A. E. Verrill of Yale college, whose dredging studies began in 1864, on the coast of Maine, and who, since the organization of the U. S. fish-commission, has been its main helper and adviser in all matters pertaining to submarine research, the special direction of the dredging operations having been intrusted to him from the beginning. His earlier experiences gave him a clear insight into the requirements of the new project, and enabled him to devise many valuable appliances, and improve upon those which had been in use. To his zealous and untiring efforts is due much of the perfection in present methods of work.

In 1867 Mr. L. F. de Pourtalès, of the U. S. coast-survey, began the extensive series of deep-sea explorations off the southern coast of the United States, which were carried on for several years, and subsequently led to the eventful cruises of the steamer *Blake* between 1877 and 1880, resulting in an entire revolution in the methods of deep-sea dredging and sounding. The investigations of Mr. Pourtalès anticipated, by a year, those of the English steamers *Lightning* and *Porcupine*, which have been so widely described, and were preceded by only one series of systematic dredgings in equal depths of water,—those of the Professors Sars, father and son, of Norway. But little credit for this fact has been received from naturalists abroad; the date of Mr. Pourtalès' first cruise being generally regarded by them as 1868, although his first paper, descriptive of the character of his work, and of many new forms of deep-sea animals, appeared in December, 1867.¹ His collections, representing principally the fauna of the Gulf Stream off Florida, gave new and interesting results; going farther to prove the existence of a rich and

diversified deep-sea fauna, different from that of the shore regions, than any previously obtained.

That these dredgings were not undertaken to please the passing whim of some over-enthusiastic naturalist, but were as deliberately planned and carried out, and as successful in their results, as those of the English steamers which followed them in conception, a reference to the official publications of the coast-survey will sufficiently prove. As substantiating this statement, we may be pardoned for quoting a short paragraph from the report of Mr. Pourtalès, above referred to (December, 1867), in which the plans and objects of the new explorations are briefly stated. This would not be called for, were it not that it is this identical report which has been so utterly ignored by European writers, and equally overlooked by many American. Had it only been written in popular language, and been published with copious illustrations, it might have received the credit which has been denied it; but such channels of publication are seldom deemed necessary to establish priority in scientific research.

The plan of operations, according to Mr. Pourtalès, was as follows:—

“The present superintendent of the coast-survey, Prof. B. Peirce, has lately directed the resumption of the investigations of the Gulf Stream, so successfully inaugurated by his predecessor, but interrupted for several years by the war. Besides observations of the depth, velocity, and direction of that current, and the temperature and density of the water at different depths, the researches will be extended to the fauna of the bottom, of the surface, and of the intervening depths. Not only will an insight be thus obtained into a world scarcely known heretofore, but that knowledge will have a direct bearing on many of the phenomena of that great current. Thus a new light may be thrown on its powers of transportation from shallow to deeper water or along its bed, on its action in forming deposits in particular localities, or on its possible influence on the growth of coral-reefs on its shores.”

In a subsequent passage, he summarizes his first season's results in the following terse remarks, the italics being his own:—

“However, short as the season's work was, and few as were the casts of the dredge, the highly interesting fact was disclosed, that *animal life exists at great depths, in as great a diversity and as great an abundance as in shallow water.*”

Early in the following year (1868) the same

¹ *Bulletin Mus. comp. zool. Cambridge*, vol. i., 1863-69, pp. 103-120.

explorations were resumed, and they were continued through 1869.

It may be thought that we have departed too widely from our subject in discussing with so much detail the progress of American research during a period in which no great improvements were made in methods of work on this side of the Atlantic; but how could we have better furnished proof of the rapid growth of interest in such matters, and of the maturing of ideas which prepared the way for the important changes marking the next decade?

There is, however, one noteworthy addition to the collector's outfit made in this period, which deserves special mention. On one of the dredging cruises of the English exploring steamer *Porcupine*, between 1868 and 1870, Capt. Calver, the naval officer in charge, attached several of the common deck-swabs to the end of the dredge-net, with the expectation, that, in sweeping the ocean-bottom, they would securely entangle all the rough and spiny objects lying loose within their path. His fondest hopes were realized; and the novel experiment, suggested by often finding such objects as sea-urchins, corals, and sponges, adhering to the exterior of the dredge-net, and even to the lower part of the drag-rope, gave origin to one of the most efficient implements of modern deep-sea research.

When the beam-trawl, a well-known English appliance for the capture of bottom-fish, was first adopted into the outfit of the marine zoölogist, we are unable to state; but it does not appear to have ever been extensively and systematically employed in scientific research until so used by the U. S. fish-commission, beginning in 1872. It was afterwards used by the *Challenger* from 1873 to 1878, and now greatly excels the dredge in the extent and value of its results, wherever the ground is suited to its use.

The year 1871 was signalized by the organization of the U. S. fish-commission, one of the most important scientific establishments of modern times for marine zoölogical work. Although instituted primarily for the investigation of fishery matters, it has, through the wise and liberal policy of its director, Professor Baird, accomplished most valuable results for marine biology. The latter department has been sedulously fostered, in the belief that its results would have an important bearing upon the practical questions at issue. No pains have been spared to perfect the methods of research, and many valuable contributions have already been made to the marine collector's outfit. These are briefly described below; and, as the history of the commission is already well

known to most readers, we need refer here to only a few points which have marked its progress.

The earlier explorations were carried on mainly by means of sail-boats, and were confined to comparatively shallow water. From 1873 to 1879 a naval tug was placed at the disposal of the commission every year; but in 1880 the steamer *Fish Hawk*, a twin-screw propeller of two hundred and five tons (*n.m.*), was built expressly for the combined purposes of fish hatching and dredging. Its small size and light draught prevented long trips at sea; but it was well adapted for deep-sea work, and was supplied with all the improved appliances, as well as those which had originated with the commission, including wire rope, then recently introduced by the coast-survey. In 1883 the steamer *Albatross*, described in vol. ii. of *Science* (pp. 6, 66), was completed, and made her first successful cruise in the spring of that year. Her log for the summer of 1883 records the deepest trawling yet made in the Atlantic Ocean; the depth having been 2,949 fathoms, and the results successful. Brief accounts of her dredging cruises under Lieut.-Commander Tanner, U.S.N., have appeared from time to time in late numbers of *Science*.

While the fish-commission claims priority for many improvements in apparatus primarily intended for depths under a thousand fathoms, it willingly yields the palm for deep-sea improvements to the U. S. coast-survey, especially in the persons of Commander Sigbee, U.S.N., and Mr. Agassiz. The explorations of the steamer *Blake* from 1877 to 1880, in which the methods of deep-sea dredging and sounding were completely revolutionized, mark one of the most important stages in the progress of marine research. Wire rope was substituted for hemp, the dredge was altered to adapt it to the soft bottoms of deep water, on which dredging results had always been uncertain, and the beam-trawl was made reversible. The methods of handling and reeling the rope were also perfected. These changes and additions were briefly described and figured from time to time, as work progressed, in the *Bulletin of the Museum of comparative zoölogy*, at Cambridge, by Mr. Agassiz and Mr. Sigbee, and were afterwards fully discussed by the latter in one of the most elaborate and instructive reports ever dedicated to the methods of deep-sea research.¹ It is a quarto volume of two

¹ Deep-sea sounding and dredging: a description and discussion of the methods and appliances used on board the coast and geodetic survey steamer *Blake*. By CHARLES D. SIGSBEE, lieutenant-commander U. S. navy, assistant on the coast and geodetic survey. Washington, 1880.

hundred and eight pages and forty-one plates, describing the sounding and dredging appliances used by the *Blake*, and which, for the greater part, were devised or improved during her dredging cruise. So far as her dredging appliances are concerned, the credit for changes made belongs mostly to Mr. Sigsbee and Mr. Agassiz; the former having been in command of the expedition, and the latter in charge of the natural-history operations.

During the seventh decade, European explorers were not idle, and numerous deep-sea expeditions were fitted out. Most notable among these was the cruise of the British ship *Challenger* around the world between 1873 and 1878. Her scientific results were most interesting; but the older methods of deep-sea work were not greatly altered, although the practicability of using the beam-trawl successfully in the deepest water was fully demonstrated.

In 1881 the French government inaugurated a series of submarine explorations in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea; for that purpose fitting out a small naval vessel, the *Travailleur*, and placing the management of affairs in the hands of a competent scientific staff, under the directorship of Prof. A. Milne-Edwards. These investigations were continued by the same vessel during 1882, the appliances and methods of work having apparently been patterned after those generally recognized in Europe. In 1883 a larger vessel, the *Talisman*, was assigned to the work, and operations were established on a much grander scale than before.

For an account of these explorations, descriptive of the methods of work and general results, we are indebted to the last volume of *La Nature*, a French journal of the character of *Science*, which began in a January number the publication of a series of articles by one of the naturalists who accompanied the steamer.¹ Coming from such an authoritative source, we are led to regard these papers almost in the light of a semi-official report, and look to them for at least a correct statement regarding the origin of their methods of work, inasmuch as these matters are discussed in some detail, and with evident pride at the completeness of the outfit. That the outfit was complete, no one who is at all posted on the subject can deny; for nearly all of the many improvements introduced by the coast-survey and fish-commission prior to 1880 are most faithfully copied, and most heartily

praised for their perfect adaptation to the requirements of research.

We glance through the several pages of the report for at least some slight acknowledgment on behalf of American inventive skill; but beyond a brief statement to the effect that the hoisting-engine "was of the same type as that employed by Mr. Agassiz," and that he also "used with good results the common form of beam-trawl," we are left to infer that the entire outfit was of French origin; and such must be the impression of every one who reads these papers. In fact, in several instances, credit is explicitly bestowed on French inventors for certain of the appliances which do not differ in any essential features from the corresponding American patterns.

What is to be gained by thus appropriating to the credit of a nation what properly belongs to another and a friendly one, by all the rights of international courtesy, it is difficult to understand, and especially so in this age of supposed enlightenment, when every important discovery is carried with lightning rapidity to all parts of the civilized world. The field of marine research is sufficiently broad to engage the entire attention of all the naturalists who have yet entered it; and the frequent manifestations of jealousy on the part of foreign, and especially French investigators, which often result in wholly ignoring the works of an able American author, can but retard progress instead of aiding it.

Proofs of the superior excellence of American methods of deep-sea research may be found in every important scientific library of Europe as well as this country; and at the two most prominent international fisheries exhibitions of the world, — those of Berlin in 1880, and London in 1883, — all of the American appliances were displayed, and received the highest awards. They have therefore been made sufficiently well known to establish their merits before the scientific world; but, as no descriptions of them have yet been published for the benefit of the general public, we propose in future numbers of *Science* to give accounts of their construction, and of the causes which lead to their introduction.

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SPECIAL MANURES FOR PARTICULAR CROPS.

THE fact that the percentages of nitrogen and of the several ash ingredients vary quite widely in different plants (legumes being rich in nitrogen, cere-

¹ For an abstract of the portion relating to the apparatus employed, see *Science*, No. 62.