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PROSPECTUS.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES,

IN TEN VOLS. QUARTO,

BY LOUIS AGASSIZ.

To be Published by Messrs. Little, Brown & Co. of Boston, United States.

For more than eight years, I have now been in this country, devoting my attention chiefly to the study of those classes of the Animal Kingdom which American naturalists have, thus far, not fully investigated. The amount of materials I have already brought together is so great, that the time seems to me to have come when I should proceed with the publication of the more important results of these investigations. Desirous of contributing my share to the rapid progress natural sciences are making at present in this part of the world, I wish to present my work to my fellow-laborers in this field in the form most easily accessible to them. It has therefore appeared to me desirable to bring it out in a series of independent volumes, rather than to scatter my papers in the Transactions of our academies and learned societies. This plan will, moreover, leave me entirely free to present my contributions to science with such minute details, and to such an extent, as I shall deem necessary to the fullest illustration of my subject.

Without entering into a detailed account of the contents of this work, it may be sufficient here to state, that it will contain the results of my embryological investigations, embracing about sixty monographs,

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from all the classes of animals, especially selected among those best known as characteristic of this continent; also descriptions of a great number of new genera and species of Polypi, Acalephæ, Echinoderms, Bryozoa, Ascidians, and other naked Mollusks, Worms, lower Crustaceans, and Fishes, accompanied with accurate figures, and such anatomical details as may contribute to illustrate their natural affinities and their internal structure.

I shall not extend my publications to classes already illustrated by others, but limit myself to offering such additions to the Natural History of the States I have visited as may constitute real contributions to the advancement of our knowledge.

From a careful estimate of the materials I have now on hand, I ma satisfied I shall be able to include the most valuable part of my investigations in ten quarto volumes; each volume containing about three hundred pages, with at least twenty plates. Each volume shall be complete in itself, containing one or several independent monographs; so that, if any unforeseen difficulties should interrupt the publication of the whole, the parts already published shall not remain imperfect. As far as possible, I shall always select first such of my papers as contain the largest amount of new matter, or as may contribute most directly to the advancement of science. Having devoted the greatest part of my time to the investigation of the embryonic growth of our animals, I shall make a beginning with the embryology of our turtles, several of which I have traced through all their changes; and next proceed to a full illustration of the highly complicated phenomena of alternate generations, budding and metamorphoses of our Hydroids, many of which I have followed, for many years, in all their transformations, in the open sea as well as in confinement. I trust these monographs will afford our medical students a fair opportunity of making themselves familiar with the modern results of one branch of physiology, which has the most direct bearing upon their science, and for which the different species of the family of turtles found in every part of the United States will afford them a better opportunity even than the artificial breeding of hens' eggs. Moreover, the extent of my embryological researches, covering, as they do, all the classes of the animal kingdom, will furnish, I trust, a new foundation for a better appreciation of the true affinities, and a more natural classification, of animals. I foresee the possibility, upon this basis, of determining, with considerable precision, the relative rank of all the orders of every class of animals, and of furnishing a more reliable standard of comparison between the extinct types of past geological ages and the animals now living upon earth. On the other hand, my monographs of our Polypi, Acalephæ,

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Echinoderms, Worms, Crustacea, Fishes, &c., will, I hope, furnish the means of a better appreciation of the general character of our Fauna, which thus far has only been compared with that of the other continents in its higher classes.

I shall have frequent opportunities of acknowledging the many favors I have received from naturalists of all parts of the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast, and from the shores of our great Lakes to those of the Gulf of Mexico; and also of mentioning the many specimens which have been furnished to me from every part of the Union, and of which I shall publish descriptions.

It is a matter of course, that a work like this, illustrated by a large number of plates, cannot be published without a liberal and extensive patronage. As it has been prepared solely with the view of throwing additional light upon the wonderful diversity of the animal creation of this continent, its structure, and its general relation to that of the other parts of the world, without the slightest hope of compensation for myself, I trust I may meet with the approbation of those conversant with the importance of the subject, and receive sufficient encouragement from the enlightened part of the community to enable me to bring to a successful close an undertaking upon which I enter now, and in this form, for no other purpose than to contribute my share towards increasing the love of nature among us.

As the printing of this work cannot begin until a sufficient guarantee is secured for the publication of the whole, I take the liberty of making an appeal to the lovers of science to send to the publishers their own subscriptions, and such others as they may procure, as soon as convenient, and, if possible, before the first of August next, that I may be able to proceed at once with a work which, relating to animals peculiar to America, I wish to make, in every respect, an American contribution to science, fostered and supported by the patronage of the community at large. I hope in this way to show my friends in Europe that American naturalists have entered upon a fair competition with the scientific labors of the old world, and that they aspire, with a generous ambition, to achieve their scientific independence, and to return freely the intellectual gifts which have thus far been poured upon them.

To render this work more generally accessible, it is intended to publish at the rate of about one volume a year. Such an arrangement will bring the whole within reach of every student of Natural History, and of every friend of the progress of science in the country. The periods of publication, however, cannot be more definitely fixed, because the required uniformity of execution of the plates, to which particular attention will be paid, will demand that they be all entrusted

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to the same artist, who has drawn on stone most of the plates of my former works.

I herewith open a subscription for this work, in ten volumes, quarto, in cloth binding, at £2. 10s. each volume, payable on delivery. The Smithsonian Institution, with its usual liberality, has offered to take charge of the distribution of the successive volumes to subscribers in Europe, who may transmit their subscriptions to H. Bailliere in London, Hector Bossange in Paris, Westermann in Leipzig, or to the Author in Cambridge, Mass., U. S., or to the Publishers in Boston, United States, either directly, or through the Agents of the Smithsonian Institution. It should, however, be remembered, that, as, owing to the great expenses incurred in this publication, but few copies can be printed beyond the number of actual subscribers, an early application is necessary to secure the work.

Cambridge, Mass., U. S., May 28, 1855.

L. AGASSIZ.

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