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Oscar Harger

[with full Bibliography]

By Sidney D. Smith

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1843—1887.

OSCAR HARGER, the son of Alfred and Ruth (Beardsley) Harger, was born in Oxford, Conn., Jan. 12th, 1843. From his father, who was of Huguenot descent, and a farmer and land surveyor, he inherited great physical endurance, remarkable mathematical talents and the salient points of his strong character. By almost unaided exertions he prepared himself for college, at the Connecticut Literary Institute at Suffield, Conn., and, entering Yale, maintained himself during the four years of undergraduate study by teaching and mathematical work, and was graduated with high standing in the Class of 1868. During his college course he developed great mathematical capacity and ever after took special delight in abstruse mathematical work, often resorting to it for recreation. It is probable that the bent of his mind was mathematical but, while a boy, he had studied botany and become familiar with the native plants about his home, although his time was so occupied with farm labor during the proper time for botanizing that he commenced the study of grasses and sedges in winter, collecting and identifying many species from the hay stored in barns. His success in botany undoubtedly led him to turn his attention to other departments of natural history, and after graduation from college, he abandoned the mathematical career open to him and began the study of zoölogy with Professor Verrill.

In his zoölogical studies he at once showed special aptitude for original work and had begun important investigations when, in 1870, he was appointed Assistant in Palæontology in Yale College, and went with Professor Marsh on his geological expeditions in 1871 and 1873.

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After accepting this position, although the greater part of his time and energy was given to work in vertebrate palæontology for Professor Marsh, he continued his investigations in invertebrate zoölogy as long as his health permitted. In the summer of 1872, in company with the present writer, he visited St. George's Banks in the Coast Survey Steamer "Bache," on a dredging expedition, the results of which were published in the Transactions of the Connecticut Academy. He also published papers on myriapods, a fossil arachnid and isopods. His last and most important published works are a report on the Marine Isopoda of New England and the adjacent waters, and on the Isopoda of the Blake dredgings on the eastern coast of the United States. The former, his only completed work, is a systematic and accurate monograph, one of the most important contributions to our knowledge of the Isopoda, and will long remain a standard authority and a manual for the study of that group on our coast.

These publications establish his reputation as a zoölogist, but his best work and highest attainments were in the department of vertebrate palæontology. Remarkable logical powers, an unbiased mind, and years of accurate observation, had given him a truly wonderful knowledge of vertebrate osteology. Under his hand the broken and disarranged bones of an unknown carpus or tarsus seemed to fall into their proper places by magic. But his knowledge was not one of details alone; he had a truly philosophical grasp of the bearing of facts on evolution and classification; and only the few who knew his attainments can appreciate how much palæontological science would have been advanced had he been able to publish his observations and conclusions. He was not a scientific specialist only, but took a deep and practical interest in politics and other questions of the day, and his peculiarly open mind, wholly untrammelled by bias or preconception, gave his views and arguments on any subject originality and value.

Mr. Harger never enjoyed robust health, and in 1879 he was attacked by a cardiac trouble which increased from

year to year. Though knowing that his life was despaired of by his physicians and friends, he never spoke of his illness, but with silent courage and indomitable will, worked on cheerfully, attending to his regular duties until prostrated by cerebral hemorrhage a week before his death, which occurred on Sunday, November 6th, 1887, at his home 14 University Place. Funeral services were held at the house on the Tuesday following, the Rev. E. S. Lines, and his classmate and friend Professor Beckwith, officiating.

May 13th, 1875, he married Miss Jessie Craig of New Haven, who, in the highest sense, was his helpful and sympathizing companion. Only the few whose privilege it was to be included in the little circle of those who enjoyed his every-day companionship, and who feel that their lives have been made better by the example of his pure and inflexibly truthful life, can fully appreciate his loss.

Of Mr. Harger's undergraduate college life, his classmate, Professor H. P. Wright, writes as follows in the Biographical Record of the Class of 1868 in Yale College:

"As an undergraduate he excelled in all departments, but was especially fond of mathematics and natural science. Even then he had the spirit of an investigator, and was never quite willing to accept anything as true until he had himself proved it. Many of the class will recall the rude experiments in physics which he performed in his room, 48 South Middle College, in our Junior year. He was obliged to practice the greatest economy, and supported himself in part by doing mathematical work under the direction of Professor Newton, chiefly upon valuation tables for the Insurance Department of the State of New York."

The following appreciative estimate is from the pen of Professor Newton of Yale University:

"You ask me to give you in a few words the impression which Mr. Harger made upon me both while a student and in his later years.

"No one, I think, could know Mr. Harger without being impressed with the definiteness with which he held and

expressed his thoughts. There was something clear and straightforward in his words that made me feel that the man's whole character was transparent. While he was a student he was interested in many curious unusual questions, but his special attention was then given to the exact sciences. In these his progress was such that he stands out in my mind and memory as one of the foremost of all those who have come under my instruction in these thirty-five years. It was to me a source of regret, at the time, that he should shortly after graduation turn away from the exact to the natural sciences, for I felt sure that there was a bright career before him in the mathematics.

“But although his thoughts were from that time mainly in the subjects chosen as his life studies he never forgot his early love. He was continually interested in questions in the exact sciences, and in working out curious problems. I have before me a roll recently made by him, and illustrating this trait of his character; one upon which he must have spent much time and thought. In it he dealt graphically with prime numbers, constructing a geometrical modification of the Sieve of Eratosthenes. He exhibits to the eye in a clear and beautiful way all the prime numbers and the divisors of all odd numbers below 51,000. In all such curious problems he seems to have been interested to the end of his life.”

The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences on December 28th, 1887, directed that this minute be entered upon its records, and that a copy be sent to his family:

“This Academy having learned with sorrow of the sudden death of Oscar Harger, a member and late Secretary, desires to put on record an expression of the high esteem and respect in which he was held.

“In his death the Academy has lost a zealous and earnest toiler and co-laborer in scientific pursuits, one whom we all respected for his ability and faithful services, and whom many of us, who knew him best, had learned to love, for his amiable disposition and the sterling virtues of his character.”

The following is a list of Mr. Harger's published papers :

Descriptions of new North American Myriapods. Brief contributions to zoölogy from the Museum of Yale College. No. XXIII. <Amer. Jour. Sci., III, iv, pp. 117-121, pl. 2, August, 1872.

On the sexes of *Sphæroma*. <Amer. Jour. Sci., III, v, p. 314, April, 1873.

[Isopoda, pp. 569-573, pll. 5. 6.] <Catalogue of the marine invertebrate animals of the southern coast of New England, and adjacent waters. By A. E. Verrill, S. I. Smith, and Oscar Harger. <Report upon the invertebrate animals of Vineyard Sound and the adjacent waters, with an account of the physical characters of the region. By A. E. Verrill. <Report U. S. Commissioner Fish and Fisheries, part I, pp. 295-778, pll. 1-38, 1874.

Notice of a new fossil Spider from the Coal Measures of Illinois. <Amer. Jour. Sci., III, vii, pp. 219-223, figure, March, 1874.

On a new genus of *Asellidæ*. <Amer. Jour. Sci., III, vii, pp. 601-602, June, 1874.

Report on the dredgings in the region of St. George's Banks in 1872. By S. I. Smith and O. Harger. <Trans. Conn. Acad., iii, pp. 1-57, pll. 1-8, August, 1874.

[Descriptions of *Asellus communis*, *Asellopsis*, and *Asellopsis tenax*, pp. 657-661 pl. 1, figures 3, 4.] Crustacea of the fresh waters of the United States. By Sidney I. Smith. <Report U. S. Commissioner Fish and Fisheries, part ii, pp. 637-665, pll. 1-3, 1874.

Description of *Mancasellus brachyurus*, a new fresh water Isopod. Brief contributions to zoölogy from the Museum of Yale College. No. XXXVII. <Amer. Jour. Sci., III, xi, pp. 304-305, April, 1876.

Descriptions of new genera and species of Isopoda, from New England and adjacent regions. Brief contributions to zoölogy from the Museum of Yale College, No. XXXVIII. <Amer. Jour. Sci., III, xv, pp. 373-379, May, 1878.

[List of Isopoda, p. 6.] <Preliminary check-list of the marine invertebrata of the Atlantic coast, from Cape Cod to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence. By A. E. Verrill. New Haven, June, 1879.

Notes on New England Isopoda. <Proc. U. S. National Mus., ii, pp. 157-165, November, 1879.

Report on the marine Isopoda of New England and adjacent waters. <Report U. S. Commissioner Fish and Fisheries, part vi, pp. 297-462, pll. 1-13, 1880.

[Isopoda, p. 450.] <Preliminary notice of the Crustacea dredged, in 64 to 325 fathoms off the south coast of New England, by the United States Fish Commission in 1880. By S. I. Smith. <Proc. U. S. National Mus., iii, pp. 413-452, January, 1881.

Reports on the results of dredging, under the supervision of Alexander Agassiz, on the east coast of the United States, during the summer of 1880, by the U. S. Coast Survey Steamer "Blake," Commander J. R. Bartlett, U. S. N. commanding, XXIII. Report on the Isopoda. <Bull. Mus. Comp. Zoöl., xi, No. 4, pp. 91-104, pll. 1-4, September, 1883.

S. I. SMITH.

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