

Preface

THE inhabitants of the waters of the earth have fascinated human beings ever since "God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth." Our interests have by no means been confined to the aesthetic or the gustatory; the reflections of Isaac Walton are an earnest of the composure and rapport with the universe that exists when fishes and their surroundings are contemplated; the mental relaxation of fly fisherman or surf caster needs no defense or explanation; the life of fishes, their migrations, their evolution, and the incredibly diverse facets of their activities, afford infinite opportunities for study by the scientist. In latter years man's curiosity about the inhabitants of "the water in the seas" has been increased and stimulated by his ever greater penetration into the deeps. Improved apparatus has enabled him to widen his sphere of effort and to capture fish for his markets farther from shore and deeper down than heretofore. With goggles and rubber fins he has pushed beneath the surface for momentary glimpses of those which live below; with diving helmet and diving suit he has gone deeper and investigated more closely; in the bathysphere he has dangled in the sea half a mile down and checked on the lives of the strange fishes which make their home in that dark and cold portion of the world.

Expeditions have gone forth with fishes as their prime consideration, and ichthyologists have studied what the expeditions brought back. Men and women in numerous laboratories have worked upon fisheries problems, while countless numbers of fishermen, professional and amateur, have added their bit to the knowledge of the whys and wherefores of our fishes. All this has produced an enormous quantity of information and lore which lies scattered in countless publications. The reason for the present series of volumes is to correlate the contents of the rich storehouse of knowledge relating to the fishes that live in the waters of the western North Atlantic.

This volume, the first of a series, describes the lancelets, the hagfishes and the lampreys, and those most interesting animals, the sharks. It has been written on the premise that it should be useful to those in many walks of life—to those casually or vitally interested in the general phenomena of life in our waters, to the sportsman whose interests are closely associated with pleasure and relaxation, to the fisherman whose livelihood depends upon knowledge of where fishes are gathered together, as well as to the amateur ichthyologist and the professional scientist. Special stress has been given to the relationship of the fishes to ourselves—in most cases this relationship is to man's advantage, but the present volume also carries this theme in reverse—some sharks will attack man!

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