OBITUARY

Professor Carl H. Eigenmann

Dr. Carl H. Eigenmann, Curator of Ichthyology in the Carnegie Museum from 1909 until 1918, when he resigned because of failing health, and Professor of Zoology and Dean of the Graduate School of Indiana University at Bloomington, Indiana, died at his home in Coronado, California, on April 24, 1927, in the sixty-fifth year of his age.

He was born at Flehingen, Germany, on March 9, 1863. He lost his mother while still a child. His father soon afterward remarried and he left Germany at the age of ten and came to this country to reside with his father's brother at Rockport, Indiana. His uncle sent him to the State University at Bloomington to prepare himself for the study of law, but under the inspiration of Dr. David Starr Jordan, then President of the University, he turned to the study of fishes. His first paper, a "Review of the American Diodontidae," appeared a year before his graduation. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from the University in 1886, and his Master's degree in the following year. In 1889 he took the degree of Ph. D. in zoology, he having served as assistant in the laboratory, under Dr. Jordan, and having sustained a satisfactory examination.

In the spring of 1886 Barton Warren Evermann, one of Mr. Eigenmann's classmates, recommended him for the principalship of the Santa Paula, California, public school, which position Evermann had held in 1879-1881, at the same time telling Eigenmann that, if the position were offered him, to let him know, as there were certain things about which Evermann wished to advise him. One of these was that he must have a teacher's license and that he must arrive there in time to take the June examination. He failed to do this, and did not arrive in Santa Paula in time. Being unable to qualify for the school position, he went down to San Diego where on August 20, 1887 he married Miss Rosa Smith, another of Dr. Jordan's students, who already had to her credit a long list of papers on Californian fishes.

Shortly afterward Mr. and Mrs. Eigenmann went to Harvard to study the large accumulations of South American freshwater fishes,
gathered by Professor Louis Agassiz and his associates upon the occasion of the Thayer Expedition to Brazil. These had been largely left unstudied because of the death of Prof. Agassiz. There the young couple spent the better part of two years and in addition to a number of shorter papers, chiefly published in California, they published a volume of five hundred pages on the South American Nematognathi, or Cat-fishes, which appeared in 1890. Mrs. Eigenmann was joint author in a few small papers with her husband for three more years, after which all his papers were published over his name, although Mrs. Eigenmann never lost her interest and always served as his adviser and editor. These early studies created in Dr. Eigenmann an intense desire to see and know the fishes of South America in their natural environment and in their life-colors, a desire, however, which was not to be gratified for nearly twenty years.

Upon leaving Harvard, Dr. Eigenmann returned to San Diego as Curator of Fishes in the Museum of the San Diego Society of Natural History. This position, because of limited opportunities, seems not to have been to his liking, but he improved the opportunity to make a detailed study of the development of the ovoviviparous Surf-perches (Embiotocidae). These studies had a decided bearing on the idea of "the continuity of the germ-plasm," a theory then receiving much attention because of the publications of the German zoologist, Weismann. This work provided material for numerous publications for the next five years and firmly established the reputation of the rising young zoologist. He also served for a short time as a curator in the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. In 1892 he collected fishes along the line of the Canadian Pacific Railway for Dr. Günther, then Keeper of the British Museum.

In 1891 Dr. Jordan left Indiana University to accept the Presidency of the newly created Leland Stanford Jr. University in California. Dr. Eigenmann was at once called to fill the Chair of Zoology at Indiana University vacated by Dr. Jordan. Having now little opportunity to carry on his earlier taxonomic studies, he turned his attention to the blind fishes of the caves of Indiana and Kentucky, and to the great opportunities they presented for the study of "degenerative evolution." For the next ten years he devoted himself assiduously to their study, visiting all of the North American caves known to harbor blind fishes and also exploring certain caves in Cuba. He published many reports on this subject. The work culminated in a
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large volume on "The Cave Vertebrates of America," issued in 1909 by the Carnegie Institution of Washington. His work on degenerative evolution done in the prime of his life, is probably the work on which his reputation will chiefly rest. He used to say that 'the blind vertebrates are not blind because they are in the caves, but that they are in the caves because they are blind.'

He seems in this period to have given passing attention to a study of variation, as exhibited in the number of fin-rays, scales, and other obvious characters in certain fishes of the lakes of northern Indiana. Attention too, may be directed to his discovery and description in 1902 in conjunction with a student, Mr. Clarence H. Kennedy, of the first known Leptocephalus or oceanic larval form of the American eel, although the European form had long been known.

The opportunity for publication in sumptuous form in which it was proposed to issue the Reports of the Princeton University Expedition to Patagonia, the study of the fishes of which had been assigned to him, seems to have redirected his vision to the great continent of his early dreams. Although the fishes collected on this expedition amounted to a mere handful, he took the opportunity to publish a complete detailed statement of the evidence provided by the freshwater fishes of South America in support of the hypothetical former land connection between South America and Africa, the so-called "Archiplata-Archhelenis theory." He likewise incorporated a full catalogue and bibliography of the South American freshwater fishes. This work appeared in 1909.

About the same time he made an arrangement with the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard whereby all of the unidentified Characin fishes from the Agassiz collections were to be sent to Bloomington. This arrangement provided him with an abundant source of material and formed the basis for his monograph of the Characins of which three parts have been published, although the work is left uncompleted at his death. Numerous smaller papers also appeared which were based on these collections, as well as a few collections sent to him by various South American correspondents. All this time, his early wish to visit the great continent described by Humboldt, Bates, and Wallace remained unsatisfied. As a student of this period said, "I was able to get him to take his eyes off the map of South America long enough to sign my registration card."

In 1901, after the Denver meeting of the American Association for
the Advancement of Science, during an excursion from Colorado Springs to Cripple Creek, by chance Dr. Eigenmann came to occupy a seat contiguous to that occupied by Dr. W. J. Holland, Director of the Carnegie Museum, then in its infancy. The conversation turned upon South American fishes and Dr. Eigenmann's long cherished hopes and plans for an intensive exploration of South America. Dr. Holland proved to be sympathetic.

In the fall of 1906, Professor J. C. Branner of Stanford University invited Dr. Eigenmann to join him in an expedition to Brazil. Unable to do so, yet not wishing to lose the opportunity to make use of Prof. Branner's experience and companionship, Dr. Eigenmann took up the matter with Dr. Holland, who thereupon commissioned Mr. John D. Haseman, a student of Indiana University, to make the expedition under the auspices of the Carnegie Museum. Haseman reached Bahia, Brazil, on October 5, 1907, just as Dr. Branner was about to return to this country. But Haseman remained and continued the work assigned to him, eventually travelling through eastern Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay, and finally returning by way of the Rio Guaporé, arriving in February 1910, with a collection of fishes second only in size to the Agassiz collections at Harvard.

In the fall of 1908, under the auspices of the Carnegie Museum, Dr. Eigenmann was able to achieve his long cherished wish to visit the continent of South America. He went to British Guiana, because in accordance with the Archhelenis theory, this region, as Archiguyana, forms one of the oldest land-masses in South America, and here, if anywhere, should be found the vestiges of the primitive or aboriginal fauna. Although disappointed in this, and finding the fauna to be strictly Amazonian, he nevertheless had a highly successful trip, bringing back extremely large collections. Although having been for many years acquainted with South American fishes in their colorless condition as alcoholic specimens, his delight at now seeing them in their fresh state is shown in the following quotation: "species ............ which I had only known as mummies, were resurrected from the depths of that pool, and I danced about its margin with delight to see them in their vivid living colors." Immediately upon his return early in 1909, he set to work with enthusiasm to complete his report. This, "The Fresh-water Fishes of British Guiana," appeared in 1912, as Volume V of the Memoirs of the Carnegie
Museum, a huge quarto volume of nearly six hundred pages and over one hundred plates, the longest of all Dr. Eigenmann’s publications, which Dr. Eigenmann often referred to as his “Guiana Monster.”

In 1912, under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution, a party of government scientists proposed to set out for Panama to collect the fishes from both sides of the Isthmus before the completion of the canal should form a waterway, and allow the intermingling of the Atlantic and Pacific faunas. The importance and desirability of this survey had originally been suggested by Dr. Eigenmann himself, and he felt that he should have been included in the chosen party. He had pointed out the strategic importance of this region as bearing upon the problem of the origin of the fauna of the Pacific slope. Not to be left out in the study of his own problems, again assured of the support of the Carnegie Museum, early in 1912, he set out for an adjoining region, the Magdalena river in Colombia. Ascending this to Bogotá thence crossing the central and western Andes to the coast at Buenaventura, he then returned by ascending the unhealthful Pacific stream, the San Juan river, to its headwaters, crossing the low continental divide, and descending the Atrato river to its mouth. In the San Juan district he suffered a severe attack of malaria, from the effects of which he never fully recovered.

Recognition was now coming to him and it became increasingly easier for him to secure funds locally for carrying out his plans for systematic exploration. The following year and almost every year thereafter, one or two of his students were sent to various unexploited regions in South America. In 1917, again in spite of repeated and continuous illness, he made a final trip, accompanied by his daughter, to the more pleasant regions of northern Peru, Lake Titicaca, and Chile. However, he never gave up the idea of one more trip. After his return his condition becoming more and more delicate, he felt obliged to relinquish his connection with the Carnegie Museum, which he did in the following year. His report on the fishes of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile was published in the Memoirs of the Carnegie Museum, Vol. IX, No. 1, Oct. 1922.

He was now relieved of active teaching at Indiana University, being made Research Professor, although continuing to serve as Dean of the Graduate School. Almost every winter, accompanied by books, manuscript, and barrels of specimens, he went to Florida to continue
his researches, and at the same time to better look after his health. Two years ago he again went to Florida, but at this time he had to remain in the hospital. A year ago with Mrs. Eigenmann he removed to California to spend the remainder of his days.

Always of an aggressive, active, and persistent nature, his tireless efforts in behalf of his favorite study gained for him the title of the "indefatigable." Dr. Jordan wrote of his systematic exploration of the South American continent as "unparalleled," and comparable only to that of organized governmental effort. He was the author of more than two hundred scientific papers and the describer of nearly four hundred new species of fishes. He was a member of numerous learned societies, and at his death the only citizen of Indiana who had been accorded the honor of election to the National Academy of Sciences. His kind interest in his students and his ever-ready humor endeared him to his students and associates. His death creates a great void in the ranks of American ichthyologists.

Arthur W. Henn.
(From Photograph taken in 1915)

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