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**A history of British starfishes, and other animals of the class
Echinodermata**

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Preface.

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P R E F A C E.

THIS History of the British species of a much neglected but beautiful and interesting class of animals originated in an attempt to revise the characters of such Starfishes as inhabit the Irish Sea, and to introduce the generic arrangements proposed by Professor Agassiz, which I laid before the Wernerian Society, with the approbation of its distinguished president, Professor Jameson, and which was published in 1839 in the eighth volume of its Transactions. Without the kind assistance of my brother naturalists, the materials for the following pages could not, however, have been gathered. To my friend Mr. John Goodsir I am especially indebted for assistance and advice. From Mr. Thompson of Belfast a great portion of my information has been derived; and the materials which he had been collecting for several years, in order to prepare an account of the Irish species, were most liberally, and without reserve, placed in my hands, as were, also, with like kindness, Mr. Robert Ball's collections for an account of the Echinidæ. In Scotland I have derived most valuable aid from Professor Jameson, Dr. Johnston of Berwick,

and Dr. P. Maclagan; in England from Mr. Alder, Mr. Bean of Scarborough, Mr. Bellamy of Plymouth, and Mr. Gray of the British Museum, and from many other gentlemen in both countries, and in the sister island, whose assistance I have recorded in the text. In Dublin Captain Portlock most liberally permitted me to examine the Ordnance collection. To all these gentlemen I return my fervent thanks, also to Professor Agassiz, who most kindly permitted me to make use of the notes he had made on the British collections of these animals during his last visit to our country.

Nor must I forget favours of the pencil. To my friend Mr. G. J. Bell the volume is indebted for some of its most interesting embellishments: Mr. Alder and Mr. Thompson have also contributed to the ornamental part. The wood-cutting speaks for itself,—thanks to Mr. Bastin, who in the most praiseworthy manner made himself acquainted not merely with the drawings, but with the texture and appearance of the animals themselves, in order the better to express them.

With three exceptions the figures of species are from my own drawings, and with a view to secure correctness were mostly drawn on the wood by myself. In the text I have endeavoured faithfully to do justice to preceding writers, and rarely have quoted a synonym which I have not myself verified. I have endeavoured to bring the subject as near as possible to the present state of science, and trust that few memoirs essential to my purpose have escaped me. I should have wished to have made more

use than I have done of the valuable papers on the Echinidæ by M. Desmoulins, but could lay hands on a portion of them only. Since I commenced the publication two papers have appeared which I must notice, as they add several to my enumeration of the synonyms of the Starfishes. The one is a Memoir by one of the greatest living physiologists, Muller of Berlin, on the genera of the Starfishes, read before the Berlin Academy in April 1840. This paper must be praised on account of the excellent way in which the characters of the genera are drawn up. The chief novelty is the employment of the anus of Starfishes (or anal pore) as a source of family distinction, which aperture Muller describes as existing in all Starfishes saving *Asterias* proper, and a new genus, *Hemichemis*, which seems identical with my previously constituted *Luidia*. His genus *Crossaster*, also, is my *Solaster*, published the year before. Several generic names previously adopted by Agassiz and Nardo are wantonly changed; thus, *Urastrer* is turned into *Asterocanthium*, and *Palmipes* into *Asteriscus*, with which he unites *Asterina*. In this paper Muller maintains that one of the five intermediate inferior plates of the Ophiuridæ bears a madreporiform tubercle, or rather corresponds to that body, a view which I am not inclined to adopt.

The other Memoir to which I must allude is one by Mr. Gray on the Starfishes, which he calls the class *Hypostoma*, and defines somewhat ambiguously, published simultaneously with my two first numbers, in the *Annals of Natural History*. I am afraid I must censure Mr. Gray for chang-

ing names still more than Muller, and with less reason. It is a pity zoologists do not take a lesson from their fellow labourers in the field of Nature, the botanists, in this respect. Mr. Gray has increased the confusion by giving fragments of descriptions instead of generic and specific characters, probably from carrying too far a laudable desire for brevity. His essay deserves praise, however, for recording many new foreign habitats of the beautiful animals he catalogues.

