

**THE OYSTER; A
POPULAR SUMMARY
OF A SCIENTIFIC STUDY**

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The oyster; a popular summary of a scientific study by William K. Brooks

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A POPULAR SUMMARY OF A SCIENTIFIC STUDY

BY

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SECOND AND REVISED EDITION

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PREFACE.

The first edition of this book was written in 1890 at the suggestion of President Gilman and other citizens of Baltimore, and it was published by the Johns Hopkins University in 1891, in the hope that it might help to bring about a practical and judicious system of oyster farming in Maryland, and the development and improvement of the natural resources of our waters, by an account of the way in which the structure and habits of the oyster fit it for cultivation as a submarine agricultural product.

To-day, fifteen years after the book was written, the oyster grounds of Virginia and North Carolina, and those of Georgia and Louisiana, are increasing in value, and many of our packing houses are being moved to the south, but there is no oyster farming in Maryland, and our oyster beds are still in a state of nature, affording a scanty and precarious livelihood to those who depend upon them.

Since the facts and reflections which the first edition contained are as instructive now as they were fifteen years ago, no essential change in the book seems to be

necessary, and most of the new matter refers to minor points. To this there is one exception. I have added to the account of the structure of the oyster a section upon its peculiar fitness for gathering up the germs of cholera and typhoid fever and transmitting them to man, since the importance of clear ideas upon this subject increases with the growth of the cities and towns upon the shores of the Bay and its tributaries, and with the increasing danger of the pollution of the oyster area by sewage. The section upon this important subject is the most notable addition to this edition.

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY,
March 25, 1905.

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST EDITION.

This book (for which I have been asked to write an introductory note) is written for the information of all who care for oysters,—no matter whether their point of view be that of providers or consumers,—of the oysterman, the money-maker, the housekeeper, the legislator, the editor, or the student of natural history. So well is the book written that many parts of it are as fascinating as a story.

The facts that have led to its preparation are these. After many years of plenty, Maryland is in danger of an oyster famine. The supplies which nature bestows most bountifully have been so treated that scarcity now takes the place of abundance, anxiety and alarm have followed security. Authentic figures showing the decline and fall of the oyster empire of the Chesapeake, startle all who consider them. It is not only the dredgers, the dealers, the shuckers, the packers, the coopers, the tanners, and the carriers, that are to suffer if this state of affairs continues, everybody in Maryland will likewise suffer more or less. An important article of food, that should be as plentiful

as it is excellent, will grow more scarce, and a branch of industry will be cut off, which employs a large amount of labor and of capital and so contributes to the welfare of the State, the region, and the country. The interior as well as the seaboard, the farmer as well as the oysterman, will be injured unless some remedy is found.

The author of this volume is well known in all scientific circles as an accurate, clear-sighted and trustworthy observer. His papers are received and quoted by the best authorities in every place where the study of natural history is carried on. Not only can he see with his trained eye and powerful glasses, more than most people, but he can state distinctly and without any deviation from the exact truth, what he sees, and what he thinks of what he sees. His life has been devoted to the careful observation of the forms and changes of form in living beings.

To the study of the oyster he has devoted a large part of his time for more than ten years past, having been encouraged to do so by the Johns Hopkins University, in which he is an honored professor, and by the legislature of the State of Maryland, which he served as an oyster commissioner in 1883-4. He can hold his own not only among naturalists, but also among practical men. He has dredged in every part

of the bay. To use his own words, he has tonged oysters in five different States; in the warm waters of the South, he has spent months under the broiling tropical sun, wading over the sharp shells which cut the feet like knives, studying the oysters "at home." He has planted oysters; he has reared them by collecting the floating spat; and he has hatched from artificially fertilized eggs more oysters than there are inhabitants of the United States. More than this, he has diligently studied the experience of other States and countries and has gathered up the knowledge of the world in respect to the life of the oyster, its enemies and its needs, its dangers and its protections. The people of Maryland may rejoice that in just this crisis, the State has the service of such a citizen, ready without any reservations and without any expectations of reward, to give his hard-earned knowledge to the public.

But the author has another claim to be heard. He is governed by common-sense. The difficulty that he sees is summed up in a single sentence that he prints in capital letters, **THE DEMAND FOR CHESAPEAKE OYSTERS HAS OUTGROWN THE NATURAL SUPPLY.** The remedy he proposes is to increase the supply by artificial means. To show what is possible for the propagation and protection of young oysters, he describes in