

A NOTE ON PALAEOONTOLOGICAL SOCIETIES

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ABSTRACT.—The author gives a historical review of the Palaeontological Societies of the world. In the strict sense of the term, that is a Society holding regular meetings, discussions, excursions etc., the *Palaeontologische Gesellschaft* founded by O. Jaekel in 1912 is the oldest of such Societies. The *Palaeontological Society of India* founded in 1950 by M. R. Sahní, Palaeontologist, Geological Survey of India and his colleagues in the Indian Universities, and other institutions is the newest Society to be formed. The aims and objectives of the *Palaeontological Society of India*, not the least of which is the promotion of goodwill and cooperation among the world's scientists, are welcomed.

IT is with a feeling of great pleasure and cordial welcome that I approve of the foundation of the *Palaeontological Society of India*. In this note I propose to give a brief historical review of the existing Palaeontological Societies of which the Indian Society is the most recent.

By far the oldest Society of this kind is the *Palaeontographical Society*, instituted in 1847 in London. In its constitution it is provided "that it shall have for its objects the illustration and description of British fossil organic remains." In pursuing this objective a long series of very valuable monographs has been published since 1848. But it may be said, that the Palaeontographical Society has not had the character of a true scientific union, with regular scientific meetings, discussions, excursions, etc. It was and is rather a group of subscribers giving the necessary financial support for the publication of transactions. In this respect it has a structure similar to that of the equivalent German series *Palaeontographica*, inaugurated two years earlier, in 1846. Like its British counterpart, it is mainly a periodical supported by subscribers, but not with a Society behind it.

The same is true of the *Schweizerische Palaontologische Gesellschaft*. Since the year 1874 there exists, to be sure, a series of volumes entitled *Abhandlungen der Schweizerischen Palaontologischen Gesellschaft*, but there is no Society in the conventional sense of the

term. In consequence, later on the title of the periodical was changed to *Schweizerische Palaontologische Abhandlungen* (Memoires Suisse de Paleontologie). The official date of the definite foundation of the *Schweizerischen Palaontologischen Gesellschaft* (*Société Paléontologique Suisse*) is 1921. Its annual *Berichte* (*Comptes Rendus*) are published in the volumes of the *Eclogae Geologicae Helvetiae*.

Thus, so far as I am aware, the oldest Palaeontological Society that deserves this name in the proper sense, *i.e.*, a Society of independent status, with a vigorous scientific life and with a Journal of its own, is the *Palaontologische Gesellschaft*. It was founded by O. Jaekel in 1912, its organ being the *Palaeontologische Zeitschrift*, published since 1914. In the programme of the Society, special stress was laid upon the biological aspects of palaeontology. The *Zeitschrift* was intended to publish smaller papers of this kind, since for the publication of large-sized monographs several series of archival character were available.

Besides the serial publications already named, there are to be mentioned the *Palaeontologia Indica* (since 1865), the *Palaeontologischen Abhandlungen* (1882–1933), the *Beiträge zur Palaontologie Oesterreich-Ungarns und des Orients* (since 1882), the *Memoires de la Societe Geologique de France*, *Palaeontologie* (since 1890), the *Palaeontographia Italica* (since 1896), the *Annales de Paléontologie* (since 1906). Of a later date (1922) are the *Palaeontologia*

Sinica. The original scope of the *Palaentologischen Gesellschaft* was to be an international Society, since from the beginning it included a large number of members all over the world, among them the most famous names of the time.

But some years later, in other countries, several national Palaeontological Societies were established, as for instance the *Societe Paleontologique de Russie* which exists from the autumn of 1917. It was founded by A. P. Karpinsky, M.D. Zalessky (Palaeobotanist) A. A. Borissiak, N. N. Yakovlev, A. N. Rajabinin and others, with its publications *Annales et Memoires*. The *Schweizerische Palaentologische Gesellschaft* (1922) has already been referred to. It was followed in 1927 by the *Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists*, a section of the *American Association of Petroleum Geologists*, which in the same year inaugurated the *Journal of Paleontology*, originally cultivating palaeontological papers with a stratigraphical bearing. Some decades ago (1909) in the U.S.A. the *Paleontological Society* had been established as an affiliate and section of the *Geological Society of America*. Without a journal of its own, its *Proceedings* were published in the *Bulletin* of the latter Society. But since 1933 the Paleontological Society joined the Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists under the editorship of the *Journal of Paleontology*. This journal has in the meantime developed into our leading organ for smaller papers, equally distinguished by the abundance of its important contributions as well as by its excellent get-up and rich illustrations. This holds good at least for the invertebrates, since vertebrate palaeontology is only scantily represented. For this latter field the *American Society of Vertebrate Paleontologists* had been founded some years prior to the Paleontological Society, but in 1910 the two Societies were amalgamated. In recent times a *Society of Vertebrate Paleontology* rose again, editing a *News Bulletin*.

Further, a Society that deserves mention is the *Palaobiologische Gesellschaft* of Vienna,

which was founded in 1933 for the promotion of the pre-existing journal, *Palaobiologica*. As suggested by its name, this Society and its periodical are devoted mainly to paleobiological research. But "paleobiology" in the sense as coined by O. Abel is merely a synonym of paleocology and in a wider sense it is identical with palaeontology.

Palaeobotany in India has in recent times been specially cared for by the *Palaeobotanist*. And now, as the last child in a large family the *Palaentological Society of India* is born. It has many objectives in view—assisting India in the exploration of its economic resources—oil and coal, the unravelling of important unsolved problems in Indian palaeontology, palaeobotany and prehistory, sponsoring of expeditions for collecting new fossil materials particularly of early Man in India, dissemination of popular knowledge, founding a Museum and a Library, and last but not least, the promotion of co-operation and goodwill among scientists of the world. Its destiny is being guided by M. R. Sahni, Founder-President of the Society, Palaeontologist in charge of Palaeontology and Palaeobotany, Geological Survey of India, and by his colleagues in the Indian Universities and other institutions. India has an old and famous tradition in palaeontology. The *Palaentologia Indica* and other publications of the Geological Survey of India have played an important role in the history of palaeontology that can never be lost sight of. Large series of monographs have been devoted to the abundant fossils of all geological ages in the subsurface of India. Descriptions of these will now be supplemented by the *Journal of the Palaeontological Society of India* of which the present is the Inaugural Number.

We offer our heartiest congratulations to the *Palaentological Society of India* on the inauguration of its Journal, and wish it a most successful development. May it become a strong promoter of our science, which we love and which we are all eagerly endeavouring to further by our joint labour!