

INTRODUCTION.

ELEVEN families of Phytophagous Coleoptera are dealt with in this Volume and its Supplement, the Hispidæ and Cassididæ being treated separately. The Phytophaga of Mexico and Central America form, as was to be expected, no inconsiderable portion of the Coleopterous fauna of these regions; but our knowledge of them has until recently been comparatively meagre. The enormous amount of material, however, obtained by Messrs. Champion, Flohr, Gaumer, Höge, Smith, and others gives us a very good idea of the Phytophagous fauna of Mexico and Central America, and we may confidently assert that during the progress of this work our knowledge of this Tribe of Coleoptera has been very largely increased. In the course of time many more new species will doubtless be discovered in the less explored parts of Mexico and elsewhere; but it is probable that we already know the more important forms; this assertion is strengthened by the fact that amongst the various collections from other sources submitted to me for examination from time to time, but very few species were represented of which we had not received examples previously. We must of course bear in mind that amongst the Halticinæ and Galerucinæ, consisting for the greater part of small and obscure species, an ample field may still exist for enriching our knowledge and collections; and had it not been for such painstaking collectors as Messrs. Champion and Smith many of these small, but nevertheless highly interesting, forms, often neglected for the larger and more showy species, would still be unknown to us. The same may be said of many other parts of the Globe, for wherever any unworked locality has been explored by an able entomologist, the Phytophaga almost always prove, excepting in Oceanic islands, to be very rich in small as well as in large species.

Gemminger and Harold in their Catalogue (1874) give the total number of Phytophaga (excluding the Hispidæ and Cassididæ) as 7905 species. Since the issue of this Catalogue perhaps 5000 other species, described or undescribed, have been added to our collections, and no idea can at present be formed of the probable limit in regard to the total number of existing species. From within the limits of Mexico and Central America 2166 species are recorded.