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ISLAND BUILDERS.

The Wonderful Story of the Coral.

In common with the sponge the coral has long enjoyed a reputation as something rather mysterious; built up in some inexplicable manner in the depths of the seas, born wonderfully of the "great grey level plains of ooze, where the shell-buried cables creep." Many who deny its right to the title of mineral, yet dubious of its real nature, give the credit of its being usually to "a sort of insect"; a guess wide of the mark.

The builder of coral-masses is a close relative of the tiny fresh-water hydra of our ponds and streams on the one hand and of the flower-like soft-bodied sea-anemone on the other; and, vastly different as at first sight it appears, its method of life and living is not far removed from either of these.

The "Polyp" at Home.

The coral-animal or "polyp" is very simply constructed. A month surrounded by a fleshy body and fringed with tentacles armed with stinging-threads for securing food, and an unenviably simple stomach, complete its make-up. The majority of living corals vary in size from about a quarter to one inch in diameter; small in comparison with the earlier fossil forms as found in the limestone of Wenlock, Malvern, etc., which sometimes measure a foot or more across with thick dividing walls; though others, of another type, were very tiny, the individual polyps being no larger than a pin's head. Reproduction takes place by automatic division of individuals, or by "budding," the buds remaining attached to the parent whence they sprang and adding to the mass, or by eggs. The soft-bodied larvae resulting from the eggs move actively about by means of rowing-threads for some time before settling down for good. When the day arrives on which it feels a roving existence no longer appeals, the youngster chooses an anchorage and lays the foundation-stone of its chosen home; a basal plate by which it voluntarily anchors itself for life. Its next procedure is to build an external skeleton. An outer wall is built up, thin partitions are made, and usually a pillar from the centre of the foundation-stone grows up to the central food-cavity as an internal support; its material for this somewhat extensive job being carbonate of lime taken from the sea-water!

Coral "Flowers."

Though certain species cling to a solitary mode of life, others are out-and-out communists, combining to form more or less extensive colonies. These communities take well-ordered forms. The well-known "brain coral," so-called from the resemblance of its ridged surface to the convolutions of the brain, forms large areas of skeletons massed and welded together, the shape of the mass and even the details of the skeletons varying considerably in different situations and under different conditions of growth, many influences dictating the exact shape it shall take. The branched "stag's horn" and flattened "mushroom" corals adopt the shapes indicated by their titles, though neither rival in beauty or form or colouring the purple-crimson "organ-pipe" of the Indian Ocean; a striking object when seen with its bright green living polyps with tentacles expanded flower-like in readiness to convert into a meal any tiny organism venturing within reach. This deceptive appearance, as of elegant petalled flowers blossoming on the soft "bark" of the coral stems, led eighteenth century observers to declare the "flowers," that Pliny and Dioscorides were undoubtedly correct in proclaiming the coral to be a subterranean shrub which, when dragged from its sea-bed and exposed to the air, suddenly became petrified!

Unstable Foundations.

The greatest depth at which the reef-building corals can work is between twenty and thirty fathoms. Confined to water, the temperature of which in the coldest weather does not fall below 68 degrees F., coral-reefs are abundant in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and near the West Indies, and are most plentiful where volcanic upheavals are not looked upon as extraordinary. The foundation of the living coral, which extends in many reefs far below the above-mentioned depth, is no longer living, the once elevated portion of the seabed, the peaks upon which the now dead foundations rest, having subsided, the upper surface of the water is almost reached, the coral polyps build outwards, thus increasing the breadth of the reef.

Enduring Monuments.

The Great Barrier Reef of Australia varies in width from ten to ninety miles, and is 1,250 miles long—a monumental result of the labours of myriads of tiny animals. Atolls, or coral-rings enclosing a lagoon (with no central island), have been responsible for a deal of animated discussion; the generally accepted theory now being that the existing ring began as usual around and near to an island which has subsequently sunk and

passed from knowledge, the coral keeping pace in upward growth—varying with circumstances from roughly one to three inches per year—with the sinking foundation. Barbados is built up almost entirely of coral, lumps of it taking the place of stones in the naturally shallow soil of the island, and the now high and dry Dolomites of Austria are largely old coral reefs.

A Lucrative Business.

In consideration of its slow growth the coral reefs are "fished" once only in ten years, the fishing boats engaged in this extremely lucrative-business varying in size from three to fourteen tons. The most valuable fisheries are among the coral reefs off Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, the raw material going chiefly to Italy. The red coral of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea is exported in large quantities to India for the manufacture of ornaments and articles of personal adornment. The black coral of the Persian Gulf and Great Barrier Reef is still more highly prized, but the most valuable of all is the rose-pink coral, which even in pre-war days fetched anything from £30 to £120 per ounce!—John of London's Weekly.

Armenia's Agony.

Lord Bryce and the Atrocities of the Young Turks.

Lurid revelations of the massacre of Armenians in 1915 were made by Lord Bryce at a luncheon given at Pagan's restaurant by Lord Gladstone and the Armenian bureau. The massacre, said Lord Bryce, formed an unsurpassed chapter of horror in the blood-stained annals of the East. The statements made in the Blue Book had been confirmed by German missionaries, and it was to be hoped that the Germans would now know the atrocious conduct of their Government, which had allowed a Christian people to be almost exterminated. The Armenians had hoped that the people of the United States would receive a mandate for the country, but a decision had been postponed. "I cannot conceive," added Lord Bryce, "that the rule of the Turks will be restored. That would be an atrocious crime. The Young Turks, who rose in the name of liberty, have surpassed the crimes of Abdul Hamid in Armenia. I plead that the Turks shall not be allowed to rule over Christian populations." The film called "Auction of Souls," founded on the book, "Ravished Armenia," and on Lord Bryce's official report on the Turkish atrocities, was afterwards shown at the Queen's Hall, and will shortly be presented to the general public. The chief part is played by a young Armenian girl, Aurora Mardi-ganian, who managed to escape from the Turks, and the drama presented is at once enthralling and terrible.—Ex.

War Words We've Won.

The word "dragon" in French was not taken from the fact that soldiers bearing a dragon on their shields took their name from it. As a matter of fact the French dragons never wore a shield. The word came from dragonne, an ornament ending in a tassel or knot worn on the sword-hilt in full dress.

The first soldiers to wear this ornament were called "dragons"; they appear in history for the first time under Francois I., of France as Dragons du Roi. This ornament dragonne is still worn in France in the army and navy in full dress.

With reference to the word "cuirassier," it has no reference whatever to the word cuirre (copper), but to cuir (leather) and cuir (armour). In French "cuirasse" literally means any kind of metal armour. We read of "cuirassiers" of Henry IV., of Navarre wearing steel breast and back plates—cuirasses de cuir (leather armour) of the ancients. During the eighteenth century "cuirasse" meant breast and back plates which, under Louis XIII., XIV., and XV., were of steel, and worn by Gendarmes du Roi. Even now we have in the French Navy Gardecotes cuirasses (armoured coast-guard ships) and Croiseurs Cuirasses (armoured cruisers).

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