

“Water Animals”

The Present Truth – December 28, 1893

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“Stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God.” Job 37:14.

Last week, we learned about the sun, and the moon, and the stars that we see in the heavens above us, this week we shall learn about the “stars of the sea,” and about the many other curious and wonderful things that are found in the oceans, lakes, and rivers.

If you were to visit the sea-shore, and go down among the great rocks, and lift up the long sea-weeds that hang from their sides, you would find stars clinging tightly to the rocks,—not shining stars like the one in heaven, to be sure, but little, five-pointed, living stars. These star-fish, as they are called, are of different colors, but generally reddish orange yellowish. The upper part is hard and rough, while the underside is soft and contains the mouth, and an eye is said to be at the end of each of its five rays. This odd little creature sometimes presses the points of its rays upon the sand, and raises itself in the middle, until it looks like a five-legged stool. If one of its points, or rays, is bitten off, another grows in its place, and if the fish is torn entirely in two and thrown back into the water, the two parts will get new rays and grow into two perfect star-fish.

But this fish is but one of the many strange things that live in the water. The ocean is just swarming with the living creatures. Some of them are very large and many are too small to be seen; yet they are all wonderful. Most of the animals that live in the water have a broad tail and fins with which to swim, “but some crawl, as the crab, some float about, like the jelly-fish, and some lie still, like the oyster.”

Each animal has just such covering or clothing as it needs. The whale, the largest water animal, is so heavy, and goes to such great depths in the water that it needs a very strong covering to protect it from the pressure of the water and the force of the waves. We therefore find it covered with a thick “blanket,” as it is called. Its skin is so made that it can hold a great mass of oily matter, which, it is said, is never less than several inches in thickness, in many places nearly two feet deep, and as elastic or springy as India-rubber. The outside of the skin has no hair, but looks like velvet because of the oil that oozes from it. This causes the great animal to move easily through the water. We find the seals and some other animals dressed in soft, warm fur. One kind, called the Crested Seal, has even a little hood which it can fill with air to protect its head and nose. One animal is called the Sea Mouse, because it has such a hairy coat. It is small, and lives under stones and shells, at the muddy bottom of the sea; but it is exceedingly beautiful. Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet flesh from every hair in its little coat, and make it seem like a tiny “breathing rainbow.” The fish are dressed in suits, hard, different-coloured scales, so lapped one upon the other that they keep out all the water and yet allow the fish to bend in any direction. The scales are kept oiled in order that the fish may glide swiftly through the water. Some animals are covered with sharp, needle-like spines, and others, like the turtle, with thick, bony armour, and still others which lead quiet lives, in houses of the most beautifully-tinted and pearly-lined shell.

Each animal has just such tools as it can use. The whale carries in its mouth a strainer made of fringed whale-bone with which to restrain the water out of its food. The Sword-fish has a sword, the Saw-fish a saw, and the Cuttle-fish and Squids carry pen and ink. The pen looks like an isinglass quill pen, and lies along the body just under the back. The black ink is carried in a little sac, and when the animal is in danger of being caught, it fills the water with ink. Then it cannot be seen and quickly darts away. The Angler-fish has fishing-rod, and line and bait, and can fish with them as deftly as any fisherman you ever saw. A small round fish called the Beaked Chætodon, has a little gun, or bow, and can shoot as straight as you can. The gun is on the end of its nose, and the bullet or arrow is nothing but a drop of water. If it sees a fly or other insects, hanging on the grass over the water, the fish comes up quietly and points its little gun towards the victim. Suddenly it shoots a drop of water at the fly, knocking it off its perch and into the water, where it is quickly snapped up by the cunning hunter.

But the creatures that live in the water are more than interesting; they are useful. Sometimes one hundred barrels of oil are obtained from one whale, besides the whale bone that is taken from its mouth, and the boot that is made from its tail. Food, oil, leather, fur, ivory, isinglass, trumpets, costly pearls, ornaments, and many other things are obtained from the creatures in the sea. Many of the windows and lanterns in China are made of the clear Chinese Window Shells; and your sponges are but the skeletons of animals that live in the bottom of the ocean. But what seem to be the most wonderful of all are the little coral insects, many scarcely larger than the head of a pin. And yet we find places in the bottom of the ocean that look like beautiful flower gardens, vegetable gardens, and large forests; and more wonderful still, we find great islands miles and miles in length, which were made by these tiny builders of the sea.

Oh, where did they come from, all these wonderful, beautiful, and useful creatures? Being fitted each one with just the clothing that it needs, and gave it just the tools that it can use? Who taught them all to use their tools? Who painted the lovely shells and caused each hair of the Sea Mouse to reflect a rainbow? Surely it could have been no other than the Creator of the heavens and earth. The Bible says that on the fifth day He said, Let these things be; and they were. How wise, and how good! He has strewn "beautiful things even on the bottom of the ocean before us." Shall we not love Him with our whole hearts, and praise Him continually?

1. Have you been trying to be a light-bearer for Jesus this week? How?
2. On the fourth day, what light-bearers did He place in the sky?
3. Where else may we find stars? Describe them.
4. Are these the only living things that live in the oceans, and lakes, and rivers?
5. Name a few others.
6. What kind of clothing does each animal have?
7. How is the great whale covered?
8. How are the seals dressed?

9. What kind of coat has the little Sea Mouse? The fish? the turtle?
10. In what kinds of houses do some of the quiet animals live?
11. What kinds of tools do the animals all have?
12. Name a few of the strange tools that are used by some of them.
13. Of what use is the whale? The seal? The Pearl Oyster?
14. Can you name any fish that are used for food?
15. Where did your sponge come from?
16. Did you ever see a piece of coral?
17. What wonderful things are done by the coral insects?
18. Were these marvellous creatures always in the waters of the seas and rivers?
19. Who placed them there? When? How? Gen. 1:20-23.
20. Who alone could give them just the clothes they need, and the tools that they can use?
21. What must they have to keep them alive?
22. Who gives it to them? Ps. 104:24-28.
23. Then could they live without God?
24. What must we have to keep us alive?
25. Who gives it to us?
26. Then could we live without God any longer than they?
27. What does the Bible say we should do when we see these wonderful things that He has made? Job 37:14.
28. Why? They will teach us to know God and to love Him better.