

THE EARTH'S CRUST.

A LECTURE BEFORE THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE BY PROF. A. R. LEEDS, ON "THE MAKING OF THE EARTH'S CRUST."

The following is a full synopsis of the lecture delivered before the Franklin Institute on Thursday evening last, by Professor A. R. Leeds, on "The Making of the Earth's Crust":—

Whoever has visited the lovely Falls of Trenton in the State of New York, will have noticed that the dark blue limestone, over which the water pours at the bottom of the glen, is filled with crustaceans and shells. There are multitudes of the tiny rings of crinoidal stems, and sometimes the entire flower-like body and branching arms of the lily crinoid; many species, too, of those curious crab-like animals with great projecting eyes like horns, called trilobites. Now if any one, who chanced to be inclined to the study of nature, had passed his childhood among the hills and valleys of the State of New York, and had seen the school-boys who spend their holidays on the Schuylkill or Wissahickon, the Delaware, Crum creek, Darby creek, or the Brandywine, and hammer away upon every rock they meet, never encountering relief of fossil bird, beast, fish, worm, or shell. They do, however, find minerals in great abundance and in great variety. I made some while since a catalogue of the minerals native to South-eastern Pennsylvania, and found that it included more than 100 well-defined species. If to these varieties be added the numerous fossils, he would have a list of 200. There is no large city in the country, New York, Boston, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Chicago all being included, which possesses so rich a cabinet; one, moreover, that is accessible to the student at all times and free of cost. As a consequence, Philadelphia is and always has been noted for its multitude of mineral collectors and fine mineral cabinets. The collections of Mr. Vaux, Mr. Clay, and Mr. Trautwine are excellent, no private, and that of the first-named gentleman by no public museum in the country.

The youth who commences his geological studies while rambling through the lovely valleys and over the gently sloping hillsides that encircle our native city, commences his geological studies as nature herself would dictate were she to become articulate and constitute herself his teacher. The layers of rock which, piled one upon another, make up the earth's surface, have been frequently and very aptly compared to a series of volumes—the layers which are deepest down and which, as we shall presently see, were first formed, constituting the introductory books, and those lying near the surface the concluding ones. If the student wishes, then, to understand geology, he must read these books as nature has written them, and begin with those which she wrote first. Now one of the very earliest books is in the possession of the students who reside in Philadelphia. Of the second, third, fifth, and many of the later books we possess but fragments, and must borrow them of our friends who live in New York, New Jersey, and along the Gulf, if we desire to read them in full.

These books are written in what the student of general literature would be apt to call the dead languages of nature, but they are Greek and Latin, so to speak. But there are so many beautiful poems and strange stories told in these dead languages by lips of stone as Grecian poets sung, and as equally worthy of translation into speech intelligible to those who live at the present day.

The great fire at Alexandria that burned the famous library destroyed, it is said, many manuscripts which would have thrown light upon the early history of the Asiatic monarchies. Similar catastrophes at the beginning of the world's geological history destroyed a library as good as that which has been left to us. A few are the surviving fragments that all the sagacity of science is required to rewrite that history, and when rewritten it is almost too marvellous to admit of belief. It tells of a time when the vital and spiritual forces had not yet been set into operation upon our planet. When from pole to pole and from pæd to core the earth was given over to the fierce conflict of physical and material powers. When as yet the rocks were fluid. Though ten years ago it would have been a rash assertion to make, yet in view of what the spectroscopy has revealed to us concerning the constitution of the solar atmosphere, when some rocks were even gaseous. When these rocks were part not of the earth but of the air.

Strangely different then and now was the earth's atmosphere. Then it was composed of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, sulphur, chlorine, iodine, bromine, and the vapors of certain easily vaporizable metals, such as arsenic and tellurium. It stretched away until it filled a large part of the space included within the orbit of the moon. And if the spectroscopy reveals to us iron gas, magnesium gas, and calcium gas as existing in the solar atmosphere, it is reasonable to suppose that these and many other similar metals once existed upon our globe in the gaseous form. Other substances, such as gold, platinum, and the noble metals generally, silicon and carbon, the latter of which can be converted into a liquid only at the most exalted temperatures, constituted the fluid body of the earth.

At last that great day came when the particles of oxygen and hydrogen had so far decreased in temperature, that is to say, commenced to move in such restricted spheres, that it was possible for them to link their divided existences into one. With that act of union, water—water, the physical life-blood of the world—came into being. Water is to our earth what blood is to the life of men, what sap is to the life of plants. It has been said, and with truth, that a man is composed of a handful of dust spread through six painfuls of water. All vegetables and animals are composed of water, together with some charcoal and nitrogen. A great number of the mineral species now known to exist are hydrates, that is consist of from one to forty parts water along with other ingredients. The tiny particles of water, like fairy ships more precious to the well-being of mankind than Spanish galleons heaped with gold, are freighted with the heat poured down upon the burning sands of the Niger and Amazon, and carry it to the shores of Greenland and the Polar seas. Ever at work in our atmosphere, these particles of water are taking heat from this point, where it might harm or kill, and bearing it yonder to nourish and bless. Water is the great mediator. It is the medium by which all parts of our earth, however distant, act and react one upon the other, and by which the physical life of the globe, considered as an organic whole, goes on.

There were two distinct classes of phenomena which attended the cooling of the globe. In the first place, a cooling of the entire mass, which would diminish the earth's diameter, and cause it to shrink away from

the crust, leaving an open space between core and shell. Secondly, a contraction of the crust itself, which would cause it to break into pieces and fall down into the molten mass below, floating there like so many islands in the sea.

In conclusion, we come to a question of the greatest importance. We have been studying the development of the earth's surface, and have seen that up to this point in its history this development has been of the kind termed evolution; that is to say, it has been a development of a later from an earlier stage by the action of purely natural and physical laws, without any break or discontinuity, and without involving the necessity of an extraneous force, or the interposition of a higher power. Now the evolution which our world's history presents us with is from a lower to a more advanced stage of development—from the simple to the complex—from what is rudimentary to what is perfected. It has been ever onward in its movement, and in its tendency upwards. I venture to propose for it the term Progressive Evolution.

Now, the fact that all evolution which the earth's history exhibits has been progressive in its tendency has been a serious difficulty to many. Why, they ask, if one state is derived from another by the unassisted action of physical laws, should we not find that the result of development is sometimes to elevate, but as frequently to degrade? As in the history of nations the operation of purely moral causes has sometimes brought with it wealth, power, and culture, at other times it has caused great monarchies to lapse into barbarism.

I answer that such is the case in nature. That evolution is presented to us in two phases or aspects, one of which is progressive and the other is retrogressive. The sun, the earth, and most probably Venus, Mars, and Jupiter, are in the progressive phase of evolution, while other planets are in the retrogressive. One of them, the moon, after passing through all stages of progressive and retrogressive evolution, exhibits the dead, inert, exhausted condition to which a planet is reduced at the close of the downward movement. The unalterable operation of the physical forces teaches us the melancholy truth that a time must come when the supply of heat upon the earth's surface will fall below its expenditure. Then it must pass, as the moon has passed, through all stages of retrogressive evolution down to death and sheer oblivion.

The above lecture will be followed on next Thursday by one on "The Relations of Geology to the Picturesque," by the same attractive lecturer.

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