

SPONGES

SPONGES have been known for thousands of years. Yet it is only within the last seventy-five years that they have certainly been known to be animals and not plants.

Like plants they are always fixed and never move about. They do not have eyes or legs or any of the sense organs. They do not have any of the internal organs that we usually think of as belonging to animals. Yet they have a way of feeding and type of egg cells and their development that belong to animals. And in other obscure ways they resemble animals and not plants.

Of course this means *living* sponges. Perhaps you are thinking of what we usually call "sponges," which are only the dry skeletons of sponges. In life these were all filled in and covered over with the soft jelly-like flesh of living cells.

Sponges of all kinds always live in water. Most of them live in shallow water in the ocean. They are of many sizes and forms and colors.

The skeletons of sponges are very interesting. The wonderfully beautiful skeleton of the "Venus's flower-basket," which is found in the Philippines, is made of flinty fibers intertwined and interwoven in ways so delicate and intricate that one wonders that such a simple and lowly creature as a sponge could have formed it and had it for its skeleton.

Although sponges are in most ways very simple animals, they are rather difficult to understand, for they are different from the animals

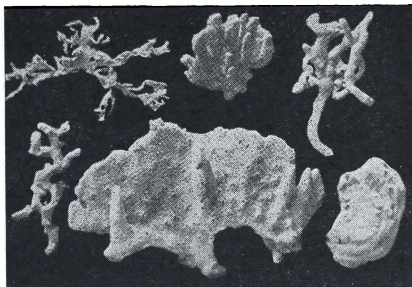
with which we are familiar.

The only work they do is to feed, and the sea really feeds him, because he gets all of the currents of water which pass by his body. The surplus water is poured out through another set of openings.

Sponges are never eaten by other animals, probably because they have a peculiar disagreeable odor and perhaps flavor. But other animals of many kinds live *in* sponges for their homes—worms, small crabs, mollusks, etc.

Sponges adapted for commercial use are found in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, near the Bahama Islands, on the coast of Florida, and in other parts of the world. They are secured from the water by diving, dredging, and, in shallow water, by long forks.

Sponges are of different sizes and textures. Some are large and coarse; these are used for auto-washing. Smaller, finer sponges are used for many purposes. Sponge fishing is an important industry.



Various Forms of Sponges