

SCIENCE.

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CONTENTS:

<i>The Lowest of the Vertebrates and their Origin:</i>	
THEO. GILL.	645
<i>Current Notes on Anthropology (IX.):</i>	
D. G. BRINTON	649
<i>Current Notes on Physiography (IX.):</i>	
W. M. DAVIS	651
<i>Science in Canada: J. T. C.</i>	653
<i>Correspondence:—</i>	656
<i>Volcanic Dust in Utah and Colorado:</i> HENRY MONTGOMERY. <i>Volcanic Dust in Texas:</i> E. T. DUMBLE. <i>On the Classification of Skulls:</i> G. SERGI.	
<i>Scientific Literature:—</i>	658
<i>Geological and Natural History Survey of Minnesota:</i> WILLIAM B. CLARK. <i>Fossil Mammals of the Puerco Beds:</i> W. B. SCOTT. <i>Ridgway's Ornithology of Illinois:</i> C. HART MERRIAM. <i>Tests of Glow-Lamps:</i> T. C. M.	
<i>Notes and News:—</i>	663
<i>Entomology; A New Quadruple Expansion Engine; Papers for the Mathematical Congress at Kazán; The Royal Geographical Society; The National Geographic Society; Botanical Books at Auction; General.</i>	
<i>Societies and Academies:—</i>	668
<i>Geological Society of Washington; The New York Academy of Science.</i>	
<i>Scientific Journals:—</i>	670
<i>The Physical Review; The Journal of Comparative Neurology.</i>	

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THE LOWEST OF THE VERTEBRATES AND THEIR ORIGIN.*

IN many seas have been found—and in almost all temperate and tropical seas may

* *Columbia University Biological Series. II. Amphioxus and the Ancestry of the Vertebrates.* By ARTHUR WILLEY, B. Sc., Tutor in Biology, Columbia College.

be found—small animals of peculiar appearance and habits and of extraordinary interest. They have a translucent, compressed and elongated fusiform body attenuated at both ends, and therefore have received one of their names—*Amphioxus*; this form may be superficially modified, however, by the development of a membrane around the caudal portion of the body and the extension downwards of cirri from an oral ring. The existence of these cirri and the erroneous attribution to them of a respiratory function have given rise to another name for the group—*Branchiostoma*. *Lancelet* is a semi-popular equivalent of *Branchiostoma* and *Amphioxus*.

The animals thus distinguished externally are unique in their organization. The nervous system is manifest in an elongated tube without any expansion forwards into an externally specialized brain, and with its anterior portion only distinguished by the fact that there are (in front of the first myotome) two symmetrical pairs of sensory nerves which innervate the snout and have no corresponding ventral roots. A skeleton is represented by a simple notochord extending to both ends of the body, and there is no rudiment of a cerebral case or of sense capsules; the only other hard parts are developed around the anterior aperture, where

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