SCIENCE

FRIDAY, MAY 31, 1912

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THE BUILDING OF "CORAL" REEFS

A coral reef is a ridge or mound of limestone, the upper surface of which lies or lay at the time of its formation, near the level of the sea, and is predominantly composed of calcium carbonate secreted by organisms, of which the most important are corals.

THE above is the opening sentence of an able and suggestive paper by Dr. Thomas Wayland Vaughan on "Physical Conditions under which Paleozoic Coral Reefs were formed," published last year in the *Bulletin of the Geological Society of America.*[1] If we pass over for the moment the question as to just what is meant by "near the level of the sea," a point that is discussed by Dr. Vaughan later on, the part of the above definition that particularly challenges attention is the final clause, "of which the most important are corals." It is not to be denied that this last statement embodies the long-standing and still prevalent view as to the origin and composition of coral reefs and, in fact, it might seem at first sight to be quite axiomatic that corals should be the most important constructive agents in the formation of "coral" reefs. But in view of the fact that some rather recent studies indicate that lime-secreting plants have been much more important than the corals in the formation of certain "true coral reefs" and in view of the few borings and analytical studies of so-called "coral" reefs thus far made, there would seem to be sufficient ground for contending that the whole question as to the relative general importance of lime-secreting animals and lime-secreting plants in the formation of reefs is still an open one. From

[1] Vol. 22, p. 238.