

It would be rash to assume that the struggles of parturition have no analogous bearing on the after vigour and welfare of offspring in the mammalia also.

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Bregner, Bournemouth, November 27.

Snakes "Playing 'Possum."

IN connection with Dr. L. C. Jones' account last week of the Puffing Adder that feigned death, it may be of interest to note that on several occasions I have observed similar behaviour on the part of the English grass-snake (*Coluber natrix*). On finding escape impossible the animal would roll slightly over, with its mouth open to its widest extent, and its tongue protruded, and remain perfectly limp and flaccid, allowing itself to be stroked, moved, and even carried in the hand with the head and tail dangling down on opposite sides, without showing any signs of animation. So sudden is the change from activity to quiescence, and so admirable the imitation of lifelessness that

VOLCANIC STALACTITES.

A CURIOUS formation is described by Mr. E. Goldsmith in the *Proceedings* of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences (part i. 1894, p. 107). It is well known that the highly heated and very fluid lava in the Kilauea crater at Hawaii, as well as in other craters, is occasionally shot up into the air some thirty feet or more. This lava in its descent through the air becomes very porous. If such a highly porous rock have a space underneath, a fresh deposit of liquid lava will trickle through the porous cooled lava, forming as it solidifies the pendant stalactites shown in the accompanying picture, which illustrates Mr. Goldsmith's paper, and has been kindly sent to us by the Academy. The figure represents the entrance to a volcanic cave, photographed by Profs. Sharp and Libbey. It shows an overhanging roof of porous basalt, from which are sus-

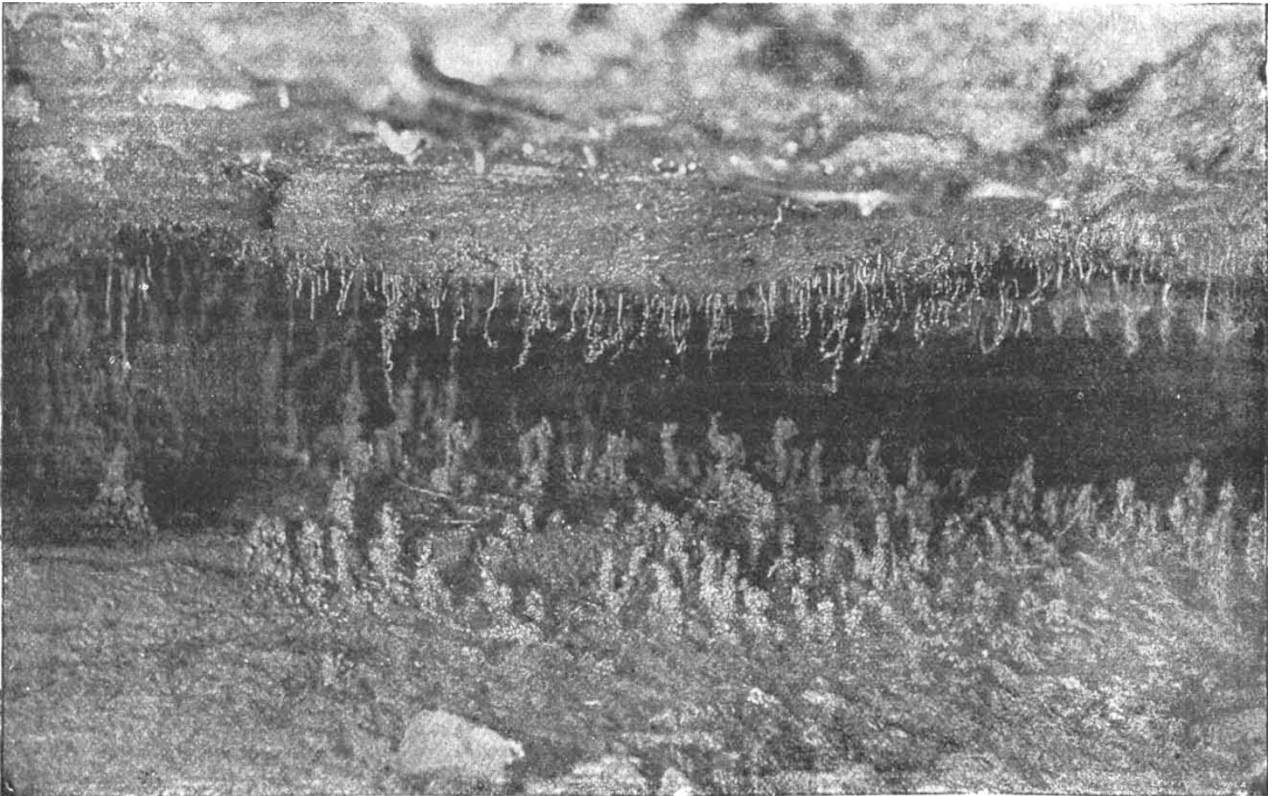


FIG. 1.—Volcanic Stalactites and Stalagmites.

it presents, that on the first occasion on which I witnessed it (now many years ago), I believed the snake to have been seized by some species of fit, and to be at the point of death until, in the faint hope of alleviating its seemingly desperate condition, I plunged it into some cold water, with the happy result of effecting its immediate restoration, the snake possibly thinking its ruse had been successful, and it was once more free. I have known cases, however, in which the symptoms have persisted after the application of the cold-water cure. Subsequently I discovered that no treatment of any kind was necessary, as the snake would "come to" of its own accord after a while.

A point which I should be very interested to learn is whether this condition is produced voluntarily by the animal for protective purposes, "the same with intent to deceive," or is the result of a general nervous inhibition, produced reflexly by the action of fright, which would render it more or less analogous to a fainting-fit.

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pended irregularly gnarled rods of volcanic stalactites; on the floor are scattered fantastic-shaped volcanic stalagmites, which seem to be much thicker than the pendant rods above. Mr. Goldsmith says that the stalactites are about one-fourth of an inch thick, and about eight inches long. They show no disposition to form cones like those seen in limestone caves. They are mostly hollow and porous, and very brittle. The colour is usually a deep black, but sometimes a part is of a brownish tint, due, Mr. Goldsmith thinks, to a higher oxidation of the magnetite present. Fragments of the stalactites, when microscopically examined, exhibited a glassy felspar having apparently the characteristic of sanidine. Magnetite occurred in great profusion, and also gases, probably air. Augite was suspected, but not definitely determined. The specific gravity of a coarse