http://www.geology.19thcenturyscience.org/books/1875-Dana-Coral/README.htm

Science, while it penetrates deeply the system of things about us, sees everywhere, in the dim limits of vision, the word mystery. Surely there is no reason why the simplest of organisms should bear the impress most strongly. If we are astonished that so great deeds should proceed from the little and low, it is because we fail to appreciate that little things, even the least of living or physical existences in nature, are, under God, expressions throughout of comprehensive laws, laws that govern alike the small and the great.

It is not more surprising, nor a matter of more difficult comprehension, that a polyp should form structures of stone (carbonate of lime) called coral, than that the quadruped should form its bones, or the mollusk its shell. The processes are similar, and so the result. In each case it is a simple animal secretion; a secretion of stony matter from the aliment which the animal receives, produced by the parts of the animal fitted for this secreting process; and in each, carbonate of lime is a constituent, or one of the constituents, of the secretion.

This power of secretion is then one of the *first* and most common of those that belong to living tissues; and though differing in different organs according to their end or function, it is all one process, both in its nature and cause, whether in the Animalcule or Man. It belongs eminently to the lowest kinds of life. These are the best stone-makers; for in their simplicity of structure they may be almost all stone and still carry on the processes of nutrition and growth. Throughout geological time they were the agents appointed to produce the material of limestones, and also to make even the flint and many of the siliceous deposits of the earth's formations.

Coral is never, therefore, the handiwork of the many-armed polyps; for it is no more a result of labour than bone making in ourselves. And again, it is not a collection of cells into which the coral animals may withdraw for concealment any more than the skeleton of a dog is its house or cell; for every part of the coral—or corallum, as it is now called in science—of a polyp, in most reef-making species, is enclosed within the polyp, where it was formed by the secreting process.