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Plant Or Animal?

Mrs. William Starr Dana

Did you ever stop to ask yourself, “What is the difference between a plant and an animal?” because this is the place where that question should be answered.

“Why, an animal is altogether different from a plant,” you answer, perhaps a little scornfully. “I have no trouble in telling which is which.”

It is very natural that you should feel this way. A cow or a horse, for example, is not at all like a tree; and when you think of animals, you think of the ones you know best, and likewise of plants.

But wise men have discovered plants that look and act so much like animals, and animals that look and act so much like plants, that at one time they say, “Now, these are animals, surely,” and a little later exclaim, “No, after all, these are plants;” and they take a long time to make up their minds as to whether certain objects are plants or animals.

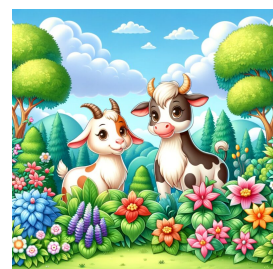
And already even you children have discovered that the plants you know best belong to families, and have children, and care for them in a very motherly fashion; that they drink earth food with their roots, and eat carbon food with their leaves; and soon you will find that they do many other things which once upon a time you would have thought it a great joke to be told a plant could do.

You remember my telling you of one little plant cell that could swim; and there are some animals, you know, that are rooted to one spot as we usually think only a plant is rooted.

What, then, is the difference between a plant and an animal?

Leaf Green and Sunbeam between them put life into what had no life before; and the living plant matter, which they help to make, is that which animals cannot make themselves, yet which they cannot live without, for this living matter is absolutely necessary to them as food.

And the one real difference between a plant and an animal is this,—a plant can make out of certain dead substances the living matter that all animals must have for food; an animal cannot do this.



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