

**BELFAST NATURAL HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.**—The Society met on Wednesday evening last, when Mr Patterson gave an account of the researches and theoretical views of Mr Darwin, on coral reefs.—Mr Darwin was naturalist to the expedition under Captain Fitzroy, in H.M. ships *Adventure* and *Beagle*, which returned from the Pacific, in 1836, after an absence of four or five years. The results of his careful and lengthened inquiries are to be given to the world, in a series of works on the natural history of South America, and the islands of the Pacific. The first of these has just appeared; it treats of the origin of coral reefs, and proposes some new and highly interesting views respecting the great changes which are taking place in the earth's crust, over nearly a hemisphere. Mr Patterson's object was to bring these views before the Society, and to compare them with still more recent, especially those of the American exploring expedition, lately returned from the same regions. Mr Patterson first described the structure and mode of growth of coral, and the different forms assumed by the reefs; the atoll, or ring of coral, enclosing a deep and calm lagoon, and hence called a Lagoon Island; the fringing or skirting reef, raised up in shallow water, near the shore, and the encircling or barrier reef, many miles distant from the shore, and extending round an island, in a narrow belt, or running parallel to its shores, often for hundreds of miles. The author then passed on to explain the theoretical views advanced by Mr Darwin. These appear to be legitimate generalizations of carefully observed facts; they are supported by a great mass of evidence, overturning the views hitherto held, and seeming fully to establish the striking conclusion, that tracts of land, of great extent, have lately subsided, and may be still subsiding, beneath the waters of the Pacific, thus introducing most important changes in the physical geography of the Southern hemisphere, and in the conditions by which animal and vegetable life is maintained. Mr. Patterson concluded with some account of the observations of the American expedition, which bear out, in most points, the theory proposed by Mr Darwin. Mr. Bryce called the attention of the Society to a singular feature in the physical geography of the Holy Land. It has been computed, in the late accurate trigonometrical survey of Lieutenant Symonds, R.N. that the level of the Dead Sea is 1,311 feet lower than the Mediterranean! From barometric observations made shortly before, Count Berthou, a French traveller, had fixed the depression at 1,332 feet; the near coincidence of these two results, from independent methods of inquiry, can leave but little doubt that they are accurate. It has been ascertained that the Sea is 300 feet below the level of the Mediterranean. The depression thus affects the whole valley of the Jordan, and the river in its course of about seventy miles, from the Sea of Tiberias to the Dead Sea, has thus a total fall of about 1,000 feet, or between fourteen or fifteen feet per mile! an amount of declination, perhaps, unparalled on the surface of the globe. It satisfactorily accounts for what all travellers tell us respecting the impetuous current of this river. We must regard this as a highly curious circumstance, especially when we consider how near the Dead Sea is to the Mediterranean — that there are no evidences on its shore of former volcanic action, nor of any desiccation of its waters since since its first formation, in the time of Abraham.—