

UNDER the LENS 7

By 'OPTICUS'



YOUNG JERRY called on me the other evening as he always does when he has found something which mystifies him. "Well?" I asked. "What brings you round this time Jerry my lad?"

"Look at this," he replied, holding up a test-tube for me to inspect. "I was fishing with Dad at Coleny last Sunday and I noticed these leaves floating about

on the bottom, but what the heck is that stuff on them?" The 'stuff' referred to was a grey, mist-like film which waved about in the water as he moved the test tube. "I fished it out with my rod-rest", he said. "Nearly lost me a good Perch that did", he added a little ruefully.

The microscope was being set up whilst he was telling me this and it was short work to snip a portion free and arrange it on a slide. He'd found a good colony of fresh-water Hydra and was amazed by the way they clung to the leaf, waving their tentacles about like small sea-anemones. These creatures are only a tenth of an inch long I told him and feed upon minute water life - too small to be seen with the naked eye, and, perhaps most important of all, provide excellent food for young fish - that is, if the fry are not too small themselves, otherwise the position is reversed! In the winter the Hydra encyst; or roll themselves up into a ball and sleep, but when the summer arrives recommence activities, reproducing by simply growing another one out of themselves. This is known as 'budding'.

Jerry was most concerned about their being eaten - he's a funny kid - but he was more worried about them eating small fish too! I told him not to worry because there were worse fates in store for small fish than being eaten by Hydra.

After I had pointed out the little tiny specks of food which could be seen through their transparent bodies, he wanted to know what the other bits and pieces were that he could see through the microscope, but I told him that I would explain those another time - so he went away with that deep thoughtful look in his eyes which foretold of more questions to come.