

BOYS AND GIRLS

The Musical Fishes.

(Ernest Monk, in 'Toilers of the Deep'.)

[If we take a comprehensive view of the meaning of the word talking, and consider that whenever sounds are made for a definite purpose, by means of a special vocal organ fashioned for the purpose, then I think,' said Professor Bridge, lecturing last year before the Birmingham Selborne Society, 'it may be fairly claimed for fishes that they can and do talk.

'There is no doubt that the sirens of ancient days were simply vocal fishes, which could be seen any day in the fish market at Athens.]

PART I.

The rippling, laughing wavelet's song,
The din and roar of billows strong,
The hollow booming of the caves,
When loud and long the tempest raves,
And shrilly cry the birds that soar
In circles by a rocky shore,
I grant this truly seems to be
The only music of the sea.
Yet I would say, conceited man,
Express ourselves we fishes can;
And I would have you understand
We are indeed a merry 'band.'
We play, since neither deaf nor dumb,
The violin, the fife, and drum;
Oh, do not jest! I will explain,
If further knowledge you'd obtain
For fishes really 'play' with glee
Beneath the surface of the sea.

You ask, how can we fiddle there,
Since fins no supple fingers bear?
Well, when a violin we lack,
One 'rasps' rough portions of his back—
Or skeleton, precise to be—
Till swells the wished-for harmony.
His muscles rub the parts together
Without regard to place or weather;
'Tis far more simple, I declare,
Than scraping strings with bow of hair.
I like this method well, but I me
Prefer instead to beat a drum,
Not with their tails, nor anything
Except a swift, vibrating spring,
Which strikes the buoyant bag of air
We fishes carry everywhere.

You wonder how the piping's done,
Since wooden whistles we have none;
You half suspect I'm not sincere,
And that I'm joking, now 'tis clear;
Yet, if you'll bear this fact in mind,
You'll see 'tis nothing of the kind;
The self-same 'organ' holding air
Is made to carry 'pan-pipes' rare.
The branching tubes on either side
A pleading melody provide,
When o'er their mouths the wind is blown
With loud effect, or tender tone.

You fail to follow? then I fear
I cannot make my meaning clear.
I'd try again, did I but know
The band is tuning down below,

Adieu.

Then sang the winds or waters blue
(No matter which), the words are true—

'O, vain and foolish man, to think
The whole, without one missing link
In music's chain, is known to thee
As song of bird, or hum of bee!'

PART II.

When next I met my finny friend,
He shook with mirth from end to end.
Ha! ha! laughed he, and murmured then,
'How very credulous are men!'
I looked amazed, and strove to hide
All evidence of wounded pride,
For I was hurt to think a fish—
Whose end is but to grace a dish,
Should dare presume to laugh at man,
But ere I spoke, my friend began—

'Ulysses from the siege of Troy
(You heard the story when a boy),
Came near the Isle of Sirens, where
Enchanting music filled the air.
Music that o'er the classic waves
Lured simple seamen to their graves.
Ulysses wished the strains to hear,
And still his barque in safety steer.
The mariners shall bind him fast
With ample cordage to the mast,
And lest they hear and weakly yield,
Their ears with wax must first be sealed.
'Tis done, the notes swell o'er the sea,
Ulysses struggles to be free;
The seamen, deaf to all around,
Row till their master hears no sound;
And one and all rejoice to find
The Isle of Sirens far behind.'

Again he laughed aloud, 'He! he!
Those naughty sirens of the sea!'
I'm sorry I don't apprehend
Where lies the joke, my finny friend.

'Of course, you don't,' the rough replied,
'When learned folk—with all their pride
Of knowledge—never guessed that we
Were those gay sirens of the sea!'

New Street, Dunmow, Essex.

[The purpose of the sounds in most cases is doubtless to attract species of the same kind together, while in other cases the purpose is to warn other fish that they had best be left alone. The grasshopper produces sound by scraping its legs against its wings; the cricket by rubbing one wing against the other, and in an almost exactly similar manner many fishes are known to 'talk.' Parts of the skeleton having roughened surfaces are so placed as to rub against each other by the action of certain muscles, and produce sound. In other instances the noise is produced—a drumming sound—by a sort of elastic spring attached to the vertebrae being struck with great rapidity upon the tense wall of the air-bladder. In another case a number of pipe-like branches are attached to each side of the air-bladder. Sounds produced by fishes can be heard, sometimes when they are thirty or forty feet below the surface of the water.]

Parents' Paradise.

By special request we publish the following:

We were much impressed lately by the orderly behaviour of a large family of children, particularly at the table. We spoke of it to our host; and he pointed to a paper pinned on the wall, on which were written some excellent rules. He said he gave each child who obeyed the rules a reward at the end of every month. We begged a copy for the benefit of our readers. They were called, 'Rules and Regulations for Parents' Paradise.'

1. Shut the door after you without slamming it.

2. Never stamp, jump or run in the house.

3. Never call to persons upstairs, or in the next room; if you wish to speak to them, go quietly where they are.

4. Always speak kindly and politely to servants, if you would have them do the same to you.

5. When told to do, or not to do a thing, by either parent, never ask why you should or should not do it.

6. Tell of your own faults, not of those of your brothers and sisters.

7. Carefully clean the mud or snow off your boots and shoes before entering the house.

8. Be prompt at every meal hour.

9. Never sit down at the table or in the parlor with dirty hands or tumbled hair.

10. Never interrupt any conversation, but wait patiently your turn to speak.

11. Never reserve your good manners for company, but be equally polite at home and abroad.

[For the 'Messenger.'

Nature Talks.

(Annie L. Jack.)

'My furry neighbor's table's set
And slyly he comes down the tree,
His feet firm on each tiny fret
The bark has fashioned cunningly.
He pauses at a favorite knot,
Beneath the oak his feast is spread—
He asks no friend to share his lot
Or dine with him on acorn bread.'

It is interesting to watch these neighbors of the woods and gardens, as they scramble from branch to branch, whisking their bushy tails, and eager-eyed in search of food. Breakfast is the first consideration and—'never give up'—'keep moving,' is the squirrel's maxim.

This old house of rough exterior near their home is built of rough stone, and they have a tunnel right through the cellar. If you should put a basket of nuts up in the attic they would find them, and carry them off—just the same as if they were stored in the basement, and they do it so openly—as if to say: 'What do you mean by taking away my nuts?'

For he hides them near the tree where he lodges, and even when the snow lies thickly upon the ground he never forgets where his stores are hidden, but scratches away the snow when hungry, and finds his treasures. Did you ever watch a squirrel eat a nut? He carries it daintily in his forepaws to his mouth, cuts off the tip, and proceeds to break away the shell. There is an air of self-satisfaction about him that is always amusing—it seems to say that he is only eating what is his own, without a thought of interference. But often the squirrel is a robber, and goes into the nests to eat the young birds, so you can understand that he is not a general favorite with his neighbors. Then again he nibbles the tender shoots of young trees, stunting their growth in his search for fresh vegetables, but most likely he never knows the mischief he has done. It is a very interesting little animal, and the house-building is wonderfully contrived. It is placed in the fork of some lofty branch, out of the reach of enemies, and concealed from sight. Its form is like a sphere, and the moss and grasses are woven together, so that it will keep out rain, and resist wind.

The same squirrels keep their nest year af-