

*Clara Dillingham Pierson*

# *Among the Pond People*



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# AMONG THE POND PEOPLE

BY

CLARA DILLINGHAM PIERSON





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*“Many a mother and teacher will accord a vote of thanks to  
the author.”*



DEAR LITTLE FRIENDS:—When the ten Polliwogs came to spend a day with me, some two years ago, I promised to tell you stories of how they and their neighbors live in the pond. I wanted to tell the stories at once, but this is a busy world and story-telling is only play, so there were many things to be done before I could sit down to my desk and hold my pen while the stories slid out of it onto paper. I wonder where all my ten Polliwogs are now!

One cannot come to know pond people quite so well as those who live in the forest or in the meadow, yet down in the shining water they live and build their homes and learn much that they need to know. And wherever people are living, and working, and playing, there are stories to be found. The pond people cannot be well or happy long away from the water, and you can only come to know them by watching the ponds and brooks. If you do that and are very quiet, the Minnows will swim to where you are, the Mud Turtles will waddle out on the logs in the sunshine, and you may even see a Crayfish walking backward along the sand.

But if you should see a very large, black bug with fore legs which open and shut like jack-knives—then keep away from him, for that is *Belostoma*. Some time you may see him under the electric lights in the city, for he likes to sprawl around there, and you can look at him on land, but let him alone.

Remember that the Dragon-Flies and many of their friends who seem to do nothing but play in the sunshine, have lived long in the dusky pond, and that this life in the air comes only after a long time of getting ready. Remember that if you pick up a Turtle or catch Minnows in a net, you must not leave the Turtle on his back or keep any water-breathing people, like the Minnows, in the air. Watch them for a little while and then let them go free.

And then remember, be sure to remember, this: that you are not to get acquainted with the pond people by tumbling into the water or by going into it with your shoes and stockings on. If you do that, your mothers will say, “We wish that Mrs. Pierson had never written about the pond people.” And if they should say that, just think how I would feel!

Your friend,

CLARA DILLINGHAM PIERSON.

STANTON, MICHIGAN, *December 22, 1900*





## THE BIGGEST FROG AWAKENS

**T**HE Biggest Frog stretched the four toes of his right forefoot. Then he stretched the four toes of his left forefoot. Next he stretched the five toes of his right hindfoot. And last of all he stretched the four toes of his left hindfoot. Then he stretched all seventeen toes at once. He should have had eighteen toes to stretch, like his friends and neighbors, but something had happened to the eighteenth one a great many years before. None of the pond people knew what had happened to it, but something had, and when the Tadpoles teased him to tell them what, he only stared at them with his great eyes and said, “My children, that story is too sad to tell.”

After the Biggest Frog had stretched all his toes, he stretched his legs and twitched his lips. He poked his head out of the mud a very, very little way, and saw a Minnow swimming past. “Good day!” said he. “Is it time to get up?”

“Time!” exclaimed the Minnow, looking at him with her mouth open. “I should say it was. Why, the watercress is growing!”

Now every one who lives in a pond knows that when the watercress begins to grow, it is time for all the winter sleepers to awaken. The Biggest Frog crawled out of the mud and poked this way and that all around the spot where he had spent the cold weather. “Wake up!” he said. “Wake

up! Wake up!” The water grew dark and cloudy because he kicked up so much mud, but when it began to clear again he saw the heads of his friends peeping up everywhere out of that part of the pond bottom. Seven of them had huddled close to him all winter. “Come out!” he cried. “The spring is here, and it is no time for Frogs to be asleep.”

“Asleep! No indeed!” exclaimed his sister, an elderly and hard-working Frog, as she swam to the shore and crawled out on it. She ate every bit of food that she found on the way, for neither she nor any of the others had taken a mouthful since the fall before.

The younger Frogs followed through the warmer shallow water until they were partly out of it. There is always a Biggest Frog in every pond. All the young Frogs thought how fine it would be to become the Biggest Frog of even a very small puddle, for then they could tell the others what to do. Now they looked at their leader and each said to himself, “Perhaps some day I shall begin the concert.”

The Biggest Frog found a comfortable place and sat down. He toed in with his eight front toes, as well-bred frogs do, and all his friends toed in with their eight front toes. He toed out with his nine back toes, and all his friends toed out with

their ten back toes.

One young Yellow Brown Frog said, “How I wish I did not have that bothersome fifth toe on my left hindfoot! It is so



in the way! Besides, there is such a style about having one's hind feet different." He spoke just loud enough for the Biggest Frog to hear. Any one would know from this remark that he was young and foolish, for when people are wise they know that the most beautiful feet and ears and bodies are just the way that they were first made to be.

Now the Biggest Frog swallowed a great deal of air, filled the sacs on each side of his neck with it, opened his big mouth, and sang croakily, "Frogs! Frogs! Frogs! Frogs! Frogs! Frogs! Frogs! Frogs!" And all the others sang, "Frogs! Frogs! Frogs!" as long as he. The Gulls heard it, and the Muskrats heard it, and all were happy because spring had come.

A beautiful young Green Brown Frog, who had never felt grown-up until now, tried to sing with the others, but she had not a strong voice, and was glad enough to stop and visit with the Biggest Frog's Sister. "Don't you wish we could sing as loudly as they can?" said she.

"No," answered the Biggest Frog's Sister. "I would rather sit on the bank and think about my spring work. Work first, you know, and pleasure afterward!"

"Oh!" said the Green Brown Frog. "Then you don't want to sing until your work is done?"

"You may be very sure I don't want to sing then," answered the older Frog. "I am too tired. Besides, after the eggs are laid, there is no reason for wanting to sing."

"Why not?" asked the Green Brown Frog. "I don't see what difference that makes."

"That," said the older Frog wisely, "is because you are young and have never laid eggs. The great time for singing is before the eggs are laid. There is some singing afterward, but

that is only because people expect it of us, and not because we have the same wish to sing." After she had said all this, which was a great deal for a Frog to say at once, she shut her big mouth and slid her eyelids over her eyes.

There was another question which the Green Brown Frog wanted very much to ask, but she had good manners and knew that it was impolite to speak to any Frog whose eyes were not open. So she closed her own eyes and tried to think what the answer would be. When she opened them again, the Biggest Frog's Sister had hopped away, and in her place sat the Yellow Brown Frog, the same handsome young fellow who had found one of his toes in the way. It quite startled her to find him sitting so close to her and she couldn't think of anything to say, so she just looked at him with her great beautiful eyes and toed in a little more with her front feet. That made him look at them and see how pretty they were, although of course this was not the reason why she had moved them.

The Yellow Brown Frog hopped a little nearer and sang as loudly as he could, "Frogs! Frogs! Frogs! Frogs! Frogs! Frogs! Frogs! Frogs!" Then she knew that he was singing just for her, and she was exceedingly happy. She swallowed air very fast because she seemed to be out of breath from thinking what she should answer. She had wanted to ask the Biggest Frog's Sister what she should say if any one sang to her alone. She knew that if she wanted to get away from him, all she had to do was to give a great jump and splash into the water. She didn't want to go away, yet she made believe that she did, for she hopped a little farther from him.

He knew she was only pretending, though, for she hadn't

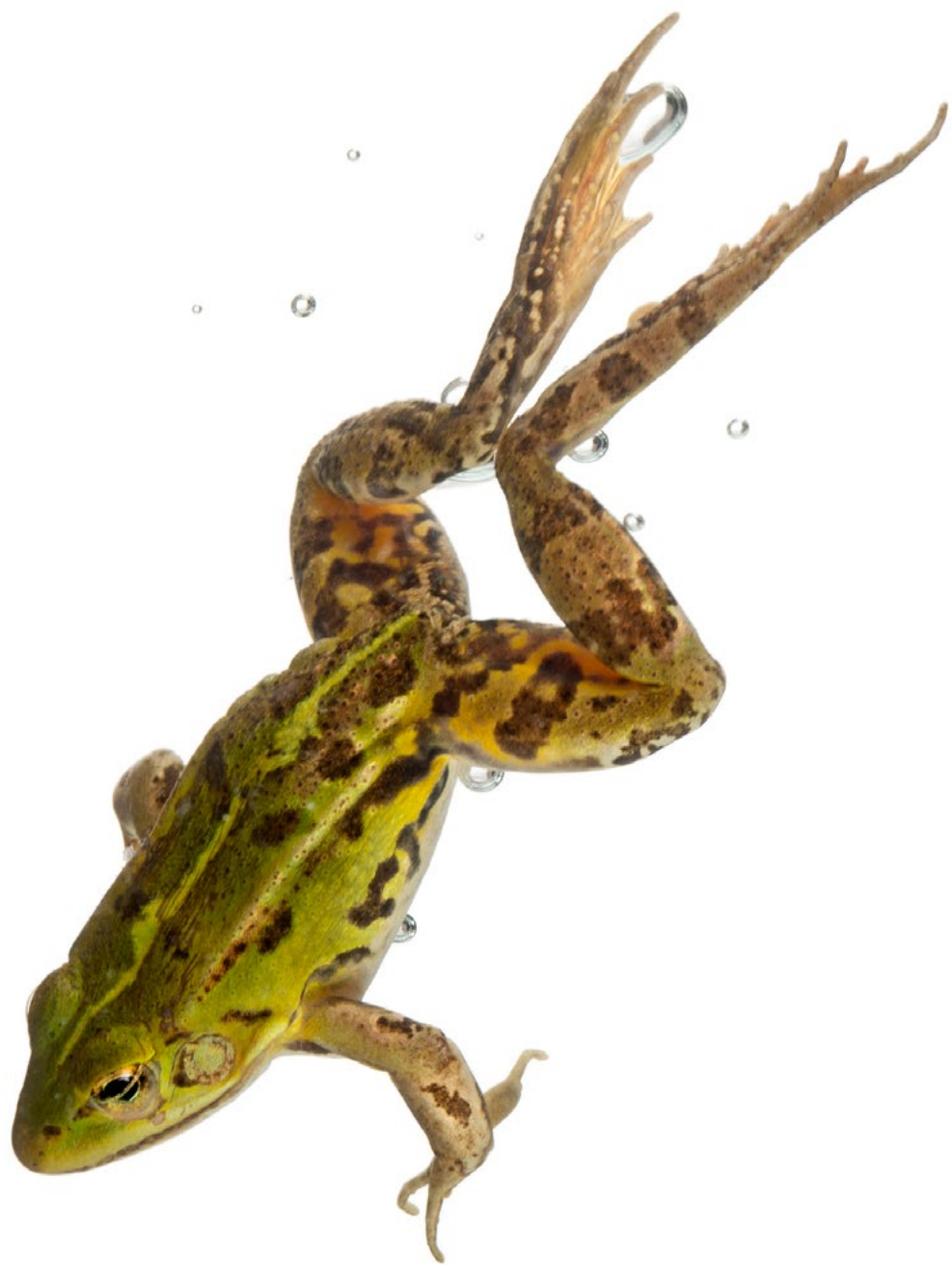
hopped more than the length of a grass-blade. So he followed her and kept on singing. Because she knew that she must say something, she just opened her mouth and sang the first words that she could think of; and what she sang was, "Eggs! Eggs! Eggs! Eggs! Eggs! Eggs! Eggs! Eggs!" As it happened, this was exactly what she should have sung, so he knew that she liked him. They stayed together for a long, long time, and he sang a great deal and very loudly, and she sang a little and very softly.

After a while she remembered that she was now a fully grown Frog and had spring work to do, and she said to him, "I really must lay some eggs. I am going into the water."

"Then I will go too," said he. And they gave two great leaps and came down with two great splashes.

The Green Brown Frog laid eggs for four days, and the Yellow Brown Frog stayed with her all that time and took care of the eggs after she had laid them. They were covered with a sort of green jelly which made them stick to each other as they floated in little heaps on the water. The Frogs thought that a good thing, for then, when the Tadpoles hatched, each would have playmates near.

One day, after the eggs were all laid and were growing finely (for Frogs' eggs grow until the Tadpoles are ready to eat their way out), the Green Brown Frog sat alone on the bank of the pond and the Biggest Frog's Sister came to her. She had a queer smile around the corners of her mouth. Frogs have excellent mouths for smiling, but it takes a very broad smile to go way across, so when they smile a little it is only at the corners. "How are your eggs growing?" she asked.



“Oh,” answered the Green Brown Frog sadly, “I can’t tell which ones they are.”

“That’s just like a young Frog,” said the Biggest Frog’s Sister. “Is there any reason why you should know which ones they are? It isn’t as though you were a bird and had to keep them warm, or as though you were a Mink and had to feed your children. The sun will hatch them and they will feed themselves all they need.”

“I think,” said the Green Brown Frog, “that my eggs were a little better than the rest.”

“Yes,” croaked the Biggest Frog’s Sister, “every Frog thinks that.”

“And I wanted to have my own Tadpoles to look after,” sighed the Green Brown Frog.

“Why?” asked the Biggest Frog’s Sister. “Can’t you take any comfort with a Tadpole unless you laid the egg from which he was hatched? I never know one of my own eggs a day after it is laid. There are such a lot floating around that they are sure to get mixed. But I just make the best of it.”

“How?” asked the Green Brown Frog, looking a little more cheerful.

“Oh, I swim around and look at all the eggs, and whenever I see any Tadpoles moving in them I think, ‘Those may be mine!’ As they are hatched I help any one who needs it. Poor sort of Frog it would be who couldn’t like other people’s Tadpoles!”

“I believe I’ll do that way,” said the Green Brown Frog. “And then,” she added, “what a comfort it will be if any of them are cross or rude, to think, ‘I’m glad I don’t know that they are mine.’”

“Yes,” said the Biggest Frog’s Sister. “I often tell my brother that I pity people who have to bring up their own children. It is much pleasanter to let them grow up as they do and then adopt the best ones. Do you know, I have almost decided that you are my daughter? My brother said this morning that he thought you looked like me.”



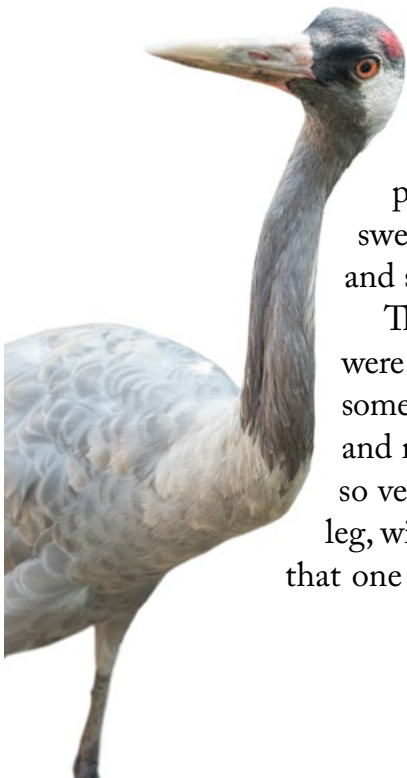


## THE DANCE OF THE SAND-HILL CRANES

ONE fine day in spring, a great flock of Sand-hill Cranes came from the south. They were flying high and quietly because the weather was bright. If it had been stormy, or if they had been flying by night, as they usually did, they would have stayed nearer the ground, and their leader would have trumpeted loudly to let his followers know which way he was going. They would also have trumpeted, but more softly, to tell him that they were coming after.

They were a fine company to look upon, orderly, strong, and dignified. Their long necks were stretched out straight ahead, their long legs straight behind, and they beat the air with slow, regular strokes of the strong wings. As they came near the pond, they flew lower and lower, until all swept down to the earth and alighted, tall and stately, by the edge of the water.

They had eaten nothing for several days, and were soon hunting for food, some on land, and some in the water, for they had stopped to feed and rest. Those who hunted in the water, did so very quietly. A Crane would stand on one leg, with his head against his breast, so quietly that one might think him asleep: but as soon as



anything eatable came near, he would bend his body, stretch out his neck, open his long, slender bill, and swallow it at one gulp. Then he would seem to fall asleep again.

While most of the Cranes were still feeding, some of them were stalking through the woods and looking this way and that, flying up to stand on a tree, and then flying down to stand on the ground. They were those who thought of staying there for the summer.

When the flock arose to fly on again, eight Cranes stayed behind. They watched their friends fly away, and stood on the ground with their necks and bills uplifted and mouths open, while they trumpeted or called out, "Good-bye! Stop for us in the fall!" The flying Cranes trumpeted back, "We will! Don't forget us!"

That night they slept near together, as they had done when with the large flock, and one Crane kept awake to watch for danger while the others tucked their heads under their wings. They were fine looking, even when they slept, and some people never look well unless they are awake. They were brownish-gray, with no bright markings at all, and their long legs gave them a very genteel look. The tops of their heads were covered with warty red skin, from which grew short black feathers that looked more like hairs.

One morning, when the Cranes awakened, a fine young fellow began to strut up and down before the rest, bowing low, and leaping high into the air, and every now and then whooping as loudly as he could. The Gulls, who had spent the winter by the pond, screamed to each other, "The Crane dance has begun!" Even the Frogs, who are afraid of Cranes, crept quietly near to look on.

It was not long before another young Crane began to

skip and hop and circle around, drooping his wings and whooping as he went. Every Crane danced, brothers, and sisters, and all, and as they did so, they looked lovingly at each other, and admired the fine steps and enjoyed the whooping. This went on until they were so tired they could hardly stand, and had to stop to eat and rest.

When they were eating, the young fellow who had begun the dance, stalked up to the sister of one of his friends, as she stood in the edge of the pond, gracefully balanced on one leg. She did not turn her head towards him, although, having such a long and slender neck, she could have done so with very little trouble. She stood with her head on her breast and looked at the water. After a while, he trumpeted softly, as though he were just trying his voice. Then she gave a pretty little start, and said, "Oh, are you here? How you did frighten me!"

"I am sorry," he said. "I did not want to frighten you." And he looked at her admiringly.

"It was just for a minute," she answered. "Of course I am not frightened now that I know who it is."

Then they stood and fished for a long time without saying anything. When she flew away, she said, "That is a very pleasant fishing-place." He stood on the other leg for a while, and thought how sweet her voice sounded as she said it. Then he thought that, if she liked the place so well, she might come there again the next day. He wondered why he could not come too, although everybody knows that a Crane catches more if he fishes alone.

The next morning, when the Cranes danced, he bowed to her oftener than to any of the rest, and he thought she noticed it. They danced until they were almost too tired to

move, and indeed he had to rest for a while before he went to feed. As she stalked off toward the pond, she passed him, and she said over her shoulder, "I should think you would be hungry. I am almost starved." After she had gone, he wondered why she had said that. If he had been an older Crane, and understood the ways of the world a little better, he would have known that she meant, "Aren't you coming to that fishing-place? I am going now." Still, although he was such a young Crane and had never danced until this year, he began to think that she liked him and enjoyed having him near. So he flew off to the fishing-place where he had seen her the day before, and he stalked along to where she was, and stood close to her while she fished. Once, when he caught something and swallowed it at one gulp, she looked admiringly at him and said, "What fine, big mouthfuls you can take!"

That pleased him, of course, because Cranes think that big mouthfuls are the best kind, so he tipped his head to one side, and watched his neck as the mouthful slid down to his stomach. He could see it from the outside, a big bunch slowly moving downward. He often did this while he was eating. He thought it very interesting. He pitied short-necked people. Then he said, "Pooh! I can take bigger mouthfuls than that. You ought to see what big mouthfuls I can take."

She changed, and stood on her other leg. "I saw you dancing this morning," she said. Now it was not at all queer that she should have seen him dancing, for all the eight Cranes had danced together, but he thought it very wonderful.

"Did you notice to whom I bowed?" he asked. He was so



excited that his knees shook, and he had to stand on both legs at once to keep from falling. When a Crane is as much excited as that, it is pretty serious.

“To my sister?” she asked carelessly, as she drew one of her long tail-feathers through her beak.

“No,” said he. “I bowed to her sister.” He thought that was a very clever thing to say. But she suddenly raised her head, and said, “There! I have forgotten something,” and flew off, as she had done the day before. He wondered what it was. Long afterward he asked her what she had forgotten and she said she couldn’t remember—that she never could remember what she had forgotten.

It made him feel very badly to have her leave him so. He wanted a chance to tell her something, yet, whenever he tried to, it seemed to stick in his bill. He began to fear that she didn’t like him; and the next time the Cranes danced he didn’t bow to her so much, but he strutted and leaped and whooped even more. And she strutted and leaped and whooped almost as loudly as he. When they were all tired out and had stopped dancing, she said to him, “I am so tired! Let us go off into the woods and rest.”

You may be very sure he was glad to go, and as he stalked off with her, he led the way to a charming nesting-place. He didn’t know just how to tell what he wanted to, but he had seen another Crane bowing to her, and was afraid she might marry him if he was not quick. Now he pointed with one wing to this nesting-place, and said, “How would you like to build a nest there?”

She looked where he had pointed, “I?” she said. “Why, it is a lovely place, but I could never have a nest alone.”

“Let me help you,” he said. “I want to marry and have a home.”

“Why,” said she, as she preened her feathers, “that is a very good plan. When did you think of it?”

So they were married, and Mrs. Sand-Hill Crane often told her friends afterward that Mr. Crane was so much in love with her that she just *had* to marry him. They were very, very happy, and after a while—but that is another story.





## THE YOUNG MINNOW WHO WOULD NOT EAT WHEN HE SHOULD

“**W**HEN I grow up,” said one young Minnow, “I am going to be a Bullhead, and scare all the little fishes.”

“I’m not,” said his sister. “I’m going to be a Sucker, and lie around in the mud.”

“Lazy! Lazy!” cried the other young Minnows, wiggling their front fins at her.

“What is the matter?” asked a Father Minnow, swimming in among them with a few graceful sweeps of his tail, and stopping himself by spreading his front fins. He had the beautiful scarlet coloring on the under part of his body which Father Minnows wear in the summer-time. That is, most of them do, but some wear purple. “What is the matter?” he asked again, balancing himself with his top fin and his two hind ones.

Then all the little Minnows spoke at once. “He says that when he grows up he is going to be a Bullhead, and frighten



all the small fishes; and she says that she is going to be a Sucker, and lie around in the mud; and we say that Suckers are lazy, and they *are* lazy, aren't they?"

"I am surprised at you," began the Father Minnow severely, "to think that you should talk such nonsense. You ought to know—"

But just then a Mother Minnow swam up to him. "The Snapping Turtle is looking for you," she said. Father Minnow hurried away and she turned to the little ones. "I heard what you were saying," she remarked, with a twinkle in her flat, round eyes. "Which of you is going to be a Wild Duck? Won't somebody be a Frog?" She had had more experience in bringing up children than Father Minnow, and she didn't scold so much. She did make fun of them though, sometimes; and you can do almost anything with a young Minnow if you love him a great deal and make fun of him a little.

"Why-ee!" said the young Minnows. "We wouldn't think of being Wild Ducks, and we couldn't be Frogs, you know. Frogs have legs—four of them. A fish couldn't be a Frog if he wanted to!"

"No," said Mother Minnow. "A fish cannot be anything but a fish, and a Minnow cannot be anything but a Minnow. So if you will try to be just as good Minnows as you can, we will let the little Bullheads and Suckers do their own growing up."

She looked at them all again with her flat, round eyes, which saw so much and were always open, because there was nothing to make them shut. She saw one tiny fellow hiding behind his brother. "Have you torn your fin again?" she asked.

“Yes’m, just a little,” said he. “A boy caught me when he was in wading, and I tore it when I flopped away from him.”

“Dreadful!” said she. “How you do look! If you are so careless, you will soon not have a whole fin to your back—or your front either. Children, you must remember to swim away from boys. When the Cows waded in to drink, you may stay among them, if you wish. They are friendly. We pond people are afraid of boys, although some of them are said not to be dangerous.”

“Pooh!” said one young Minnow. “All the pond people are not so afraid! The Bloodsuckers say they like them.”

The Mother Minnow looked very severe when he said this, but she only replied, “Very well. When you are a Bloodsucker you may stay near boys. As long as you are a Minnow, you must stay away.”

“Now,” she added, “swim along, the whole school of you! I am tired and want a nap in the pondweed.” So they all swam away, and she wriggled her silvery brown body into the soft green weeds and had a good sleep. She was careful to hide herself, for there were some people in the pond whom she did not want to have find her; and, being a fish, she could not hear very distinctly if they came near. Of course her eyes were open even when she was asleep, because she had no eyelids, but they were not working although they were open. That is an uncomfortable thing about being a fish—one cannot hear much. One cannot taste much either, or feel much, yet when one has always been a fish and is used to it, it is not so hard.

She slept a long time, and then the whole school of young Minnows came to look for her. “We are afraid,” they

cried. "We feel so very queerly. We don't know how we feel, either, and that is the worst part of it. It might be in our stomachs, or it might be in our fins, and perhaps there is something wrong with our gill-covers. Wake up and tell us what is the matter."

The Mother Minnow awakened and she felt queerly too, but, being older, she knew what was the matter. "That," she said, "is the storm feeling."

"But," said the young Minnows, "there isn't any storm."

"No," she answered wisely. "Not now."

"And there hasn't been any," they said.

"No," she answered again. "The storm you feel is the storm that is going to be."

"And shall we always feel it so?" they asked.

"Always before a storm," she said.

"Why?" asked the young Minnows.

"Because," said she. "There is no answer to that question, but just 'because.' When the storm comes you cannot smell your food and find it, so you must eat all you can before then. Eat *everything* you can find and be quick." As she spoke she took a great mouthful of pondweed and swallowed it.

All but one of the young Minnows swam quickly away to do as she had told them to. This young Minnow wanted to know just how and why and all about it, so he stayed to ask questions. You know there are some questions which fishes cannot answer, and some which Oxen cannot answer, and some which nobody can answer; and when the Mother Minnow told the young Minnows what she did, she had nothing more to tell. But there are some young Minnows

who never will be satisfied, and who tease, and tease, and tease, and tease.

“Hurry along and eat all you can,” said the Mother Minnow to him again.

“I want to know,” said he, opening his mouth very wide indeed and breathing in a great deal of water as he spoke, “I want to know where I feel queerly.”

“I can’t tell,” said the Mother Minnow, between mouthfuls. “No fish can tell.”

“Well, what makes me feel queerly there?”

“The storm,” said she.

“How does it make me feel queerly?”

“I don’t know,” said the Mother Minnow.

“Who does know?” asked the young Minnow.

“Nobody,” said she, swallowing some more pondweed of one kind and then beginning on another. “Do eat something or you will be very hungry by and by.”

“Well, why does a storm make me feel so?” asked he.

“Because!” said she. She said it very firmly and she was quite right in saying it then, for there was a cause, yet she could not tell what it was. There are only about seven times in one’s life when it is right to answer in this way, and what the other six are you must decide for yourself.

Just then there was a peal of thunder which even a Minnow could hear, and the wind blew until the slender forest trees bent far over. The rain came down in great drops which pattered on the water of the pond and started tiny circles around each drop, every circle spreading wider and wider until it touched other circles and broke. Down in the darkened water the fishes lay together on the bottom, and

wondered how long it would last, and hoped it would not be a great, great while before they could smell their food again.

One little fellow was more impatient than the others. "Didn't you eat enough to last you?" they said.

"I didn't eat anything," he answered.

"Not anything!" they exclaimed. "Why not?"

"Because!" said he. And that was not right, for he did know the reason. His mother looked at him, and he looked at her, and she had a twinkle in her round, flat eyes. "Poor child!" she thought. "He must be hungry." But she said nothing.

