

XI.

THE FISH IN THE BROOK.

A CHILD regards with new delight
Each living thing that meets his sight ;
But when within the limpid stream
He sees the fishes dart and gleam,
Or when, through pure transparent space
The bird's swift flight he tries to trace,
Their freer motion fills his heart
With joy that seems of it a part—
A joy that speaks diviner birth,
While yet he treads the ways of earth.

The child sits upon a table in front of his mother, or, it may be, upon her lap. Her left arm is thrown gently around him. Keeping her two hands parallel, the mother extends them and then alternately stretches and bends her fingers to imitate the movement of swimming. So much for the way of playing this little game.

Birds and fishes, fishes and birds ; why is it that in these the child finds an ever fresh delight ? Is it not because they seem to move with such perfect freedom, the one in the clear water, the other in the pure air ? Unimpeded activity in a pure element—this is the magnet which attracts the child to bird and fish. Yet the child tries to catch fish and bird. Is not this a contradiction ? Nay, mother, to me it seems not so. In the bird



your child is trying to catch its glad flight, in the fish its swimming, skimming, diving, gliding movements. But no catching of bird or fish can avail him. The fish lies motionless on the grass; holding the bird he loses its flight. *Within* must freedom be won, within must purity be conquered. The soul must create the pure element in which it can move freely. Mother, make your child's delight in such free self-movement the point of departure for stirring in him a consciousness of this truth, and you will be helping him to achieve life's perfect peace, life's holiest joy.

“Brother, catch me one of the fishes swimming so merrily in the brook. Look at this little one—now it is here, now it is there. Sometimes it is straight, sometimes it is bent; it is so pretty whatever it does. Oh, if I could only swim and glide and dip! if I could wriggle and slip, how I would tease you, brother, if you tried to catch *me!* Please, brother, catch me a fish.”

“Here is a fish for you, little sister, but hold it tight or it will slip away.”

“But, brother, it doesn't move any more; it only lies stretched out straight. But it is alive, for it gasps. I will lay it on the grass; then it will begin moving again. Oh, it does not move even in the grass; it lies quite straight and still. Why won't it move?”

“Don't you know, little sister, that fish only move in the water? Look again at the fishes in the brook, how merrily they are swimming

about; sometimes they are perfectly straight, and then how crooked!"

Mother, do you realise how essential it is that your child should clearly seize the distinction between the crooked and straight, especially when these words are used not in a literal but in a metaphorical sense? "He is a straightforward man. He follows a straight path. He has an upright character." Who does not rejoice when such words may with truth be said of him? On the other hand, who is not mortified when told he is walking in crooked paths, or that he is engaged in a crooked business?

This opposition between crooked and straight seems to have been in our artist's mind when he was designing the picture of the fish in the brook. Straight and crooked are the little fishes; straight and crooked flows the water; straight and crooked grows the tree and around the straight, slim arum the serpents are coiling. Seek to direct your child's attention to the difference between what is straight and what is crooked. Plant in his heart a love for all that is straightforward in thought, word, and deed, and a hatred for whatever violates this ideal; so shall the mark of rectitude be upon his life and deeds, and, using his developed strength in its right element, he will be active, joyful, and free, like the fish in the clear brook and the bird in the pure air.