

# GLADIATOR FROM SIAM

## Little Fish with a Chip on its Shoulder

A GOLDFISH swam in a little glass bowl in many a New Zealand home only a few years ago. He was part of the front-room décor scheme and generally shared with an aspidistra the occasional table at the window. But, like the aspidistra, he went out of fashion—off the gold standard, so to speak—and the bowl was replaced by something much more scientific: the electrically-heated home-aquarium of tropical fish. So many people here have taken up the hobby that they have their own official journal (dealing with such topics of perennial interest as the price of fish).

The most popular and spectacularly coloured of these exotic pets is *Betta splendens*, the Siamese fighting fish. Ounce for ounce, we were told by an owner and trainer, he is one of the best and toughest battling propositions in the world, though he is only two inches long. He is beautiful; he looks frail, but when he takes umbrage (as he invariably does) at the mere presence in the same tank of another male of his species, he fights till his fins are torn to shreds, his scales ripped off and his gill-covers bleeding.

In Thailand, fish-fighting is as popular as cock-fighting in some other countries—more than that, it is legal. In Bangkok there are a dozen or so registered betting-places where fish fight

and wagers are placed on the outcome. The usual way to start a fish fight is to place two males in opposite glass jars, or in a tank with a plate of glass between them, and let them work up a hate by looking at each other. When their gills ruffle and their body colours deepen and become more vivid, they are placed together in the same jar or tank and the battle begins.

They charge at each other. With sharp teeth they tear at the caudal and vertical fins and the scales on the sides of their bodies. The exciting part comes when they lock jaws and pull each other through the water.

Almost as interesting as the fighting of these queer little bad-tempered fish are their breeding habits. After a violent courtship during which he has bitten, cut and tormented his female, the male suddenly turns to domesticity. He builds a bubble nest on the surface of the water—a sort of marine incubator—and when the eggs are laid both male and female take them in their mouths and place them carefully in the bubble nest. When the eggs have been tucked away for a few hours the male once more attacks the female and drives her away. Then he stands guard over the eggs till they are hatched.

A fine display of exotic fish in a hair-dresser's saloon has done much to create interest in the hobby in Wellington, and one Auckland business concern displays a tank of Angels, Black Mollies, Red Tetras and Australian Rainbow



"ON OUR LEFT THE WINNAH!"—The camera-shutter was not fast enough to "stop" the loser who is retreating at slightly above designed speed, and under a full head of steam

fish. Most of the fish are imported from Australia and there are now large collections in many parts of New Zealand. Recently it was suggested that tanks should be placed in the Auckland Zoo, and some have already been installed at the Wellington Zoo. The display there, says the Curator (C. J. Cutler), may be extended if there is enough public interest and support.

Usually 80 degrees temperature is sufficient to keep "tropicals" healthy in a tank. Oxygen-generating plants, growing under water, supply the fish with enough oxygen and absorb the carbon dioxide which the fish breath out. Snails are used as scavengers. When electric lights are placed strategically above the tanks and the plant life is properly arranged, the display can be very attractive. Its advantage over the garden-pond, of course, is that the fish can be studied in warmth and comfort.

One collector told us that a home aquarium had been the means of bringing at least one badly-shocked American soldier back to health. For weeks he had lain in hospital, taking interest in nothing. Doctors and nurses could not rouse him. One nurse, by way of experiment, put a fish-tank on his locker and soon the patient was sitting up studying the fishes' movements. Not long afterwards he was discharged cured. The same collector mentioned that there had been a similar case in New Zealand where the patient was a boy of 15.

There are so many followers of the tropical fish cult in the United States to-day that some modern architects make provision for tank spaces like a built-in bookcase, in their house designs. We have just bought a fish-tank; now we're looking for someone to build a house round it.

Reference to tropical fish will be made by C. J. Cutler, Curator of the Wellington Zoo, and one of his assistants, in a 2ZB Gazette interview at 9.0 p.m. on Sunday, August 4.

## AN APPEAL FOR HELP

The NURSING STAFF of the TOKANUI MENTAL HOSPITAL appeal to women and girls to assist them in their work of nursing the mentally sick.

We are working under difficult conditions owing to the acute staff shortage, and further assistance is urgently required.

Our Hospital is situated in beautiful surroundings, 6 miles south of Te Awainutu, on a bus route. Some Juniors sleep in separate staff quarters attached to villas, other staff in excellent Nurses' Home, all nurses having separate rooms. Golf links and tennis courts on estate, and social evenings provide recreation when off duty. Three years' training qualifies a nurse for State Final Psychiatric examinations, and State General Preliminary giving time concession for general training. Full lectures by Tutor Sister and Medical Officers. There is rapid promotion for qualified nurses.

Shortage of staff denies the patients the pleasure and benefits of Occupational Therapy, and girls interested in handicrafts will find interesting work in this type of treatment.

Normal shift, 4 days on and 2 off, but owing to staff shortage we work overtime paid at time and a-half rates. This will be abolished as soon as sufficient assistance is available. One month's leave on full pay after every five months worked. Government sick leave benefits. Salary commences at £230 p.a. with annual increments of £15 p.a. to £275 p.a. for Senior Nurse. Higher positions carry higher salaries. A charge of £50 p.a. is made for accommodation, uniforms and laundry.

The patients can't be denied treatment, and we urgently require more staff to carry on the great work of the Hospital.

Won't YOU help us! Write NOW to NURSE BETTY CLARKE for further particulars.—P.B.A.

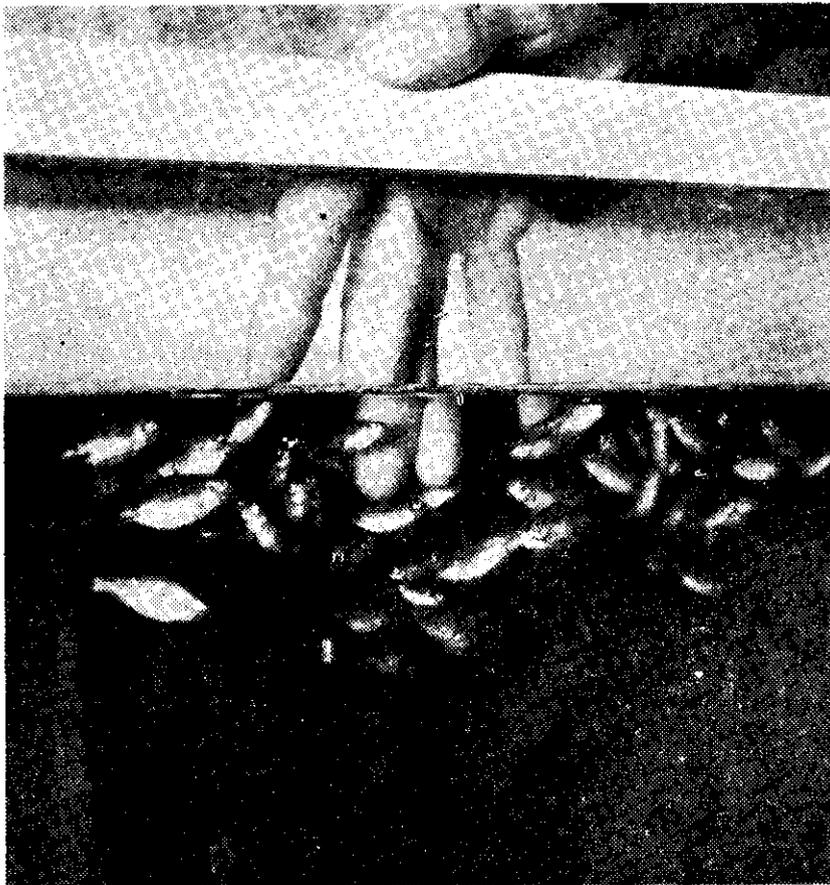
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"TROPICALS" crowd fearlessly around the aquarist's fingers—a photograph taken in a Wellington private aquarium