

To Young Listeners:

Mr. Punch's Moral!

*The oyster does not catch the eye
By beauty of appearance;
It does not dart about; instead
Stays snugly in its oyster bed
And works by perseverance.
Domestic virtue it may be
But there's a MORAL, too,
Remember, little boys and girls,
The oyster manufactures pearls,
Which shows what GRIT can do.
—From "Punch"*

AS one oyster lays about sixty million eggs in one season, it is just as well that oyster eggs are the favourite food of several kinds of small fish. If all these millions of eggs were allowed to grow, by the fifth generation there would be enough oysters to cover the earth eight times over.

Said young oyster, "My family should be
At least sixty million and three,
But my brothers delishus
Were ate up by the fishus,
And all that's left of them's me!"

CRABS are in rock pools, and on the sands. Some are so tiny that you can almost see through them—and some are so big and so strong that you would think twice about putting your toe near their claws. They are well protected from their enemies with their claws and a strong coat of armour and an eye which they can either stick out like a periscope or tuck away safely in its hollow. They can travel very fast and bewilderingly, too, on their eight legs—forwards or backwards or sideways, just as they please. They grow up in an extraordinary way. When their shell gets too small for them, as must happen from time to time, they crawl into a safe crevice and slip it off, and then they grow to twice their size while a new shell forms over them. What a lot of trouble it would save us if *our* clothes grew in that way, but perhaps after all we would feel rather tender and cold while we waited.



THE young seagull was alone on his ledge. His two brothers and his sister had already flown away the day before. He had been afraid to fly with them. Somehow when he had taken a little run forward to the brink of the ledge and attempted to flap his wings he became afraid.

The great expanse of sea stretched down beneath, and it was such a long way down—miles down. He felt certain that his wings would never support him, so he bent his head and ran away back to the little hole under the ledge where he slept at night.

His father and mother had come around calling to him shrilly, upbraiding him, threatening to let him starve on his ledge unless he flew away, but for the life of him he could not move.

The sun was now ascending the sky, blazing warmly on his ledge that faced the south. He felt the heat because he had not eaten since the previous nightfall.

He had then trotted back and forth from one end of the cliff, his long grey legs stepping daintily, trying to find some means of reaching his parents without having to fly. But on each side of him the ledge ended in a sheer fall of precipice, with the sea beneath. And between him and his parents there was a deep, wide chasm.

He was soaring gradually downwards, and outwards. He was no longer afraid. He just felt a bit dizzy. Then he flapped his wings once and he soared upwards. He uttered a joyous scream and flapped them again. He soared higher. He raised his breast and barked against the wind. "Ga, ga, ga. Ga, ga, ga. Gaw-cool-ah."

His mother swooped past him, her wings making a loud noise. He answered her with another scream. Then his father flew over him screaming. Then he saw his two brothers and his sister flying around him, curveting and banking and soaring and diving.

Then he completely forgot that he had not always been able to fly, and commenced himself to dive and soar and curvet, shrieking shrilly.

He was near the sea now, flying straight over it, facing straight out over the ocean. He saw the vast green sea beneath him, with little ridges moving over it, and he turned his beak sideways and crowed amusedly. His parents and his brothers and sister had landed on this green floor in front of him.

They were beckoning to him, calling shrilly. He dropped his legs to stand on the green sea. His legs sank into it. He screamed with fright and attempted to rise again, flapping his wings. But he was tired and weak with hunger and he could not rise, exhausted by the strange exercise. His feet sank into the green sea, and then his belly touched it and he sank no farther. He was floating on it. And around him his family was screaming, praising him, and their beaks were offering him scraps of dog-fish.

He had made his first flight.
(From "SPRING SOWING," by Liam O'Flaherty).

