



## THE MOUSE.

“WHAT next? Pray, Sir, have you not this time made a slight mistake and substituted a *pest* for a *pet*; or are we to have in due course instructions how to make the black-beetle happy, how the domestic spider may be fattened and fondled, and the cockroach rendered comfortable?”

My mind's ear is conscious of these and many other sarcastic queries from indignant lady-housekeepers, accompanied by a chorus of ten thousand little screams from ten thousand other ladies, old and young, who, though unafflicted by larder cares, are thrown into as complete a state of panic at the mere whisper of *mouse!* as men display at the dread mention of “mad dog.” Nevertheless are we no way daunted, for replying to the taunts, and the sarcasm, and the little screams, there comes a burst of admiration for the bright-eyed, nimble little mouse, in all its varieties of brown, and mottled, and tawny, and white,—a very Babel of pleadings for it as an amusing and instructive creature, and imploring that it may not be banished from the circle of Home Pets. True the voices raised in favour of the mouse are, as a rule, little voices, whose owners, having no care as to the purchase of the next cheese or box of candles, care nothing as to how the

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last was consumed, and are seldom affected beyond risibility when cook exhibits to indignant mamma the mutilated stilton, or the loaf tunnelled as neatly as though the tiny operators had studied under Sir Isambard Brunel. Never mind. The careless rogue (the boys, not the mice) will know better some day. Meantime they retain the mouse cage and triumph. Neither are they without a tolerably sound argument in favour of mouse-keeping. "What satisfaction is it," say they, "to catch a mouse and kill him? That you inflict no punishment on him is certain, as the instant a mouse is a dead mouse there is, as far as he is concerned, no more a blank in mouse-dom than though he had never lived at all. It must be a more sensible thing to get what you can out of them as some return for what they filch. What can they be made to render? Nothing but amusement. Very well; a very good thing too: and let us exact of them as much of that commodity as possible."

There is really no telling the extent of the amusement and instruction that may be gathered from close observation of the habits and peculiarities of the common little brown mouse. They have been known to emit musical sounds. I myself can bear witness to this, having heard distinctly, and for as long a time as seemed a minute, a low and continuous strain of mouse music. It was in the middle of the night, and in my bed-room. I was lying awake, when, preceded by a scratching of little paws on the fender, the soft music began. My wife heard it as well as myself. Once we whispered concerning it, but it was not disturbed, but at a second whisper there was an unmusical squeak and a scamper, and the music was at an end.

I find in an edition of the Rev. J. G. Wood's "Natural History" a letter from a clergyman friend of his—the Rev. R. L. Bampfield, of Little Barfield, Essex—giving an account of a singing mouse, or of singing mice, and which in one particular coincides with my experience.

"In a former residence of mine," says he, "some mice took up their abode behind the wainscot in the kitchen. From motives which few housekeepers would appreciate we allowed them to remain undisturbed: and most merry, cheerful little creatures they were. It seemed to us that a young brood was being carefully educated, but they did not learn all their accomplishments from their parents. In the kitchen hung a good singing canary, and by degrees the chirp of the mice changed into an exact imitation of the canary's song; at least, it was so with

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one, for though several attempted it, one considerably excelled the rest. I am not sure that admiration of the music influenced them, for, from the funny facetious way in which it was done, I should rather say it was out of mockery, or at least from a love of imitation. Yet the result was very pleasing; far inferior to the canary's note in volume, strength, and sweetness, it was perhaps superior to it in softness and delicacy. Often have I listened to it with pleasure in the evening when the canary was asleep, with its head beneath its wing; and more than once have I observed a kitchen guest glance at the canary, then look round in some astonishment and say, 'Is that a bird, sir, singing?' One trustworthy person assured me that he too had in his house a singing mouse. I have therefore little doubt that if a young family of mice were brought up from the first close to a canary, or some other songster, some of them would learn to sing."

In the case above quoted the mouse's tutor was a canary: as regards the case mentioned by myself there had been for several months before the occurrence of the harmony in the fender, two able-bodied goldfinches in a room below, in full song. I may as well mention that we set a trap for our musical mouse, and that we made a capture; whether it was the right mouse and that the consciousness of being a prisoner put its tiny pipes out, or whether it was just an ordinary mouse, we had no means of ascertaining, as in spite of the most luxurious feeding it never emitted anything more musical than a squeak. The only fact in favour of the supposition that it was the musician we had caught is, that we heard it no more.

Is it possible, then, to teach a mouse to sing, or at least to utter notes, which, though inferior to those of the canary in volume, are superior to them in softness and delicacy? It would at least be worth the trouble of testing. A mouse about to litter might be kept constantly in the same chamber with a song bird, with little or no extra trouble; even if it cost a little pains, surely so great a marvel as a singing quadruped would amply repay it.

Before anything more, however, is said of the mouse's abilities, and the best mode of cultivating and realizing them, a short chat about mice generally, with their various habits and peculiarities, may not be out of place.

## THE DORMOUSE.

This little animal is placed by Mr. Bell and some other