

Sponge Figures.

BY ALBERT H. BROADWELL.



HE companion of our early morning tub has at last asserted himself. He has made a new place for himself in this already overcrowded world. He is no more a thing to be squeezed and put aside until we should want him again. No, he has become a centre of attraction.

Is not cleanliness only second to godli-



FATHER NEPTUNE.
From a Photo. by H. Woolton, Preston.

ness? In our first illustration we find the two combined, and that in no mean manner. It is old Father Neptune, the king of the sponge world. There is a becoming seriousness about this particular Neptune. The beard, moustache, and eyebrows are masterpieces of sponge sculpture. They are, indeed, true to Nature, and, though we cannot assert for certain that the portrait is an excellent likeness, we venture to think that the presentment is one that harmonizes to a great extent with the popular conception of what Neptune should be like. It is particularly fitting that his bust should have been modelled in sponge, for were it not for Father Neptune, where, indeed, would our sponges come from?

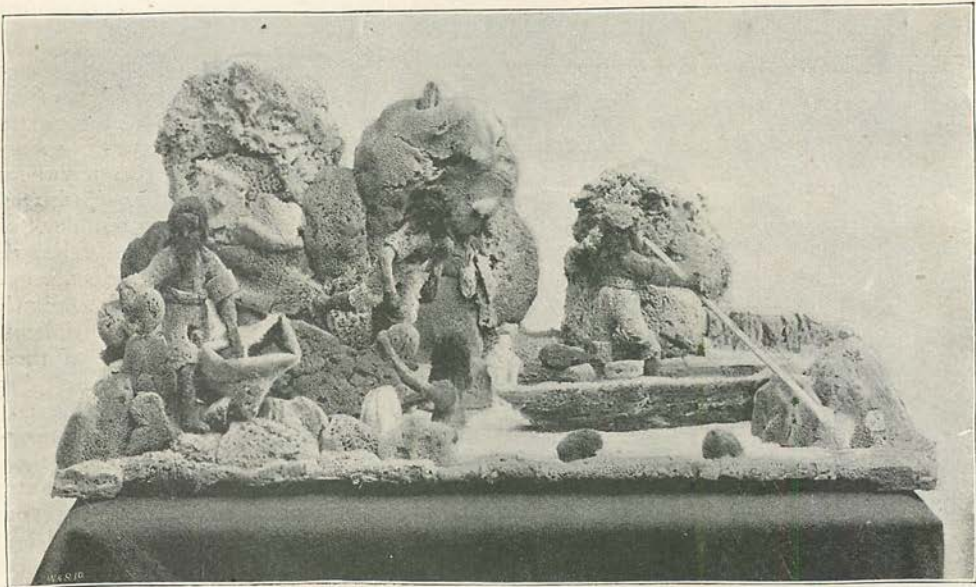
The birth of the "new sponge" took place at No. 1, Red Lion Square, on the extensive
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premises of Messrs. Creswell Brothers and Schmitz, the largest sponge importers in this country and the possessors of the most extraordinary collection of figures carved in sponge that has ever been put together anywhere. Fishing scenes, divers, Father Christmas, monkeys, John Bulls, and innumerable other figures, all made of sponge, are there to be seen scattered everywhere in picturesque confusion.

"The man in the street," Mr. Creswell will inform a visitor, "would find it difficult, perhaps, to believe that every one of these figures has cost us something over £15 sterling each, and that is putting the cost at the very lowest figure. As a matter of fact, we would not undertake to make them for outsiders at that price. Look at this diver, for instance. He is the gem of our collection. He is perfect in every detail, and we have made him our Trade Mark. Do you not think he deserves it?"



THE DIVER.
From a Photo. by W. G. Parker & Co., 288, High Holborn.



From a Photo. by]

A FISHING SCENE.

[Tear, 12, Clapham Road, S.W.]

I examined the diver carefully, and the more I went into details the greater became my admiration. Save the helmet, breastplate, and boots, everything in that diver is made of sponges, even to the air-tube and the coil of rope in his left hand.

Now, look at these pretty fishing scenes. They are exquisite in their detail. Every man wears an expression of his own. In the

picture above we see on the right a boat in charge of a fisherman. He brings in the sponges, which have only recently been rescued from the deep. Near this boat another man standing waist-deep in water hands a sponge to a fellow worker on the rocks behind. Then on the extreme left we have another hardworking individual filling a sack with the sponges that have been



From a Photo. by]

ON A CORAL REEF.

[W. G. Parker & Co., 288, High Holborn, W.C.]

collected by the others. A pretty scene it is, and it seems a pity that the camera should not give as complete a picture as the actual scene produces upon the eye.

In our second sponge scene, shown at the bottom of the preceding page, we get another view of the sponge fishers. They are at work on a coral reef, and right busy they look.

"Yes, they have created a tremendous interest in sponges," added Mr. Cresswell. "As a matter of fact we cannot produce enough of these figures to answer the numerous applications of our agents throughout the kingdom. Here is a mass of correspondence that has reached us from all parts of the kingdom with regard to the impetus given to the sponge trade by means of these figures."

It is pleasant to note that after all we can hold our own in this little island of ours, and that everything fresh in the way of trade enterprise need not be made in Germany. Indeed, Messrs. Cresswell have set an example that would, we imagine, be of more than passing usefulness to other firms who would hold their own in our multifarious industries.

In our next specimen we can readily sympathize with baby—"He won't be happy



SIGNIOR CAPRICIOSO SPONGINI.

From a Photo. by W. G. Parker & Co., High Holborn, W.C.



"HE WON'T BE HAPPY WHEN HE GETS IT."

From a Photo. by W. G. Parker & Co., 288, High Holborn, W.C.

when he gets it." It brings us back to our early days when we thought that sponges were an absolute mistake. Baby dreads it, but the dear old lady makes sure that the sponge is soft. Do you see her trying it on her own hand? It is a pretty picture, in which everything again is made of sponges. Look at the bath and the stool. Sponges everywhere—around, on top and underneath, before and behind. Yet it is an artistic piece of work, and when we first saw it in a shop-window we had to squeeze our way through a crowd of gazers, whilst lusty Robert very ineffectually shouted "Now, move on, please, move on."

And so, whilst we leave baby to its own sweet music, we come to a tune of another kind. We have here a representation of Signior Capricioso Spongini, smiling for coppers. The monkey is happy. There are nuts to crack even in sponges, and we see it



THE MASHER, CLOWN, AND DOG.
From a Photo. by Samuel J. Porter, Torquay.

done very effectually. The grin on Signior Capricioso Spongini is natural, for were not

shown in this article, with the exception of the fishing scenes, which are broad in proportion.

It is, of course, difficult to give an adequate reproduction of these figures owing to the loss of colouring, many parts in the diver and other figures being done in dyed sponges. There are red and pink sponges, black sponges, golden, green, and natural yellow sponges, all so skilfully arranged as to represent the correct raiment which the figure is intended to represent.

To come back to our sponges. We must now carefully examine the masher, clown, and dog. They form a unique group. The clown is making a pun: hence the grave face of the masher. It was ever thus. Puns are out of date, and we are glad to notice that the masher absorbs the pun with due gravity. Even the poodle turns up his nose and sniffs doubtfully at the antiquated hair-splitter which no doubt forms the subject of conversation.

Following upon the clown, it is only right that we should be stopped by a couple of



SALLY AND HER PARTNER.
From a Photo. by W. G. Parker & Co., 288, High Holborn, W.C.

the Italians an ever-smiling race? The height of Signior Spongini is 4ft. 4in., and that is about the average of all the figures

monkeys. We have dear old lamented Sally of the Zoo and her partner—name unknown. She is knitting a pair of stockings for the little

monkeys that never came; it is pathetic, but *he* does not think so. Just look at his face. It is a picture of happiness, towards which the pewter pot and the pipe no doubt contribute a great deal. We first saw this attractive couple in the window of the Auxiliary Stores at Clapham, and sponges went like hot cakes. We saw a little girl and a boy busy with penknives, trying to imitate this funny model, and their remarks were, to say the least, original. She would do Sally, he would do the partner. They neither of them succeeded, but the genuine humour of it was refreshing to those around. It is a pity that a camera was not at hand, for the childish expression of this group would have made an immensely funny picture. Look at the faces of these monkeys, and if you do not laugh we are sorry for you.

It may here be mentioned that the heads of many of these sponge figures are balanced in such a way that upon the slightest touch they will swing backwards and forwards, thereby imparting an extremely comical appearance to the subjects under treatment. The organ-grinder nods to his monkey, and the parrot nods to the organ-grinder. The masher nods at the clown, and the dog nods too. They are a jovial family these sponge creatures; but it is appalling to think what would happen if a shower or a deluge overtook them in their peregrinations.



FATHER CHRISTMAS.
From a Photo. by W. G. Parker & Co.,
288, High Holborn, W.C.

Now it is only a few weeks till Christmastide, and if we do anticipate a little we may be excused. We cannot let Father Christmas pass unheeded. He is all fun, though how he manages to balance himself on so slender a footing is, and probably will remain, a mystery. There is something winning about his features, however, which goes a long way towards an apology for his seemingly unstable position. We are inclined to think, however, that it is only the pose of a moment. Overcome with delight at the gladness he will bring to the hearts of our little bairns, he smiles to himself and feels happy all over.

And now let us be serious. We have come upon the last and grandest figure of all. It is the *bonne bouche*. Doff your hats, for it is John Bull!

Master of the sea, and consequently sovereign of spongeland, John Bull is foremost again. Do not let him off easily. Consider his proportions with due care and seriousness, and ask yourself whether he is not worthy of his name. There are no Russian sponges about him, nor are there Chinese sponges in his constitution. There are a few Turkish and Greek sponges, but he won't be squeezed "for a' that," and the hat which he doffs to no one is a piece of genuine sponge from the deep blue sea which he has ruled and, let us hope, will rule for all time.



JOHN BULL.
From a Photo. by W. G. Parker & Co.,
288, High Holborn, W.C.