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THE FIRESIDE SPHINX





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BY

AGNES REPPLIER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY E. BONSALE



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IN MEMORY OF
AGRIPPINA

*“ Les amoureux fervents et les savants austères
Aiment également, dans leur mûre saison,
Les chats puissants et doux, orgueil de la maison,
Qui comme eux sont frileux, et comme eux, sédentaires.”*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.



FOREWORD

THERE is a sweet and sunny corner of the Elysian fields, where drowse and play, and drowse and play forever, a little band of cats, whose names, imperishable as their masters', are household words to-day. We know them well, these gentle furry ghosts, lifted to immortality by the human hands that fondled them in life. We know the white Muezza whom Mohammed loved, and Bouhaki of Thebes, proudest of his proud race, and Dick Whittington's thrice famous cat that made his master's fortune. We know this sleek and shining tortoise-shell, for she is Selima, fair and ill-fated, whom the glint of gold-fish tempted to her grave. This pensive pussy with clear topaz eyes shared Petrarch's heart with Laura; this splendid beast, red as a fox and stately as a lion, is Chateaubriand's Micetto, the sovereign Pontiff's gift; and his no less arrogant companion sat, it is whispered, by the side of Wolsey, when the butcher's son was Chancellor of England.

Montaigne's grey cat is here, indolently supercilious as in old earthly days; and Victor Hugo's

Chanoine, the sleepest puss in Paradise; and Baudelaire's mysterious pet, with pale fire gleaming 'neath his half-shut lids; and Moumoutte Blanche and Moumoutte Chinoise, rivals for M. Loti's fluctuating affections, and the superb dynasties, both white and black, that ruled for years over M. Gautier's heart and home. Here, too, is "great Atossa," sung into fame by Mr. Arnold; and that sedate and serious tabby who slept too long in Cowper's bureau drawer. And—honoured of all their race—here are two happy and distinguished cats whom we cannot remember without envy, nor name without respect,—Dr. Johnson's Hodge, and Hinse of Hinsefeld, the wise companion of Sir Walter Scott.

Into this august assembly, into this sacred circle, I fain in moments of temerity would introduce a little shade who stole too soon from the warm sun, and from the simple joys of life. She was dearly loved and early lost, and the scanty honours years of toil have brought me I lay at her soft feet for entrance fee. May Hodge and Hinse champion her cause with the Immortals for the sake of the unfaltering love I have ever borne their masters, and may her grace and beauty win for her what my poor pen is powerless to attain! Dear little ghost, whose memory has never faded from my heart, accept this book, dedicated to thee, and to all thy

cherished race. Sleep sweetly in the fields of asphodel, and waken, as of old, to stretch thy languid length, and purr thy soft contentment to the skies. I only beg, as one before me begged of her dead darling, that, midst the joys of Elysium, I may not be wholly forgotten.

“Nor, though Persephone’s own Puss you be,
Let Orcus breed oblivion of me.”

A. R.



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THE FIRESIDE SPHINX



“Thine is the lore of Ra and Rameses.”

THERE was — if we may trust the Arabic chronicles as set down by that devout scholar, Damirei — no cat in the Garden of Paradise. Lion cubs and tiger cubs, little leopards and little panthers, Eve had in numbers without doubt ; but no pussy to grace and decorate her domestic hearth. How far this loss was responsible for the lamentable ennui which, Charles Lamb says, forced our first parents to sin themselves out of Eden, it would be difficult to determine ; but in that desolate world of toil which lay beyond the gleaming gates and sacred rivers of Paradise, no cat was found to comfort the sad exiles on their way. She sprang into existence at the Deluge ; for during the long weeks in which the Ark floated over the waste of waters, the rats and the mice increased

so alarmingly that the comfort — if there was any comfort — of the inmates was threatened with destruction. Then Noah, equal to the emergency, passed his hand three times over the head of the lioness, and lo! she sneezed forth the cat.

In connection with this venerable legend, it is interesting to note the behaviour of Puss in the old Italian pictures which represent the departure from the Ark, a subject which Bassano has painted over and over again. Invariably we see, walking at the head of the procession, with a most self-satisfied and arrogant air, as if she owned the newly recovered earth, a large brindled cat. The lion and the elephant, the camel and the horse, all the most terrible and the most useful beasts linger with modest diffidence in the background; the cat presents herself superbly to everybody's notice, and, as a rule, begins her career of depredation by assailing one of her late companions, — a fat frightened rabbit, or a trembling dove. No one would imagine that she owed *her* existence to the incidental discomforts of the Ark.

However mysterious and informal may have been her birth, Pussy's first appearance in voracious history is a splendid one. More than three thousand years ago she dwelt serenely by the Nile, and the great nation of antiquity paid her respectful homage. Sleek and beautiful, she drowsed in the

shadow of mighty temples, or sat blinking and washing her face with contemptuous disregard alike of priest and people. There is no mention of her in Holy Writ ; but when Moses led the Children of Israel into the desert, she watched him go,

“ With sombre sea-green gaze inscrutable.”

Deserts, indeed, offered scant allurements to her. No wandering people have ever enjoyed her sweet companionship. The Arabs loved and valued her ; but could do no more than carry her across the trackless sands for the enrichment of softer homes than their black tents could offer.

“ And the bubbling camels beside the load
Sprawled for a furlong adown the road ;
And the Persian pussy-cats, brought for sale,
Spat at the dogs from the camel-bale.”

Poor faithful dogs, lovers of novelty and change of scene, who dwell contentedly in tents, or huts, or 'neath the open sky, and roam far and wide with the masters whom they serve. The cat cares little to see the world, and dislikes the discomforts of travel. Some gracious instinct binds her to her home. She feels the charm of the familiar, and her fidelity to the sheltering hearth has made her — now that her old honours have passed away — the little god of domesticity, the friend of those who are too happy or too wise for restlessness.

Egypt, as the granary of the ancient world, had especial need for Pussy's services, and the Egyptian cat was a mighty hunter, not only of rats and mice, — ancestral prey, — but of wild fowl caught in reedy marshes, and in shallow waters where she could swim with ease. Her sacred character was in no wise impaired by her usefulness. She was the favourite of Pasht, who, in smiling mood, had given her to the world ; and the deep veneration in which she was held provoked biting jests from travellers, who then, as now, lacked sympathy for strange customs and strange gods. Herodotus was plainly of the opinion that the devotion manifested for these cherished beasts produced some uncomfortable results. In the first place, there were too many cats. The maintenance of those who lived apart in temples, and who were fed with fish, and bread soaked in milk, was a heavy burden upon the state ; and the officials, whose privilege it was to take care of them, seem to have been naturally, but unendurably, proud. Then again, the enforced mourning, the shaving of eyebrows, and all the "mockery of woe" which followed the death of even the smallest kitten, lent a funereal aspect to many homes. Last, but not least, the law which forbade the sinful slaying of a cat occasionally brought vengeance upon the head of the unfortunate who unwittingly killed one. For such an evil

accident, says Diodorus of Sicily, a Roman citizen was torn to pieces by the infuriated populace of Thebes. So imminent, indeed, was this peril, that an Egyptian who chanced to witness Pussy's death, — happily no common occurrence, as a cat, like an Englishman, considers dying a strictly private affair, — stood trembling and bathed in tears, plaintively announcing to the world that he at least had no part in such a pitiful calamity. Yet even a tender and far-reaching solicitude could not always save the Egyptian cat from harm. Fires were of frequent occurrence, and the creature's terror occasionally prevented its rescue, and drove it straight into the flames. "When this happens, it diffuses universal sorrow," says Herodotus, with that graceful sympathy which is so pleasing, because so rare, in the historian.

Writers of a later date were far less tolerant of feline dignities. Timocles observes cynically that when irreverence to the great gods so often escapes unpunished, he can hardly fear to violate the shrine of a cat. Anaxandrides of Rhodes presents with fine brutality the Greek point of view, in his comedy, "The Cities." "If you see a cat indisposed," sneers one of the characters to an Egyptian, "you weep for it. For my part, I am well pleased to kill it for its skin."

The exact era of Pussy's domestication in Egypt

is lost in the dawn of history. It was so very long ago that our minds grow dizzy, contemplating the vast stretch of centuries. A tablet in the Berlin Museum, which has on it a representation of a cat, dates from 1600 B. C. : and another, two hundred years older, bears an inscription containing the word *Maū*, or cat. The temples of Bubastis, of Beni Hasan, and of Heliopolus were the most sacred haunts of this most sacred animal. There, petted, pampered, wrapped in silken ease, and, above all, treated with that delicate reverence she is so quick to understand and appreciate, she lived her allotted lives ; and there, when all nine were well spent, her little corpse was lovingly embalmed, and buried in a gilded mummy case with dignified and appropriate ceremonial. Her

“splendid circled eyes
That wax and wane with love for hours,
Green as green flame, blue-grey like skies,”

were believed to be emblematic of the waxing and the waning of the sun, and added to the mysterious sanctity of her reputation.

Plutarch held that she also represented the moon, because of her nocturnal habits, and of her singular fecundity. “For it is said that she brings forth at first one kitten, afterwards two, and the third time, three ; and that the number increaseth thus until the seventh and last birth, so that she

bears in all twenty-eight young, or as many as the moon hath revolutions. And though this may be but a fable, yet it is certain that her eyes do enlarge and grow brilliant with the filling of the moon, and do contract and lose their light with its decline."

What a pleasure it must have been to study natural history in the ancient days, when the general absence of information left the historian liberty and leisure to tell really interesting things.

The temple of Bubastis, says Herodotus, was the fairest in all Egypt, and the festival held in honour of the goddess was the gayest of the year, thousands of pilgrims speeding along the pleasant water-ways to enjoy themselves piously at her shrine. Often they carried with them the mummies of dear dead cats, to be interred in the neighbourhood of the temple; and often they bore, as offerings to the shrine, animals of great size and beauty, or with especial markings that denoted sanctity, and insured their admittance into the circle of the elect. To these pilgrimages, and to the sacredness of the temple cats, may be traced — so says Ignace Goldziher in his "*Culte des Saints chez les Musulmans*" — a curious custom which survived until recent years among Egyptian Moslems. When the caravans bound for Mecca were preparing to start from Cairo, and the city was celebrating their departure with the feasts of Mahmal, one camel was set apart

for the sole use of an old woman who bore the honourable title, Mother of Cats, and whose duty it was to carry to the Holy City a number of Persian pussies. Her position was no sinecure, for all the distinction it conferred, the cat's rooted aversion to travel rendering it a troublesome charge; and the venerable "Mother" finally gave place to a young and active man, better able to cope with his sackful of turbulent prisoners. What strange survival of an ancient practice induced pious Moslems to send to the Prophet's shrine the animals that their far-away ancestors had carried devoutly to the temple of Bubastis? No one knows. The links between old and new have long ago been broken; and, as so often happens, the custom lingered on for countless years after its significance had been lost to men's unreasoning minds.

The great burying-grounds of favoured Egyptian cats were the thrice blessed fields of Speos Artemidos near the tombs of Beni Hasan, where thousands of little mummies reposed for centuries. It was reserved for our rude age to disturb their slumber, to desecrate their graves, to fling their ashes to the four winds of heaven, or, with base utilitarianism, to sell the poor little swathed and withered bodies — once so beautiful and gently tended — for any trifling sum they would bring from ribald tourists who infest the land. Many were even used as fer-

tilizers of the ancient soil, — a more honourable fate, and one which consigned them gently to oblivion. The incredible number of such mummies found at Beni Hasan and other sacred cemeteries proves that Egypt, “in the hour of her pride,” was the abode of countless pussy-cats, and explains the sarcasm of that travelled Greek, who observed that, on the banks of the Nile, it was more common to meet gods than men.

Once outside of Egypt, where, thanks to inscriptions, embalming, and an admirable pictorial art, we know with exactness what we know at all, the history of the cat is shrouded in mystery and gloom. There is no proof that she was domesticated in Babylon or Assyria; and what scanty information we can gather as the centuries roll on is of a dishearteningly fabulous character. There is a story which used to be found in the school-books of our youth, but which has probably been eliminated in these duller days, of the infamous scheme devised by Cambyses — and worthy of him — for the capture of Pelusium. Each Persian soldier was bidden to carry in his arms a cat, so that he was safe from the weapons of the Egyptians, who feared to wound the sacred animal he bore. The tale, it must be admitted, does not sound veracious. To march to battle carrying a cat — a cat that must have been eminently unwilling to go — would have required

more courage than to face an enemy. Moreover, the Persians could hardly have done their own share of fighting very effectively while they were clasping legions of pussies to their bosoms. Perhaps the ruthless disregard evinced by Cambyses for all his fellow-men held dear and sacred may have given rise to this once popular tradition.

There are others less well known, but much prettier, as that of the Persian monarch, Hormus, who, finding his kingdom invaded by a mighty army under Prince Schabé, his own unworthy relative, was warned by a soothsayer that he could never conquer this enemy until his troops were led to battle by a general having the face of a wild cat, — “*qui eut la physionomie d'un chat sauvage,*” says Moncrif, who tells the story with delight. After searching far and wide, Hormus at last discovered this treasure in the person of a rude mountaineer named Baharan, or, as some say, Kounin, to whom he joyfully gave the command of all his forces. The result justified the prediction. The Persians, though few and ill-trained, were yet so animated by the assurance of victory, so exultant when they beheld the fear-inspiring countenance of their leader, that they easily routed the foe, and carried Schabé's head back to their royal master.

In India the house cat was known from a very early period, and was called by several composite

names signifying rat-eater and mouse-enemy, to denote the useful character of her occupations. She figures also in some of the oldest Indian fables, always as an arrant hypocrite, fair-spoken and full of guile. Her first entrance into the Chinese Empire appears to have been about 400 A. D., and she is described in ancient documents as a hunter of mice and slayer of hens, unmistakable characteristics, both of them. There is also a venerable proverb which says, with true Chinese sententiousness, that a lame cat is better than a swift horse when rats infest the palace. The rampant creature that rears itself aggressively on the royal banners of Korea is some fierce wild cousin of the cat; just as the animal held sacred for centuries along the Pacific coast of South America, and which we see over and over again in the terra cottas of lost Peruvian cities, was forest born and bred, — ocelot perhaps, or jaguar, — not the sweet domestic deity of the Nile.

The saddest gap in the chronicles of the cat is her conspicuous absence from “the glory that was Greece,” from “the grandeur that was Rome,” — an absence which extended over many hundreds of years. No Greek monument shows her sitting at her master’s feet, as the Egyptian Bouhaki sat for centuries at the feet of King Hana, in the Necropolis of Thebes. Homer, who tells us the touching story of the hound, Argus, has never a word for

the cat; though we would give much to see her watching with wise eyes Penelope's unfinished web, or playing with the soft tangled wools in Helen's silver work-basket. And what fitter companion for Nausicaa than a white cat, beautiful, spotless and urbane? M. Henri Havard argues subtly that the very essence of Greek civilization, as it slowly flowered to perfection, was fatal to the domestication of the cat. "What place could she fill," he asks, "amid this restless glory? What hold could she hope to gain over a people enamoured of art, of language, of eloquence; over men who were at once actors, athletes and poets; and who — alternating perpetually between physical and mental activity — had elevated beauty of form to the height of a great moral principle. This race so admirably endowed, with ambitions ever unsatisfied, modelling, in insatiable pride, its gods after its own likeness, and forcing Olympos to bear a part in its quarrels; — this superb race was far too arrogant to permit the cat to participate in its apotheosis. Therefore the prudent animal avoided a society unable to appreciate or to understand her. What she required was a people, gentle, submissive, prompt to obey, and accustomed, as were the Egyptians, to the inexorable demands of tyranny."

It is always painful to disagree with M. Havard; but he forgets that the cat, although she doubtless

prefers being worshipped as a divinity, has yet consented to live with many nations on easier terms; that, notwithstanding her gentle imperiousness, she is, as a rule, willing to accord to humanity the freedom she demands for herself; and that the beauty of well-ordered life — as that fair life of Athens — has ever appealed to her exquisite sense of smoothness and moderation. Sparta, with its rigorous study of discomforts, might have repelled her sadly; but in Athens every instinct of her little heart would have been sweetly satisfied. It was her home of homes, and the unkind fates barred her way.

When at last the cat entered Greece, the glory of Greece had waned. Artemis remembered that, in Egypt, Pussy had vaguely symbolized both moon and sun, and took the small night-roaming creature — furry as her old Arcadian emblem, the bear, — under her protection; but Artemis was no longer the goddess “excellently bright.” Her lustre was dimming fast; and the old myth, imported hazily from the East, which represented the cat moon devouring the grey mice of twilight, had faded from the minds of men. As a plaything, as a pretty household toy, Pussy was carried from Africa to Europe a few hundred years before the Christian era. Diodorus tells a strange story of a mountain in Numidia which was inhabited by a common-

wealth of cats, so that no bird ever ventured to nest in its woods ; and from this mysterious region, it was said, adventurous hunters carried away a few little captives to be enslaved by decadent Greece. A more probable and a more romantic tale has been adapted from the Greek by that graceful versifier, and true lover of cats, Graham Tomson. It gives a motive, at once cogent and reasonable, for the importation of Pasht's pussies.

“ Arsinoë the fair, the amber-tressed,
 Is mine no more ;
 Cold as the unsunned snows are is her breast,
 And closed her door.
 No more her ivory feet and tresses braided
 Make glad mine eyes ;
 Snapt are my viol strings, my flowers are faded,
 My love-lamp dies.

“ Yet, once, for dewy myrtle-buds and roses,
 All summer long,
 We searched the twilight-haunted garden closes
 With jest and song.
 Ay, all is over now, — my heart hath changéd
 Its heaven for hell ;
 And that ill chance which all our love estrangéd
 In this wise fell :

“ A little lion, small and dainty sweet,
 (For such there be !)
 With sea-grey eyes and softly stepping feet,
 She prayed of me.
 For this, through lands Egyptian far away,
 She bade me pass :

But, in an evil hour, I said her nay ;
 And now, alas !
Far-travelled Nicias hath wooed and won
 Arsinoë,
With gifts of furry creatures, white and dun,
 From over sea."

It is a melancholy truth that after the "little lion" had been domesticated in Greece, we hear nothing to her credit. Theocritus flouts her with a careless word,

 "Cats love to sleep softly ;"

and decadent poets, in place of singing her beauty and her grace, as Homer sang of Helen on the battlements of Troy, grow ethical and positively evangelical over her too manifest shortcomings. There was a cat of spirit belonging to the epigrammatist, Agathias, who, when the occasion offered, ate her master's tame partridge, for which deed she has been handed down to posterity as an unnatural and infuriate monster. Agathias solaced himself by writing two poems on the tragedy, one of which has been very charmingly — if very freely — translated by Mr. Richard Garnett.

 "O cat in semblance, but in heart akin
 To canine raveners, whose ways are sin ;
 Still at my hearth a guest thou dar'st to be ?
 Unwhipt of Justice, hast no dread of me ?
 Or deem'st the sly allurements shall avail
 Of purring throat and undulating tail ?

No ! as to pacify Patroclus dead,
Twelve Trojans by Pelides' sentence bled,
So shall thy blood appease the feathery shade,
And for one guiltless life shall nine be paid."

Poor Pussy ! wasting thy soft purrs and delicate blandishments on the destroyer. And, as if the wrath of Agathias were not enough to damn thee forever, Damocharis, a friend and disciple, must needs pour forth *his* eloquent denunciations, likening thee to one of Aktæon's hounds that tore its master, — no such guilt was thine, — and reproaching thee for long neglected duties. "And thou, base cat, thinkest only of partridges, while the mice dance and play, regaling themselves upon the dainty food that thou disdainest."

The episode is worthy of Hogarth's pencil ;— idleness leading the way, the straight, smooth way to murder and the gallows. Alas ! for Egypt's little god in that bleak atmosphere of morality.

Rome honoured, if she did not cherish the cat. The conquerors of the world recognized and respected the indomitable love of liberty which won then, as it wins now, for this small weak animal an independence lost wholly and forever by beasts of many times her strength. The dog serves, the horse, the camel, the elephant serve, and are slaves of man. The cat has never served, save briefly and capriciously, casting aside her allegiance when it

pleased her to do so, and turning back to that half savage freedom which she held always in reserve. *Libertas sine Labore* is, and has ever been, her motto. The cat of Agathias had wearied of civilization and well-doing when she forsook her duties in the pantry, and decided to eat her master's bird. It is true that Pliny, whose admirable imagination deserts him strangely now and then, leaving him stranded on the driest of facts, sees in Pussy little but her usefulness. "She keeps well-filled barns free from mice." He even adds in the same breath that weasels do the work better. Palladius echoes this stupid sentiment, but Romans of more heroic mould valued more heroic traits. Tiberius Gracchus placed an image of the cat within his Temple of Liberty; and, if we may trust that pleasant old book, *La Vraye et Parfaite Science des Armoiries*, published by Palliot in 1664, more than one Roman legion marched to battle with Pussy blazoned on their banners. The *Ordines Augustei* carried a sea-green cat, courant; the *Felices Seniores* a cat, rampant, on a buckler gules; and the *Alpini* a cat with one eye and one ear, evidently a veteran warrior of the wall.

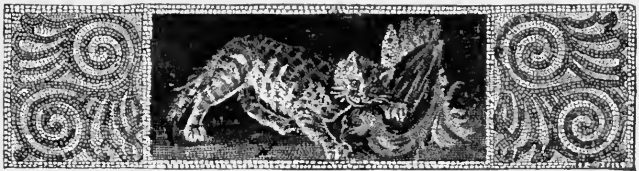
Coming late to Rome, and winning distinction first as a lover of liberty, half tamed and wholly brave, it was long before Pussy's sweeter qualities were duly exhibited, or valued at their worth. That

she was known in pleasure-loving Pompeii is proven by the spirited mosaics in the Museum of Naples, one of which represents her springing upon a partridge, like the "base cat" reproached by Damocharis. There is something indefinably pitiless in the attitude of this animal, a savage and ruthless energy in the shedding of innocent blood, which seems ill-calculated to soften the prejudiced mind. Italy was indeed no school of gentleness. Cruelty had been refined to a pleasure, and mercy had been austere banished from philosophy. Marcus Aurelius could easily endure to sit for hours in the amphitheatre, bored and distraught, it is true, but with unmoved serenity. The slaughter of a hundred lions afforded him no recreation; but, as he had generously given the animals to be killed for the diversion of simpler souls, he found no fault with their enjoyment of the spectacle. A creature, beautiful and weak, might well be cherished one hour for its beauty, and destroyed the next as a penalty for its weakness. In "Marius the Epicurean" there is a pretty description of a white cat purring its way gracefully among the wine cups at a feast given in honour of Apuleius, — "coaxed onward from place to place by those at table, as they reclined easily on their cushions of German eider-down, spread over the long-legged carved couches." This dainty and somewhat supercilious guest has been brought to the supper by a young Roman;

and, surfeited with cajolery, she sinks unconcernedly to sleep, until disturbed by the rude antics of the young Commodus.

“It was then that the host’s son bethought him of his own favourite animal, which had offended somehow, and had been forbidden the banquet. — ‘I mean to shut you in the oven a while, little soft, white thing!’ he had said, catching sight, as he passed an open doorway, of the great fire in the kitchen, itself festally adorned, where the feast was preparing; and had so finally forgotten it. And it was with a really natural laugh, for once, that, on opening the oven, he caught sight of the animal’s grotesque appearance, as it lay there, half-burnt, just within the red-hot iron door.”

That light, cruel, natural laugh echoes through the centuries, and follows the cat along her pathway of pain. Mr. Pater, fretted to pity by his own tale, eliminated from later editions of “Marius” the heart-rending episode he could so ill endure. Would that it were as easy to banish from Pussy’s history the gloomy records of sorcery and persecution.





The Dark Ages

CHAPTER II

“O gin my sons were seven rats
Runnin’ o’er the castle wa’,
And gin that I were a great gray cat,
Fu’ sune wad I worry them a’.”

A POPULAR tradition was wont to maintain that the cat was brought from the East, and introduced into northern Europe by the first Crusaders. It is one of those delightful misstatements which lend colour and charm to history. Who would not love to feel that we owe this pleasant debt — as we owe so many others — to those splendid soldiers who fought under Godfrey de Bouillon, and carried the Cross to Palestine? The Crusaders brought back to their rude and warlike homes many of the refinements of life, many dim appreciations of an older civilization, of beauty, of learning, of subtleties that had no place within the stern barriers of Feudalism. But they did not

bring back the cat. Long before Peter the Hermit preached to the loyal sons of Christendom, Pussy slept by English firesides, and was held in high esteem in English nunneries, alike for her gentleness and valour. A canon enacted in 1127 forbade all nuns, even abbesses, to wear any costlier skins than those of lambs and cats; and the "Ancren Riwe" of 1205 denied them possession of flocks, cattle, swine, or other domestic animals, save only the cat. "Ye, my dear sisters, shall have no beast but a cat," says this excellent ordinance;—"no best bute kat ane," is the old Saxon manuscript. "An Anchoress that hath herds seemeth a better housewife (as was Martha) than an Anchoress, and in no wise may she be Mary with peacefulness of heart."

To have sheep in the fold, cows in the barn, mules in the stable, was to sin against holy Poverty,—Our Lady Poverty, mother of all monastic virtues; but the cat stood for no such excess of indulgence. Her value was small, but her services were great. She gave to convents chill and bare that look of home, that sweet suggestion of domesticity, which all women, even cloistered women, love; she played with her kittens in the sun, affording a welcome distraction from work and prayer; and she held herself ever in joyful readiness to

"Combat with the creeping Mouse,
And scratch the screeking Rat."

The nuns were not so badly off who were permitted to keep a cat.

No one knows the date, and no one knows the route of Pussy's westward voyage, a voyage fraught with peril and disaster. From Cyprus she came, — so say most authorities, — and there is an ancient tradition of a Christian monastery near Paphos, where the Greek monks kept a little colony of highly trained and valorous cats, whose duty it was to destroy the serpents that infested the island. These cats hunted their prey daily "with admirable zeal and address," — I quote from Moncrif, — and to the great benefit of the neighbourhood. But when the Turks snatched Cyprus, they burned the monastery, and turned the homeless pussies, not to speak of the homeless monks, adrift upon the world; — a strange piece of ill-doing for Moslems, who, however contemptuous of cloisters, have always cherished cats with exceeding tenderness. The love which Mohammed bore for his fair white cat, Muezza, has thrown a veil of sanctity over the whole feline race; and no good Ottoman ever forgets that when Muezza slept one day upon her master's flowing sleeve, the Prophet — being summoned to the Council — cut off his sleeve, rather than disturb her slumber.

Proud then, and justly proud, was that true believer upon whom was conferred the title — at once magnificent and tender — of "Father of Cats."

Great was the solicitude manifested throughout all Islam for the welfare of these favoured animals, whose brooding reserve and wise impassiveness seemed but a reflection of the unchanging and uncommunicative East. M. Prisse d'Avennes tells us that the Moslem warrior, El-Daher-Beybars, "brave as Cæsar and cruel as Nero," had so true an affection for cats that he bequeathed a fertile garden called Ghey-t-el-Quottah (the cat's orchard) for the support of homeless and necessitous pussies. This garden lay close to his own mosque, and but a short distance from Cairo. With the revenue it yielded, food was bought and distributed every noon in the outer court of the Mehkémeh to all cats who, wishing to live in freedom, were yet driven by hunger or neglect to accept the generous alms. There is an admirable permanence about Oriental customs which we of the West — unstable citizens of a protean world — regard with envious scorn. Seven centuries have elapsed since El-Daher-Beybars atoned for the misdeeds of his fierce life by gentle charity. His gilded mosque has crumbled into ruins, the site of his orchard is unknown, his legacy has lapsed into oblivion. Yet as late as 1870 the cats of Cairo received their daily dole, no longer in memory of their benefactor, but in unconscious perpetuation of his bounty.

"How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

It is rather disconcerting, when we are dwelling so complacently upon the love of the Moslem for his cat, to remember that the only bit of verse upon the subject which has floated down to us from the dim East is not more flattering or more kindly than the epigrams of Agathias. Ibn Alalaf Alnaharwany, a poet of Bagdad who died about 930, celebrated the misdeeds and the punishment of his cat in a strain of such uncompromising morality that we are still uncertain as to whether he meant what he said, or was referring in veiled language to some tragedy of the harem. Alalaf's pussy steals forth to rob a dove-cote, "fearing nothing save the loss of his prey," and is pierced by an avenging arrow ere he can escape with the bird. "Alas!" muses the virtuous chronicler, "had he but contented himself with the lawful pursuit of mice, no such evil fate had befallen him. Cursed be the refined taste which led him to seek a daintier quarry, and cursed be the forbidden joy which brings destruction in its wake."

To be slain in the moment of victory — even though death turns triumph to defeat — is not, in Moslem eyes, the worst of woes. The robber cat of Bagdad — if he were a cat, indeed, and not an adventurous lover — had doubtless enjoyed many a moonlight raid before retribution overtook him; and this reflection should have soothed Alalaf's soul.

The Turk, although he enjoys scant reputation for humanity, has never been, and is not now, cruel

to animals. He could teach *that* lesson of kindness to every Christian nation in the world. But his benevolence has in it a curious element of caprice. While the Pariah dog struggles from puppyhood to old age for the bare livelihood yielded him by immemorial usage, the cat is still, as she has always been, a pampered plaything, smothered in luxury, surfeited with indulgence. Who that has ever seen the cats of Stamboul can forget those beautiful Persians, snow-white, indolent, amber-eyed, carried in the arms of Nubian slave-women, and clawing ungratefully at their careful guardians! And who that has watched a surly little Turkish soldier soften and brighten into smiles over the antics of a litter of kittens, snugly domiciled in his sentry-box where surely kittens had no right to be, can doubt the love the Moslem bears — in imitation of the Prophet — for Muezza's furry kindred!

Travellers in the Orient have brought back strange and delightful tales of Pussy's dignities and high estate. According to these, probably fabulous, but always pleasing reports, the cats belonging to the Shah of Persia rival in numbers and in beauty the wives of King Solomon. At Persian banquets, troops of cats, stately and soft-footed, glide in and out among the guests with silent courtesy, offering no disturbance, but merely honouring with their presence the master of the feast. In Siam and

Burmah these thrice fortunate animals are treated with becoming deference; and the Hungarian scientist, Vambéry, tells of a Buddhist convent in eastern Thibet, where there were so many pussies, all sleek and fat, that he could not forbear asking the pious inmates why they deemed it necessary to keep such a feline colony. "All things have their uses," was the serene reply. "Cats are carnal-minded, clamorous, and far from cleanly; but they atone for their sins by destroying rats, mice, and weasels, and thus spare us the temptation of imbruing our hands in the blood of our fellow creatures." — For the delicate refinements of casuistry, one must still turn to the subtle and contemplative East.

It was an ill day for Pussy when she left this land of ease, and began her bleak northwestern journey. Sir John Lubbock asserts that there is no proof of her domestication in Great Britain or in France before the ninth century; but the dim records of those far-off years leave much untold, and she may have arrived quietly and without ostentation a hundred years or so earlier. That her usefulness was recognized, and that she was highly prized as long as her rarity enhanced her value, is shown by an ancient statute ascribed to Howel Dda, or Howel the Good, a Welsh prince whose life is otherwise shrouded in obscurity. This admirable ruler — assuredly the Wise as well as the Good — made a law in 948,

regulating the market price of cats ; a penny for a kitten before its eyes were open, twopence until it had caught its first mouse, fourpence when it was old enough for combat. He who stole a cat from the royal granaries forfeited either a milch ewe with its fleece and lamb, or as much wheat as would cover the body of the cat suspended by its tail, with its nose touching the ground. A pleasant, picturesque old law, discerning the artistic possibilities of punishment, and insuring to Pussy her place in economics. A penny was a vastly respectable coin in the tenth century.

There are few golden pages, however, in the broken annals of the cat during the long dark years of mediæval history. Feudalism with its splendours and discomforts, its swift alternations of magnificent loyalty and fierce rebellion, its restless ambitions and perpetual warfare, offered little but misery to a cat. Change of any kind has ever been abhorrent to her spirit, and those were days when nothing was permanent save death. Order and tranquillity are essential to her well-being ; and the world, seething with strife, exulted in its own measureless confusion. The dog, faithful follower of man's scattered fortunes, and trusted guardian of all that was held dear, reached his apotheosis in these troubled times. Baron and knight, burgher and serf united in recognition of his merits. In

castle hall, by cottage hearth, at the door of my lady's chamber, he kept loyal watch and ward. Poets praised him, kings caressed him, beggars bound him to their wretchedness; and nuns, on whom the rule of Poverty weighed not too heavily, — like Chaucer's Prioress, — carried him upon blessed pilgrimages, and fed him daintily

“ With rosted flesh, or mylk and wastel breed.”

Carved in stone and moulded in bronze, we see him on beautiful old tombs, couchant at the feet of mailed knights and noble dames, sharing the still magnificence of death as he shared the glory and the tumult of life. Mother Church took him under her protection, for it was well known that when Saint Roch appeared at Heaven's court, his dog stood by his side; and Saint Peter, who values faithful service, smiled as he opened wide the gates. From countless altars of Catholic Christendom, Saint Roch — most pitiful because most suffering of Saints — showed, and still shows to poor humanity the plague spot on his knee; and still at his feet is the dumb friend whom no excess of misery could alienate, the animal in whose heart God has implanted a steadfastness of affection which is one of the kindly miracles of creation.

The colder temperament of the cat, her self-sufficing independence of character, her impenetrable reserve, her love of gentleness and luxury,

unfitted her for the stern rude life of the Middle Ages. She was no loyal servant, no follower of camps, no votaress of martial joys. Only in the cities, where some semblance of order was usually preserved, and some snug comforts guaranteed, could she have found a home. It is a significant circumstance that the commercial legend of Dick Whittington is the only pleasant story in which the English cat figures with prominence during several centuries ; and surely no tale could better illustrate the exact nature of her position.

In the first place, she was of trifling value. A poor boy, who owned nothing else in the world, owned a cat. Like the miller's son in "Puss-in-Boots," Dick possessed something which nobody thought it worth while to take from him. That he had little love for this cat is proven by the alacrity with which he parted from her, sending her away upon a long and perilous voyage, on the bare chance of her yielding him a profit. She was in no wise his friend and companion ; she was merely his property, to be disposed of as any other piece of merchandise. Dick was a tradesman to his finger tips, and worthy of all the civic honours heaped upon him. That his first speculation proved successful was due wholly to the accident which carried poor Pussy to a catless land, overrun by rats and mice. Utilitarianism, commercialism, a flavour

of export and import pervade the tale. There is no graceful sentiment to hallow it; and the utmost we can claim for young Richard is that he was not a weakling like the miller's son, who had to be dragged by *his* cat to affluence and a throne. Once started on the way, Dick built up his own fortunes with a steady hand. Indeed, a boy who could so lightly part with the only living thing he might have held by his side, was in no danger of being outstripped in the hard race for wealth.

Commonplace as is the story of Whittington's cat, it is nevertheless a legacy which we have no mind to lose; and all conscientious chroniclers should protest against the grovelling preciseness which would banish it from England's annals. There are records to show that "Richard Whityngdon" was thrice Lord Mayor of London, serving in 1397, 1406, and 1409; that he was born in Gloucestershire, was a mercer by trade, that he married Alice Fitzwarren, and that he lent one thousand pounds — doubtless at goodly interest — to King Henry the Fourth. There is also the evidence of that venerable stone which was found in the garden of a house in Westgate Street, Gloucester, where the grand-nephew of the Lord Mayor is known to have lived in 1460. This stone represents in bas-relief a boy holding in his arms a cat, the ever-famous cat that lifted her young master from penury; and it is

a pleasant proof that the Whityngdons were not unmindful of the source whence sprang their wealth and distinction.

What makes the historian so eager to dwell long and lovingly upon every page gilded by Pussy's triumphs is the deepening gloom through which we see her little figure steal frightened and forlorn. For centuries she is hidden from our sight; and, when she emerges out of the unknown, a strange and melancholy change has come over her fortunes. Here and there we find such scanty proof as I have offered of toleration, and even of esteem, on the score of usefulness; but, as she grew in time to be a familiar object in the homes of men, they looked at her askance with cruel and troubled eyes. The god of Egypt, the plaything of Rome, became, by some sad ill chance, a symbol of evil things. Her beauty, her grace, her gentleness availed her nothing. She was the witch's friend, and on many a murky midnight had gazed unblinkingly upon shameful spells. The Prince of the Power of Darkness had taken her for his own, and she dwelt by the hearths of men to lure them to destruction. The cat that served seven masters, each for seven years, carried the soul of the seventh into Hell. Like the were-wolf, she set free the primitive, bestial impulses of humanity. The wife who left her sleeping husband's side to share the obscene revels

of warlocks and of witches, stole through the lattice window as a sleek black cat. Perchance some passing traveller, seeing her glide by, wounded her with stone or sword; and the next morning she was found maimed and bleeding beneath the counterpane. In ruined churches, pillaged and desecrated by the unsparing wickedness of war, there assembled, on the eve of Saint John, hags and wizards and young girls caught in Satan's toils, all creeping through the darkness under the forms of cats, and all afire with impious relish for sorcery and sin.

Innumerable legends cluster around the cat during these picturesque centuries of superstition, when men were poor in letters, but rich in vivid imaginings; when they were densely ignorant, but never dull. Even after the Dark Ages had grown light, there was no lifting of the gloom which enveloped Pussy's pathway, there was no visible softening of her lot. The stories told of her impish wickedness have the same general character throughout Europe. We meet them with modest variations in France, in Germany, in Sweden, Denmark, England, Scotland and Wales. It was a belated woodcutter of Brittany who saw with horror-stricken eyes thirteen cats dancing in sacrilegious glee around a wayside crucifix. One he killed with his axe, and the other twelve disappeared in a trice. It was a charcoal-burner in the Black For-

est who, hearing strange noises near his kiln at night, arose from bed and stepped into the clearing. Before him, motionless in the moonlight, sat three cats. He stooped to pick up a stone, and the relic of Saint Gildas he carried in his bosom fell from its snapt string upon the ground. Immediately his arm hung helpless, and he could not touch the stone. Then one of the cats said to its companions: "For the sake of his wife, who is my gossip, sisters, let him go!" and the next morning he was found lying unconscious, but unharmed, across the forest road.

From Scandinavia, where the fair white cats of Freija were once as honoured as were Odin's ravens and Thor's goats, comes the tale of the haunted mill in which dreadful revelry was heard at night, and which had been twice burned to the ground on Whitsun Eve. The third year, a travelling tailor, pious and brave, offered to keep watch. He chalked a circle on the floor, wrote the Lord's prayer around it, and waited with patience until midnight. Then a troop of cats crept stealthily in, carrying a great pot of pitch which they hung in the fireplace, lighting the logs beneath it. Soon the pitch bubbled and seethed, and the cats, swinging the pot, tried to overturn it. The tailor drove them away; and when one, who seemed to be the leader, sought to pull him gently outside the magic

circle, he cut off its paw with his knife. Upon this they all fled howling into the night ; and the next morning the miller saw with joy his mill standing unharmed, and the great wheel turning merrily in the water. But the miller's wife was ill in bed ; and, when the tailor bade her good-by, she gave him her left hand, hiding beneath the bedclothes the right arm's bleeding stump.

There is also a Scandinavian version of the ever famous story which Sir Walter Scott told to Washington Irving, which " Monk " Lewis told to Shelley, and which, in one form or another, we find embodied in the folk-lore of every land, — the story of the traveller who saw within a ruined abbey a procession of cats lowering into its grave a little coffin with a crown upon it. Filled with horror, he hastened from the spot ; but when he reached his destination, he could not forbear relating to a friend the wonder he had seen. Scarcely had the tale been told, when his friend's cat, who lay curled up tranquilly by the fire, sprang to its feet, cried out, " Then I am the King of the Cats ! " and disappeared in a flash up the chimney.

In the Norwegian tale, which lacks the subtle suggestiveness of the German, the cat is a young Troll, who, hiding from the jealous wrath of Knurremurre, lived for three years as a peaceful pussy in the house of a Jutland peasant. One day this man,

toiling to market with his basket of eggs, was met by a Troll from Brönö, who sang out to him lustily :—

“ Hör du, Plat,
Siig til din Kat
At Knurremurre er död.”

(“ Hark you, Plat,
Tell your cat
That Knurremurre is dead.”)

In no way enlightened by this message, the peasant went home and repeated it to his wife ; whereupon his cat leaped from the hearth, cried joyously, “ Then I am the Master Troll,” and overturned the pot of soup in his haste to scramble up the chimney, and be gone.

In Sternberg’s “ Legends of Northamptonshire,” we have the story of a woodman whose dinner was stolen from him daily by a cat. After many vain attempts, he succeeded in waylaying the creature and cutting off one of its paws, only to find, when he reached home, that his wife had lost her hand. The curious deviltry which provoked witches to plague their husbands, in preference to other men, is one of the interesting points in the annals of sorcery. Those were wild times, when strength ruled the world roughly ; and the witch wife—once innocent and weak—had doubtless a long score of insults to avenge before she took to burning her husband’s mill, or stealing his daily bread.

As for the poor cat, her fate was sealed ; and we can hardly wonder at the deep suspicion with which men regarded an animal so mysterious, and so closely allied to the supernatural. Even when her behaviour was harmless or beneficial, they feared a lurking malice which never lacked the power for evil things. M. Champfleury tells us of a French woman, a native of Billancourt, who was peacefully cooking an omelette, when a black cat strayed into her cottage, and sat upright on the hearth. She took no notice of the creature, but went on with her work. The cat watched the omelette attentively for a moment, and then said : "It is done. Turn it over." Indignant at advice from such a quarter, the woman hastily flung her half-cooked eggs at the beast's head, and the next morning had the satisfaction of seeing a deep red burn on the cheek of an evilly disposed neighbour.

The trials for witchcraft — always of absorbing interest — offer ample proof of Pussy's wicked associations. Again and again she figures with direful prominence in the records of demonology. A black-hearted Scottish witch confessed in the year 1591 that she had impiously christened a cat ; and that she and other witches had carried this animal "sayling in their Riddles or Cives into the midst of the sea, and so left it before the towne of Leith ; whereupon there did arise such a tempest at sea, as

a greater hath not been seen." Nor was this all. It was against King Jamie — pious enemy of witchcraft — that these hags worked their will. "Againe it is confessed that the said christened cat was the cause that the Kinges Majestie's shippe, at his coming forthe of Denmarke, had a contrairie winde to the reste of the shippes then being in his companie ; which thing was most straunge and true, as the Kinges Majestie acknowledgeth. For when the rest of the shippes had a fair and good winde, then was the winde contrairie, and altogether against his Majestie."

Evidence of a most disastrous character was brought against the cat in countless other trials. The famous Scotch witch, Isobel Gowdie, "convict and brynt" — so saith the record — in 1662, confessed that it was a common habit of the sisterhood to change themselves into cats, and in that guise to prowl at night over the country-side, stealing into all the farmhouses that were not fenced against them by prayer and charms. She herself had a foolish preference for the form of a hare ; and, as a consequence, had been twice hunted by hounds, narrowly escaping death. Joan Peterson was hanged at Wapping, ten years earlier, for visiting and plaguing her neighbours under the semblance of a black cat ; and a sister witch met the same fate at Lynn, for sending an impish pussy to

sit at night upon the bed of one Cicely Balyer with whom she had grievously quarrelled.

This kind of visitation was not infrequent, — nor altogether surprising when one considers the nocturnal habits of cats, and the accessibility of cottage chimneys, — but the horror of it brought many an old wife to the scaffold. Janet Wishart and Alice Kyteler were both convicted of sending a “wan-toune cat” to work evil upon such as had offended them; and a nameless English witch, hanged in King Jamie’s reign, confessed that she wrought all her charms with the help of a dun-coloured cat, that came one night to her cottage when she was cowering over her fire, nursing angry thoughts against a farmer’s wife. This beast dwelt with her for months, stealing forth night after night to obey her foul behests, until there was scarce a woman in the village who had not suffered from its malignity.

Apparently there was no piece of mischief too great or too trivial for an energetic and evilly disposed cat. The mere presence of Isobel Grierson’s pussy in broad daylight would turn sound ale sour; and the most damning evidence brought against John Fian, a Scottish schoolmaster, strangled as a warlock in 1591, was that he had been seen by neighbours in hot pursuit of a cat, leaping over hedges and ditches like one with wings, so furious was the chase. When questioned as to why he

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hunted the animal, he unwisely admitted — or so at least deposed several garrulous witnesses — that Satan had need of all the cats his servants could bring him, being unable without their aid to raise storms or to wreck ships, — a curious limitation of diabolic power.

The trial which of all others, however, established the Scotch cat's reputation for sorcery was that of Margaret Gilbert and Margaret Olson, two women of Caithness, who were accused of bewitching the household of a stone-mason named Montgomery by means of a number of cats. No bolts nor bars could exclude these emissaries of evil, nor could they be killed like ordinary animals. When run through by a sword, or cleft in twain by a hatchet, they merely disappeared, to return again at some more convenient opportunity. Moreover, they had the habit of conversing together at night with human voices, but in an unknown tongue ; — a habit which seems to have thrilled the unfortunate Montgomery with terror, and which, it may well be admitted, was calculated to try the nerves. No wonder that a little maid servant fled from the house in mid-term, and would enter it no more, after she had heard these cats talking by the kitchen fire. It is no wonder that villagers came in time to look askance upon all pussies as possible imps of Belial ; — a possibility which assumed definite shape and name.

levolence when the ever famous witch-finder, Matthew Hopkins, admitted that he himself had beheld at dusk an evil spirit in the shape of a "white kitlyn." This innocent looking object speedily proved its diabolic nature by routing the pious man's greyhound, which turned tail and fled before the tiny creature; while Hopkins, unmindful for once of his serious duties, lost no time in following his dog. It was certainly a "kitlyn" of pluck and spirit that roamed the English lanes that pleasant summer eve.

Continental cats were as deeply incriminated as were those of Great Britain. A witch of Grandcour, named Elizabeth Blanche, confessed at her trial that she was in the habit of rubbing her body with a black ointment which transformed her into a cat, and enabled her to steal unnoticed through the darkness, when summoned to devilish rites. German witches trooped to the Brocken on Walpurgis night under the semblance of cats; and many were the witnesses who swore that they had tracked the little footmarks for miles to the place of meeting. *El Gato Moro*—the Moor-Cat—prowled in the moonlight about the citadel of Toledo, and pious Christians who beheld it prayed with exceeding fervour to be delivered from its spell. Jean Bodin, author of *Demonomanie des Sorciers*, tells us with sympathetic gravity a number of stories so curious

and so startling that we envy the readers who were fortunate enough to believe them. It is from Bodin that we learn of the witch cats who in 1566 assembled in such numbers in the forests near Vernon that they terrorized the neighbourhood, and no man ventured to assail them. After a time they became so bold that they attacked a party of labourers, returning at nightfall from their work. The men, seeing themselves thus horribly beset, fought with desperation for their lives ; and, though covered with wounds, managed to escape, having killed one of the cats, and injured a number of others. This battle proved the undoing of the witches, for the next morning a dozen women of Vernon were found bleeding and mutilated in their beds ; and, being brought promptly to trial, made full confessions, denouncing half their neighbours in the country-side.

Bodin is also responsible for the statement that the heretical Waldenses, when hard pushed by the royal troops, summoned to their aid a demon cat, under whose leadership and direction they again and again escaped unwhipt of justice. This is especially worth hearing, because it seems to be one of the few instances in which any practical assistance was lent by the Powers of Darkness. Nothing is more striking than the supreme impotence of sorcerers and sacrilegists, when summoned to

answer for their ill-doing. With all the vast machinery of Hell to back them, they could neither outwit nor outstrip the clumsy pursuit of man. A rare exception to this rule was the case of a baker's wife in Köln, who cruelly bewitched her husband's little apprentice. When accused of the crime, she manifested the unconcern of one who had nothing to fear ; and neither threats nor exhortations could move her to repentance. She was sentenced to the stake ; but, to the end, defied the judge, laughed at the executioner, and mocked the priest with appalling blasphemies. The fagots were fired, the smoke enveloped her thickly, the priest lifted his voice in prayer, — when, with a wild exultant screech, there leaped from out the flames a black cat, which disappeared in a trice amid the terrified throng. The witch had escaped ; but one trembles to think what suspicion must have fallen for a time on all the black pussies of Köln.

Perhaps, however, it was impossible to enhance the guilt of an animal already credited with such frightful depths of malignity. The very word Grimalkin, or Greymalkin, which now we use so lightly, was the name of a fiend, and bore a fearful significance in the annals of witchcraft.

“ Now I go, now I fly,
Malkin, my sweet spirit, and I,”

sings Hecate in Middleton's fantastic play. A still

deeper horror clings to "Rutterkin," for by that name was known one of the sinfullest of cats, — a terrible cat, black, sinister, malevolent,

"with eyne of burning coal,"

who helped his most wicked mistress in the "sorrowful bewitchment" of the Countess of Rutland and her two young sons, and who did more to blast the fair fame of his race than any puss in Christendom.

The record of the extraordinary trial in which Rutterkin figures so darkly is to be found in the "Churche Boke of Bottesford." Here is set forth with many curious details the story of the witch, Joan Flower, who conceived a venomous hatred of the Earl of Rutland, and of his "noble Countess," — a woman so gracious, good, beautiful and kind, that she was revered alike by rich and poor, friends, servants and dependents. Joan, knowing full well that she could strike the mother most deeply through her son, stole a glove belonging to the heir, soaked it in scalding water, pricked it with pins, and rubbed it on the back of her "familiar," the black cat, Rutterkin. In consequence of this deviltry, Henry, Lord Ross, sickened with strange consuming pangs, which racked him in incessant torture until he died. The hag, ill content even with so dire a vengeance, next tried her arts upon the younger boy, Francis, Lord Ross, who had suc-

ceeded to his brother's title and inheritance. Him, too, she bewitched, with the ready aid of Rutterkin, and the poor child, wasting in hideous pain, died in his mother's arms. Then, to complete the ruin she had wrought, and to insure the downfall of a noble house, Joan possessed herself of some feathers from the bed of the Countess, and rubbed them upon Rutterkin's belly, that the now childless woman might never again give birth to a living infant. The feathers and the gloves she obtained through her daughter, Margaret, who was a servant in the castle, and who shared her mother's animosity, and her mother's crimes.

Both Margaret and a younger sister, Phyllis Flower, — what charming names this witch's brood possessed! — gave their evidence unreservedly at the trial; admitting all the circumstances related, and hoping perhaps that, by freely incriminating their parent, they might themselves escape. In this hope they were deceived, and the two girls were hanged in the year of grace 1618. Joan, however, who was either a stout-hearted old sinner or a deeply calumniated saint, refused to make any confession, and maintained her innocence steadfastly, in the face of her daughters' accusations. Even in prison she persistently and solemnly denied the charges brought against her, praying that the bread she ate might choke her if she had ever been guilty

of sorcery. Whereupon, — according to the chronicle, — the bread, as it had been a living thing, stuck in her throat, and slowly strangled her, to the supreme edification of the bystanders, who refused to impiously interfere with the manifest workings of Providence. In the parish church of Bottesford may still be seen the beautiful tomb of the Earl and Countess of Rutland, with the two little boys kneeling at their parents' feet ; but what became of Rutterkin, after his guilt had been established, is nowhere mentioned, even in the garrulous "Boke."

Cats played a prominent part in that most pitiful of all such pitiful tales, — the bewitchment of the children of Mohra. In 1669 this tranquil Swedish village was cast into fearful consternation. Over three hundred boys and girls, from six to sixteen years of age, had been seduced, it was believed, by charms and cajolery to visit nightly the witches' meetings, and enroll themselves in Satan's ranks. The poor children freely and even eagerly confessed their guilt, clinging with tenacity to all the painful and grotesque details involved in such a story ; babbling with infant tongues of things too evil for their understanding ; and adding touch after touch of loathsome extravagance, as their imaginations became heated in the riotous atmosphere of credulity. Among other particulars, they affirmed that

the Devil gave to each of them "a beast about the bigness and shape of a young cat," which creature was called a "carrier," its especial duty being to steal the butter, cheese, milk, and bacon which constituted their simple offerings to the Prince of Darkness. These thievish cats accompanied them to "Blockula," the palace of Satan, and shared such entertainment as was given them.

The readiness of the children to incriminate themselves was surpassed by the infatuation of their judges. Fifteen of the poor little culprits were actually condemned to death and executed for their hallucinations. Thirty-six were whipped every Sunday for a year before the church doors, and others were punished with varying degrees of severity. So widespread was the interest awakened in this trial, that it extended even to England, then much occupied with witches of her own. The Duke of Holstein attempted to acquaint himself with all the particulars; but was discouraged by the Swedish authorities, who deemed it best to bury the matter in oblivion.

Girt with mystery, burdened with subtle associations of evil, abhorred by the timorous and devout, how was the cat to escape from the long martyrdom which awaited her? The Church offered no asylum to this poor fugitive, albeit she was not without her advocates in Heaven, since both Saint Ives, patron

of lawyers, and Saint Gertrude, gentlest of mystics, had deigned to take her under their protection. Moreover a pretty Italian legend softened in some degree the asperity of her lot in that chosen land ; for it was whispered that she was created — not to mitigate the discomforts of the Ark — but to minister to the still greater needs of Saint Francis de Paula, when the holy recluse was living in the austere loneliness of his hermitage. Satan, having failed many times to beguile the Saint from a rapt ecstasy of prayer, sent, as a last resource, hundreds of mice to torment him. They swarmed in his narrow cell, gnawed his garments, nibbled at his feet, and behaved with the shameless audacity of vermin that knew their diabolic origin, and feared no retribution. The monk's prayers seemed ended, when suddenly there sprang from his loose sleeve a small furry animal that attacked the invaders with incredible speed and fury. So vigorous was its onslaught, that only two mice escaped by hiding in a crack of the wall ; and it is to find these fugitives that the cat's descendants still sit motionless before every little hole and crevice, waiting, as they have waited ever since, for their appointed prey.

But neither the gratitude of Saint Francis, nor the lukewarm patronage of Saint Ives and Saint Gertrude could save poor Pussy from black calumny

and persecution. Deeper and deeper into the hearts of men sank the belief that she was allied with demons, and that not only witches and wizards, but their most terrible Master might be seen by guilty mortals under the disguise of a cat. The unhesitating acceptance of a personal Devil, as an important factor in life, made our ancestors exceedingly alert to defeat his designs. No broad-minded doubts softened their fear and detestation; and Saint Dominic was not the only powerful preacher who figured Satan as a black cat, that he might thrill his startled hearers into a trembling abhorrence of sin. One result of this darkening of Pussy's character is that she can seldom be found in church architecture or decoration, where more innocent animals have frisked and gambolled for centuries. Indeed there are antiquarians who maliciously assert that her rare appearance — distorted out of grace and beauty — in some dim corner of a very old cathedral, is due, not to any softening of a universal prejudice, but to that sombre Manichean heresy which constantly found expression in symbolizing triumphant evil. They profess to believe that mediæval stone-masons, tainted with this unholy creed, yet discreet enough to conceal their errors from the Church's chastening hand, indicated the nature of their views by carving, on pulpit and on pillar, ravenous monsters, — lions, leopards,

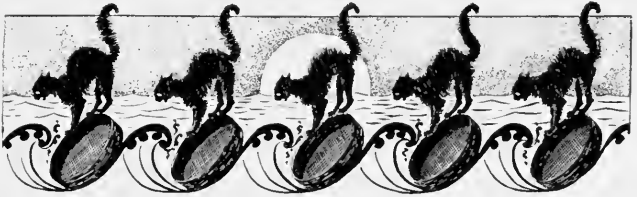
cats, all equally unrecognizable, but all alike glutted with prey. Thus they handed down to posterity the disquiet of their souls, without risking the short, stern shrift of an ecclesiastical court.

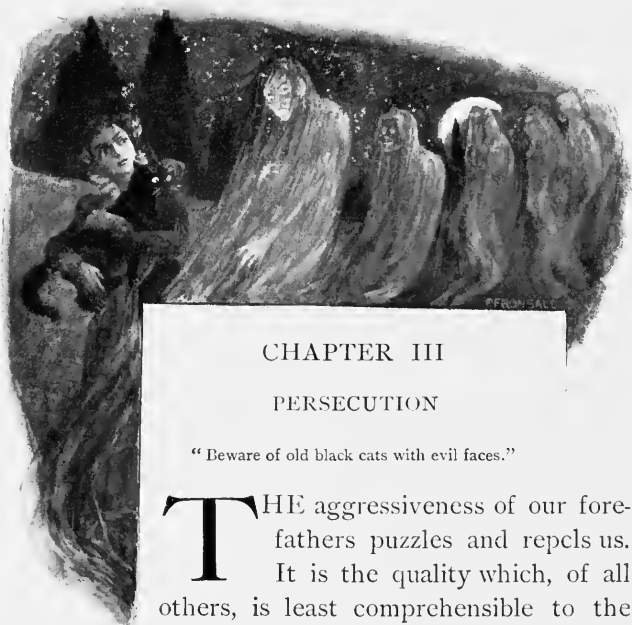
The theory, like most theories, is entertaining ; but even heresy can hardly be said to have given the cat her due. She was practically banished from cathedrals, save at Rouen, where we find her bravely chasing a mouse around one of the pillars in the nave. A careful search will also reveal her occasional presence in the beautiful old choir stalls, where the genius of the mediæval wood-carver resolved itself into an infinite capacity for taking pains. Amid the riotous groups of greyhounds, monkeys, and birds, we may see her — though very rarely — curled up in a recess, or springing with splendid freedom amid a network of oaken leaves. There are two very droll cats in the choir of the old Minster in the Isle of Thanet ; and on one of the stalls of Great Malvern church a pair of rats are engaged in the congenial task of gibbeting a cat, — “*le monde bestorné*,” as this reversal of a natural law was called in ancient France.

Venice gives us a much finer exception in the superb choir-stalls of San Giorgio Maggiore, carved by Albert de Brule at the very close of the sixteenth century, when prejudice and superstition were losing their ancient hold. They represent scenes

from the life of Saint Benedict ; and the Flemish sculptor, deeming no convent complete without its cat, has slyly introduced several into his pious work. One stall shows us Pussy quarrelling in a most unsanctified spirit with Benedict's blessed raven ; and, in another, we see her eating a mouse under the bed of a sleepy brother whom the Saint is vainly endeavouring to arouse. The elaborate oak panellings which surround the altar in the upper sala of the Scuola di San Rocco are of a much later date, so that we are hardly surprised at the frank admission of a cat into Saint Roch's company. She sits on a well-curb, regarding him with thoughtful indifference. The anxious solicitude of his dog, the sleepy affection of Saint Jerome's lion, the humble fidelity of Saint Anthony's pig, find no reflection in her steadfast gaze. She merely stares at the Saint, as she stares at Venice from one of the columns of the Ducal Palace. Some subtle lack of sentiment renders her curiously ill-adapted for pious parts, notwithstanding her constant and very charming presence in Italian art, of which much may be said. Certain it is that she was deliberately ignored throughout those earlier years, when the great cathedrals rose slowly and superbly into being. We cannot believe with M. Champfleury that the sculptors of the Middle Ages failed to recognize the cat's beauty and grace ; she must have

leaped as lightly then as now upon her quivering prey ; but hers was a sinister loveliness which they deemed unfit to adorn the splendid monuments of Christendom.





CHAPTER III

PERSECUTION

“Beware of old black cats with evil faces.”

THE aggressiveness of our forefathers puzzles and repels us. It is the quality which, of all others, is least comprehensible to the unconcern which we call tolerance, and to the sensitiveness which we call humanity. How, we ask ourselves, could men have felt cock-sure of things about which they knew nothing; and why should they have deemed it essential to beat their convictions into other men's brains? The speed and sincerity with which principles were translated into action five hundred years ago kept all Christendom in commotion. People did not then shrug

their shoulders and say, "'Tis a pity Neighbour Hearne standeth apart from Church ;" or "'Tis passing strange Dame Gurton should be so maliciously disposed." By no means ! They saw to it that Hearne either went to church, or stood his trial for heresy ; and they brought the sour old woman to a more amiable frame of mind, or to the witch's stake. Neither did they observe with scholarly composure that the adoption of the cat by the black race of sorcerers was a "curious custom, worthy of research." They said, "Like master, like servant ;" and tossed poor Pussy into the terrible bonfire which blazed for her on the Eve of Saint John.

Now and then a student, gentle and profound, as one Balthazar Bekker of fragrant memory, asserted the innocence of the cat, — perhaps he had a kitten of his own, — and declared the dog to be more deeply versed than she in the unholy arts of necromancy. But the people knew better than this. The frank integrity of the dog was unmistakable. One wag of his honest tail disarmed suspicion. Blunder he might, and fall perchance from grace ; but the subtle witchery of the cat was far beyond his canine comprehension.

Moreover the weight of evidence was always against the cat. At the trial of Rebecca Walther, a woman of Neuchatel who was strangled as a sorceress in 1647, it was proven that a neighbour's

dog, trotting soberly along the road, fell dead in the dust, when the witch came to her doorway, and fixed her cold malignant eye upon him. Who ever heard of a cat dying of such delicate susceptibility? Perronon Méguin, another witch of the same town, did indeed contrive to kill an enemy's cat by smearing it with a poisonous ointment; but this was a natural and laborious method, akin to bootjacks and blunderbusses. People, unaided by Satan, have done as much.

Finally, as proof indubitable of Pussy's guilt, we have the report of the learned jurist, Kessner, who collected the records of countless witch-trials, and published them for the enlightenment of the curious, and the edification of the devout. In the evidence offered at these trials, it was shown that, whereas the Arch-Fiend appeared to his followers but sixty times as a cavalier, and but two hundred and fifteen times as a he-goat, he took more than nine hundred times the congenial form of a black cat;—reason enough for giving this accursed animal a wide and cautious berth.

So it came to pass that Pussy entered upon long years of persecution, and her annals are so freighted with misery that, to one who loves her dearly, the mere recital of her pain is beyond measure grievous. There is still to be seen a receipt for two hundred "*sols parisis*," dated 1575, and signed by

Lucas Pommoreux, —abhorred forever be his name! — who for three years had supplied “all the cats needed for the fire on Saint John’s day.” “To toss a few cats into the flames on the festival of Saint John was considered an encouragement to morality,” observes M. de Ménil ; and an old French song celebrates with pitiless gayety the fate

“ D’un chat qui, d’une course brève,
Monta au feu Saint Jean de Grève.”

The custom continued in force, losing none of its popularity, until 1604, when the gracious child, afterwards Louis the Thirteenth, interceded at court for the lives of these poor animals, and obtained from Henry the Fourth an edict which ended the barbarous sport.

What incited the villagers of France to build these sacrificial fires was the widespread belief that all cats attended the great Witches’ Sabbath on Saint John’s Eve. Fontenelle told Moncrif — that courtly chronicler of high-born pussies — that, when he was a little boy, not even a kitten was to be seen on this night of mystery. The whole feline population was abroad — or so he conceived — intent on deeds of mischief. In Picardy the burning of cats took place on the first Sunday of Lent, and was part of the “Bihourdi,” a festival so old that nobody is sure of its origin. Lanterns and torches were carried through the village streets, bonfires

were lit, fiddlers scraped their bows, and — crowning relish of the entertainment — cats, fastened to long poles, were dropped into the heart of the flames, while the children danced merrily, hand in hand, laughing and screaming with delight. The Flemish peasants, more stolid and unimaginative, carried their cats in bags to the top of steeple or belfry, and dropped the poor creatures from this cruel height. A statute of 1618 forbids the inhabitants of Ypres the pleasure of hurling a cat from their tower on the second Wednesday in Lent, as had been their honoured custom for years.

To Brussels is due the unenviable distinction of having produced the first cat organ, in 1549. This triumph of ingenuity was designed to lend merriment to the street pageant in honour of Philip the Second, and is described by Juan Cristoval, a Spaniard in attendance upon the King.

“The organ,” says Cristoval, “was carried on a car, with a great bear for the musician. In place of pipes, it had twenty cats separately confined in narrow cases, from which they could not stir. Their tails were tied to cords attached to the keyboard of the organ. When the bear pounded the keys, the cords were jerked, and this pulled the tails of the cats, and made them mew in bass or treble notes, according to the nature of the airs.”

Such an invention could have afforded, at best,

but doubtful entertainment ; yet the cat organ was so widely appreciated that German humourists undertook to alter and improve it ; and after a time a choice variety of instruments were constructed, in all of which cats were induced by some well applied torture to furnish forth the necessary music. The same ingenuity was revealed in forcing Pussy to play other prominent but reluctant parts in public celebrations or rejoicings, especially when these were of a religious character ; for then the people naturally felt that the cruelty which so pleased their hearts was sanctified and devout, — at once a protest against the shortcomings of their neighbours, and an illustration of their own superior piety. In an entertaining old book called “Twenty Lookes over all the Round-heads in the World,” which was published in England in 1643, we find related with honest pride an incident designed to show the zeal of the London populace for the principles of the Reformation.

“In the Reigne of Queene Mary (at which time Popery was much exalted), then were the Round-heads” — *i. e.*, the monks and friars — “so odious to the people, that in derision of them was a Cat taken on a Sabbath day, with her head shorne as a Fryer’s, and the likenesse of a vestment cast over her, with her feet tied together, and a round piece of paper like a singing Cake between them ; and

thus was she hanged on a gallows in Cheapside, neere to the Crosse, in the Parish of Saint Mathew. Which Cat, being taken down, was carried to the Bishop of London, and by him sent to Doctor Pendleton (who was then preaching at Paul's Cross), commanding it to be shown to the Congregation. The Round-head Fryers cannot abide to heare of this Cat."

It would seem as though the friars might have been less ashamed of such a cruel and ribald jest than the perpetrators thereof; but, to the robust temper of the time, buffoonery dishonoured its victims. Whatever was made ridiculous was made contemptible; and the poor cat, swinging in its priestly vestments, offered an argument against Popery as simple as it was sound.

A still more forcible demonstration of the popular humour lent vivacity to the rejoicings with which London celebrated the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. In the Hatton correspondence there is a lively account of all the pageants, speeches, and "mighty bonfires" which, on this august occasion, gladdened loyal hearts; and particular mention is made of the burning of a "most costly Pope," constructed of wicker-work, and carried with mock solemnity through the streets, accompanied by two "divells." The interior of this Pope was filled with live cats; "which cats," says the writer gleefully,

“squalled in a most hideous manner as soon as they felt the fire ;” — to the delight of the spectators, who jokingly pretended that it was the language of the Pope and the devils which they heard. The cat organ of the Brussels fête fades into mere humanity alongside of playfulness like this.

Why, we ask ourselves, should the cat have been ever the chosen victim of such savage sport ? All animals can suffer ; most animals can cry out in their pain. The pleasure derived from torturing a cat could have been no keener than that which might have been yielded by the suffering of any other beast. What was it then that lent such peculiar appropriateness and piquancy to the sacrifice of this gentle little creature, unless her association with witchcraft and the powers of evil placed her beyond mercy’s pale ? Not only was there no pity for her in the world ; but superstition had so claimed her for its prey that foul murder dogged her steps from innocent kittenhood, however softly and warily she might tread. Bucolic England, thick-skulled and heavy-witted, roasted her alive in its brick ovens, simply because such a holocaust was believed, none knew why, to bring good luck to the house. Scotland, more imaginative and more sinister, spitted her before a slow fire, as a means of divining the future. It was thought that the witch cats of the neighbourhood would come to their

comrade's aid, — which does credit to their kindness of heart, — and would answer any questions to obtain her release.

Strange and gruesome remedies for rheumatism, and ague, and all the ills that village flesh is heir to, were extracted from Pussy's brains and bones; and countless means were devised by which she might afford the rural population such entertainment as it was best fitted to enjoy. Scottish peasants amused themselves by hanging her up in a small cask or firkin, half full of soot, at which men and boys struck vigorous blows, striving to escape before the soot fell on them. This primitive game might have been played just as effectively without the assistance of the cat; but it would have been flavourless had it lacked what Montaigne so admirably calls "the tart, sweet pleasure of inflicting pain."

In England, a cat tucked into a leathern bottle was a favourite target for archery. — "Hang me in a bottle like a cat, and shoot at me," says Benedict blithely; and cat-worrying was for centuries as much a recognized sport as cock-fighting, or bull and badger baiting. It is hard to forgive Christopher North for his apparent enjoyment of this most cruel of amusements, which he describes with a zest that does him infinite shame. In cock-fights and dog-fights there is fair play, and the combatants

are enamoured of the strife ; but the desperate courage of a cat at bay can ill excuse the brutality which matches it against an animal of many times its strength. That a good sportsman like Wilson should have relished such a spectacle, puts us out of conceit with humanity.

In tracing the long and bitter persecution of the cat, there are two points to be especially considered. Its sinister reputation — obtained, Heaven knows how, — as the accomplice of witches, and the chosen emissary of the Fiend ; and the evil character it won for itself — again, Heaven knows how, — as an animal equally perfidious and malign. In zoölogical mythology, and in the folk-lore of every land, it figures darkly, and without esteem. A Hindoo fable represents the cat as living with pretended austerity on the banks of the Ganges. The fame of the new Saint's piety, of his long prayers and rigorous fasts, inspires the little birds and mice with such confidence that they gather around him daily, and are daily devoured. From Alexandria we have the story, retold by Æsop and La Fontaine, of the cat bride who leaps from her husband's embraces after a scudding mouse. In an Alsatian legend, a cat comes again and again as a nightmare to torment a young joiner. He wakens once to find her stealing into his room through a hole in the chimney-place ; whereupon he stops up the hole,

and nails one of her paws to the floor. The next morning reveals to him a beautiful young woman, whom, with the customary fatuity of youth, he promptly marries. But, after a year of wedded life, the hole is by some luckless chance uncovered, and the unfaithful wife disappears, never to be seen again.

Every country adds its quota of dispraise. The story of the nightmare cat appears with variations in the folk-lore of Germany, Austria, and France. Italy tells the fable of the cock who wants to be Pope. His friend, the cat, offers to accompany the foolish bird to Rome, and eats him up comfortably on the first day's journey. In a Bavarian tale, the cat marries the mouse, and sups, without a shadow of remorse, on her small bridegroom. Now and then the picture is brightened by some unexpected touch of fidelity or gratitude, as in the *Afanassiëff*, where a peasant girl gives the witch's cat a piece of ham, and is helped by him generously in return. There is also a grisly Tuscan legend of a servant maid who unwittingly disturbs the procession of ghosts, on the terrible "Night of the Dead." When the phantoms have swept noiselessly past, she finds, to her horror, that she has a human hand in her basket. By the advice of a wise woman, she keeps this hand a year, and on the following Feast of All Souls she ventures once again to stand in the road

at midnight, with the open basket at her feet, and a black cat clasped tightly in her arms. "Take back your hand, my masters!" she pleads; and one of the ghosts plucks it from the basket, whispering grimly, "Were it not for the thing you carry, you should walk this night by my side."

The protection afforded by the cat in such an instance was, after all, involuntary, and by no means lessened her disrepute. One does not lightly love a guardian so uncanny. It is probable also that the sailors' wives of Scarborough, who filched their neighbours' black kittens to insure their husbands' safe return from sea, regarded these stolen prizes with more respect than affection. Even in instances where the animal has manifested its own too rare regard, there is often a subtle horror associated with its faithfulness. We remember apprehensively the cat that loved the poisoner, Wainwright, that would not leave his side, and that was the sole witness of his sudden death.

From Lyons comes a dreadful story of crime and retribution. Towards the close of the last century, a woman was found murdered in her home, her throat brutally cut, her oaken chest rifled of its scanty treasures. She had lived alone, with no other companion than a great brindled cat, and this cat was now discovered by the neighbours huddled on a cornice of the cupboard, his glaring eyes fixed

full upon his dead mistress. No persuasion nor artifice could move him from his post. For two whole days and nights he crouched there like a panther tense for the spring. On the third morning, a man, suspected of the murder, was brought into the room, when suddenly, and with horrible fury, the creature hurled himself upon the assassin, biting and tearing him savagely. Confession and execution followed ; but of the cat's fate we know nothing. Two hundred years earlier, his shrift would have been a short one. Not even his avenging rage could have saved him from sharing the murderer's grave.

Innocence was no protection for an outcast of his fated race. Among the famous French trials of the seventeenth century is one of a woman who had strangled in cold blood several little children left by their mothers to her care. For this hideous crime she was condemned to be hung in an iron cage over a slow fire, in company with fourteen cats that had killed nobody, but that added to the horror of the spectacle by clawing fiercely at the murderess in the throes of their own death agony.

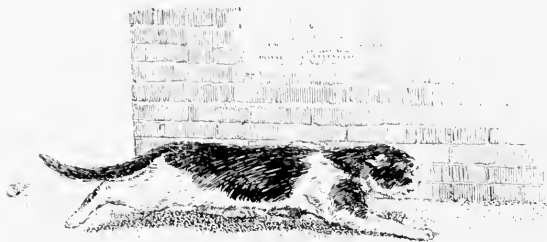
The page of Pussy's martyrdom has been long in turning. It has been no pleasure, Heaven knows, to linger over it ; but when we think of the strange and bitter vicissitudes through which she has passed, — this creature so small and helpless, so timid

and so brave, we come to a better understanding of her complex, subtle, and, to many minds, unlovely character. Self-sufficing by nature, she has learned distrust through centuries of suffering. To see a cat run across a street is to understand that her race has for generation after generation been hunted as cruelly as the hare. She scurries by swiftly and fearfully, as did that poor ancestress of hers whom the Puritan soldiers chased derisively around the nave of Lichfield Cathedral, until Prince Rupert interrupted their pious sport. She knows not now precisely what she dreads,—the coast being clear, and no boys nor dogs in sight; she knew not three hundred years ago why she was held responsible for theological errors in which she had no share. Catholicism, Anglicanism, Puritanism,—all were alike indifferent to her; yet, as we have seen, she bore the burden of man's devout distaste for his neighbour's creed. Perhaps the last authentic instance of feline persecution for conscience' sake was the case of the "ecclesiastical cat" that George Borrow met and rescued in Wales.

The Vicar of Llangollen, a most unpopular character in a stronghold of sturdy dissent, had returned to England, leaving behind him his black cat; and the antagonism formerly felt for the clergyman had been transferred to the clerical pet. No householder would give it food or shelter; and, if it slunk

trembling through the village streets, the children pelted it with stones and clots of mud. "There never was a cat so ill-treated as that poor Church of England animal," says Borrow indignantly; "and altogether on account of the opinions which it was supposed to have imbibed in the house of its late master; for I never could learn that the dissenters of Llangollen were in the habit of persecuting other cats. The cat was a Church of England cat, and that was enough." Finally he was obliged to carry away this unconscious and reluctant martyr, and to seek for it an asylum in another village, where it was charitably received by a young woman, who, being herself an Anglican, was all the more ready to aid an oppressed scion of the Establishment.

It is a touch of comedy with which to ring down the curtain on Pussy's tragic past.





CHAPTER IV

RENAISSANCE

“ Un homme chérissoit éperdument sa chatte ;
Il la trouvoit mignonne, et belle, et délicate,
Qui miauloit d'un ton fort doux :
Il étoit plus fou que les fous.”

THE close of the sixteenth century saw western Europe undergoing a curious and comfortable change. Civilization, with her handmaid, luxury, and her schoolmaster, the printing-press, had seduced the souls of men. War was no longer a pastime for princes ; it was a serious and expensive business, frowned upon by financiers, and deferred as tediously as possible. Men built themselves costly homes, bought pictures and tapestries and vellum-bound books, and began slowly

to understand the first rudiments of the noble art of cooking. Rich merchants enjoyed the delights of ostentation, and the great middle class studied its own comfort with commendable industry. An air of well-being spread over the towns, and, in favoured lands like England, extended itself even to the peasantry. Lazy and luke-warm antagonisms supplanted the old fiery intolerance. Life grew softer, sweeter, replete with self-indulgence and self-satisfaction. All things were working harmoniously for the reëstablishment of the cat in popular esteem. "The time had arrived," says M. Havard prettily, "for her to profit by new and gracious conditions. She became once more the assiduous guest of a courteous and companionable society."

It is in France that we find the first distinct proofs of Pussy's return to favour ; in France, where the persecution of the peasant had yielded to the love and pity of the prince, and where she was destined, in later years, to rule over loyal hearts. Indeed, M. Gautier always affirmed that only a Frenchman could understand the fine and subtle qualities of a cat. Nevertheless, it was very cautiously that she ventured, with many a soft and shy intrusion, to establish herself by friendly hearths. Centuries of cruel injustice weighed upon her spirits, and there were still men who shrank with abhorrence from her panther-like beauty and grace.

Henry the Third, who had so much affection to spare for little dogs, could not look at a cat without fainting ; and Ronsard confesses that he trembled from head to foot if he met one, even at broad noon.

“ Homme ne vis, qui tant hâisse au monde
Les Chats que moi d'une haine profonde ;
Je hais leurs yeux, leur fronts, et leur regard.”

Other and kinder voices, however, were raised, even at this early date, in defence of Pussy's charms. Joachim du Bellay was the first French poet who sang the praises of his cat, — the beautiful and amiable Belaud ; and Montaigne, in his lazy, luminous fashion, “without a spur or even a pat from Lady Vanity,” wrote more than three hundred years ago the final word upon the subject ; a word which we have been assiduously repeating and amplifying — but not improving — ever since. “When I play with my cat,” he muses softly, “who knows whether she diverts herself with me, or I with her ! We entertain one another with mutual follies, struggling for a garter ; and, if I have my time to begin or to refuse, she also has hers. It is because I cannot understand her language that we agree no better ; and perhaps she laughs at my simplicity in making sport to amuse her.”

This is the whole story of human and feline companionship. This is the whole nature of the cat, accepted with philosophy, and described with care-

less exactitude. The independence of character, the coldness of heart, the alternations of playfulness and reserve, the courteous but temperate regard, granted on terms of absolute equality, — these things were understood and respected by one too wisely kind for intolerance. “Thus freely speaketh Montaigne concerning cats,” and there is little to add to his words. The world is now so old that everything we would like to say has been said long ago by those who first had the opportunity.

Two proofs we find of Pussy’s rapid progress in esteem. The French country houses built between the middle of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were all furnished with “*chatières*,” little openings cut in the doors for the accommodation of the cat, who wandered in and out of the great chill tapestried rooms as her restless fancy prompted her. These *chatières* indicate a careful study of her convenience, yet, by the close of the seventeenth century, they had wholly disappeared; — a circumstance, says M. Havard, which points to but one conclusion. In her hundred years of pampered domesticity, the cat had accustomed mankind to wait upon her pleasure. There was no longer any need of creeping through a hole. If she wanted to come in or go out, — and cats are perpetually wanting to do one or the other, — somebody was always ready to get up and open the door.

Richelieu lent the weight of his all-powerful example to the fast-growing passion for pussies, although he limited his own appreciation to their infant charms. He delighted in kittens, — the most bewitching playthings in the world, — because they amused him, and saved him now and then from the bleak melancholy which lay ever waiting for a leisure hour. But though he petted and fondled them, smiled at their absurdities, and humoured their love of mischief, the grace of attachment to these frolicsome little friends was denied him all his life. When they matured into sobriety, and put on the delicate charm of mingled intelligence and caprice, he sent them away, and gave their place in his cabinet, and in what was by courtesy called his heart, to a younger and gayer generation.

Mazarin's love for cats was a more sincere and steadfast emotion. He cherished his beautiful pets all their lives, and took pleasure in the superciliousness of their behaviour. His attitude towards them was one of parental care, sweetened and softened by humility. Like Cardinal Wolsey, he reserved his arrogance for men, whose knees are supple to bend; and, like Wolsey, he found in the companionship of his cat the sure road to meekness and self-abasement. For there is nothing so lowering to one's self-esteem as the affectionate contempt of a beloved cat.

“ Half gentle kindness and half disdain,
In salutation courtly and urbane,
Where naught disturbs the concord of her reign.”

In the brilliant court of Louis the Fourteenth, Pussiness began that series of social triumphs which led, step by step, to her grand apotheosis during the following reign. Her beauty, her exquisite propriety of demeanour, her velvet footfall, her gentle, flattering purr, her love of luxury and repose, all fitted her for the splendour of her surroundings. The art with which she veiled her mind and motives was duly appreciated by courtiers, forever occupied in masking their own emotions. She followed unconsciously the advice of the old French noble who sent his son to court with these wise words: “ Seize everything, speak ill of nobody, and sit down whenever you have the opportunity.” “ Gracieuse, supple et perfide,” she harmonized exquisitely with a society which reflected her dominant traits. Saint Simon, in an amusing passage of his *Memoirs*, describes the intrusion of a kitten upon one of the Royal Councils, and the delight of the little king, Louis the Fifteenth, — a boy of eight, — at this pleasant interruption of business. The kitten, with the audacity of kittenhood, jumped first upon the princely knee, and thence to the council table, where it pranced and paddled among the papers, tolerated for the sake of the pale tired child

who presided silently and courteously for hours over these tedious meetings. Indeed, Saint Simon, then fuming with indignation at the recent appointment of new Councillors, proposed the adoption of the kitten as a permanent member of the august assembly ; — a jest which seems to have been considered by himself and others as exceedingly bitter and well-timed.

It is to François Augustin Paradis de Moncrif that we owe our intimate acquaintance with the most distinguished cats of this period. Scotch by descent, Parisian by birth, courtier by taste and training, poet, dramatist, *littérateur*, and faithful lover of the fair feline race, Moncrif, in happy mood, conceived the idea of writing a series of letters in praise of cats. No one was better fitted for the task ; no one could have accomplished it more gracefully. In his pages, the names of pussies, long since dead, live sweetly embalmed in verse. Here may we read of Marmalain, the beautiful cat of Mme. la Duchesse du Maine, who inscribed to her favourite a spirited *rondeau*, full of tender flattery, and the fond conceits hallowed by true affection. When Marmalain died, his noble mistress was too profoundly dejected to compose a fitting epitaph ; so to M. La Mothe le Vayer was assigned that honour, and his touching lines have been sympathetically translated by Mr. Edmund Gosse.

" Puss passer-by, within this simple tomb
 Lies one whose life fell Atropos hath shred ;
 The happiest cat on earth hath heard his doom,
 And sleeps forever in a marble bed.
 Alas ! what long delicious days I 've seen !
 O cats of Egypt, my illustrious sires,
 You who on altars, bound with garlands green,
 Have melted hearts, and kindled fond desires ;
 Hymns in your praise were paid, and offerings too,
 But I 'm not jealous of those rites divine ;
 Since Ludovisa loved me, fond and true,
 Your ancient glory was less proud than mine.
 To live, a simple pussy, by her side,
 Was nobler far than to be deified."

From Moncrif, too, we learn of Tata, the cat of
 Mme. la Marquise de Montglas ; and of Dom Gris,
 the cat of Mme. la Duchesse de Béthune ; and of
 the incomparable Ménine, " morte vierge au prin-
 temps de la vie," whom the young Duchesse de
 Lesdiguières cherished and lost.

" Ménine, qui jamais ne connut de Ménin,
 Et qui fut, de son temps, des Chattes la Lucrèce ;
 Chatte pour tout le monde, et, pour les Chats, Tigresse."

When this fair Amazon died, Mme. de Lesdiguières
 built over the little corpse a noble mausoleum, with
 a marble pussy sleeping upon a marble pillow,
 whereon was engraved the following courtly epitaph :

" Ci git une Chatte jolie :
 Sa Maitresse qui n'aima rien,
 L'aima jusque à la folie ;
 Pourquoi le dire ? On le voit bien."

Still more pathetic is the story of Mlle. du Puy's music loving cat, who listened with critical attention when his mistress played upon the harp; manifesting his pleasure if she played well, and his annoyance if she blundered. Mlle. du Puy attributed her skill as a harpist mainly to this cat's taste and judgment; and, to mark her gratitude for so great a service, she bequeathed him at her death a town house, a country house, and an income sufficient to maintain both establishments. Her family, grasping and avaricious as are most kith and kin, contested the will, and succeeded, after a long struggle in the courts, in wresting from the legatee an estate which, by every law of justice and morality, was his, and his alone.

Of all the cats, however, whom Moncrif delighted to applaud, none fills so proud a place in his letters, and in our regard, as Grisette, the beloved pet of Mme. Deshoullières.

“ Deshoullières cares not for the smart
Her bright eyes cause, disdainful hussy!
But, like a mouse, her idle heart
Is captured by a pussy.”

Grisette was a cat of parts. Her manners were marked by gentle distinction; and to her rare beauty were added intelligence, and a somewhat chilling sweetness of character. She inspired affection in all whom she honoured with her notice;

and we may read page after page of impassioned verse addressed to her by the wits and poets of her day, who veiled their own sentiments thinly under the disguise of despairing feline suitors. There seems to have been little coquetry in Griset. She granted few favours; but preserved that soft and courteous indifference, that exquisite delicacy and tact, which compelled respect as well as adoration. Yet she too had a charming poetic gift, — Mme. Deshoullières acting as her amanuensis, — and nothing can be prettier than her shy admission to Tata that his gallantry and valour made her little heart beat fast; or than these lines which defy translation, but which may be accepted as the highest standard of absolute good-breeding for a cat. They should be hung, in their sweet old French, on the walls of every kitten nursery in the world.

“ Sçavez-vous de quel air discret et raisonnable
J’ay ma part des bons répas?
J’appuye discrètement ma patte sur les bras
De ceux qui sont assis à table.
Si leur faim est inexorable,
Ma faim ne se rebute pas;
Et d’un air toujours agréable,
Je tire du moins charitable
Les morceaux les plus délicats.”

It is melancholy to relate that Moncrif was pelted with ridicule by the satirists of his day because of

this pleasant "Histoire des Chats;" and that, after his election to the French Academy, he had the weakness to withdraw the book from circulation. Solid and serious scholars, who had inaugurated what M. Champfleury calls "the grievous system of professional literature," pretended to believe that cats were unworthy of an Academician's momentous regard. Wits made merry at the expense of the "historiogriffe;" and false friends, like Voltaire, flattered the poor poet out of his reason, and then laughed sourly at the simplicity which credited men with truth. Upon the awful and august occasion of Moncrif's maiden speech, some wag, thrilling with joy at his own brilliant jest, turned a cat loose in the room; and when the frightened creature began to mew, the Academicians laughed and mewed in chorus, to the painful confusion of the newly elected. — "Rira mieux qui rira dernière." To-day, when tomes of oppressive erudition lie swathed in shrouds of dust; when names once honoured are well-nigh forgotten; when Moncrif's other writings — plays, and poems, and pastorals — have slipped unobtrusively into oblivion; this "gravely frivolous" little book still gains a hearing for its author. No one who truly loves cats can afford to neglect so interesting a period in their history, nor so veracious and admirable an historian.

If Moncrif be the first genuine chronicler, the Froissart of cats, La Fontaine, says M. Feuillet de Conches, is their Homer. "He painted them, as he studied them, under all aspects, and with a master's skill." But that he painted them unkindly is too evident for denial. He borrowed Rodilardus from Rabelais, and turned that feline Samson into a cruel and insatiable tyrant,

* "L'Attila, le fléau des rats,"

who wages day and night a relentless war of extermination.

"Et Rodilard passoit, chez la gent misérable,
Non pour un chat, mais pour un diable."

This "Alexander of cats" is as brave as he is merciless, — cowardice has never been a cattish trait, — but he is as false and malicious as he is brave. He sows the seeds of dissension between other animals, and laughs in his sleeve at their stupidity. He refuses pity to the mouseling in these terrible words, "Cats know not how to pardon." He is a prince of hypocrites, and, like the hermit of the Ganges, affects piety, and the spirit of universal brotherhood. When the foolish young rabbit quarrels with the weasel, she consents to abide by the just decision of Raminagrobis, a saintly puss of ascetic habits and incorruptible morals; a "chate-mite," who, sighing that he is old and deaf, per-

suades the disputants to approach within reach of his murderous claws. Where Æsop treats Pussy with some kindness, as in the fable of "The Cat and the Fox," La Fontaine is at pains to insist that this pair of pilgrims are pious frauds, arch-dissemblers, who compensate themselves with many a strangled chicken and stolen cheese for the hardships of their pilgrimage. He sums up feline characteristics in the surpassing cynicism of the old rat's scornful speech; "No benefit can win gratitude from a cat."

And this defamer, we are bidden to believe, sings Homerically of the race which he defames? What if his good humour be ever unimpaired, and if his comfortable laugh reminds us now and then that he, for his part, does not seriously object to such amazing scampishness? We who are forced to object, — as living in a sternly moral age, — wish that a little mercy, or even a little justice, had tempered these gay calumnies which will outlive truth itself. For so great is La Fontaine's charm, so felicitous is every finely chosen phrase, that the beauty of his verse wins permanence for his most scandalous characterizations. He admits the seductive qualities of the cat. Like the amorous young Greek of the fable, he finds her

"mignonne, et belle, et délicate,"

inspiring foolish and excessive affection, to which

she returns a selfish indifference. He describes exquisitely and precisely the "gentle hypocrite," with her irreproachable modesty of demeanour, her soft sleek fur, her noiseless step, her air of mingled graciousness and dignity, her sleepy eyes half shut, lest their gleam should betray the tigerish soul within. This is the cat of La Fontaine, an unworthy picture, drawn with consummate skill. France accepted her without shadow of protest, granting to her courage, her cunning, and her loveliness, pardon for many sins. After all, these amiable critics may have urged, we forgive Achilles much, because he is brave; Odysseus more, because he is acute; Helen most of all, because she is beautiful. Why then pass priggish judgment upon a creature brave as Achilles, acute as Odysseus, beautiful as Helen? She has the qualities of her defects; and these things are as the wise gods ordain. We cannot mould her to our liking; Montaigne has told us so. She will not strive for our approval, any more than she will toil for our convenience. "*Libertas sine Labore.*" She walks her chosen path by our side; but our ways are not her ways, our influence does not remotely reach her. Let us abandon the office of critic, where there is no mutual standard for criticism.

And so it was that Mme. la Duchesse de Bouillon — true lover of cats and their most tender friend —

begged La Fontaine to give her a copy of every fable in which her favourite animal played its ungrateful part. These precious manuscripts, after being lost for a century and more, were discovered by M. Feuillet de Conches, stored away in a lumber room with other interesting and valuable papers of the de Bouillon family, whose estate had passed into alien hands, and whose long-prized treasures had been thrust into dusty oblivion.





CHAPTER V

THE CAT OF ALBION

“Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat,
Where have you been?”

“I’ve been to London,
To look at the Queen.”

THIS beaste is called a Musion, for that he is enimie to Myse and Rattes. He is slye and wittie, and seeth so sharpely that he overcommeth darknes of the nighte by the shyninge lyghte of his eyne. In shape of bodye he is lyke unto a Leopard, and hathe a great mouthe.

He dothe delight that he enjoyeth his libertye ; and in his youthe he is swifte, plyante and merrie. He maketh a ruffull noyse and a gastefull when he profereth to fighte with an other. He is a cruell beaste when he is wilde, and falleth on his owne feete from most high places, and seldom is hurt therewith. When he hath a fayre skinne, he is, as it were, prowde thereof, and then he goeth faste aboute to be seene."

So writes John Bossewell, in his "Workes of Armorie," 1597 ; and the vigour and accuracy of the description shame our feebler pens. Bossewell, it is true, found part of this admirable portrait in a still older book, translated from the Latin by Thomas Berthlet, and printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1498. In its curious pages, the wild cat of Great Britain and his tamer brother are characterized with minute fidelity, the writer dwelling upon their close resemblance to the leopard, their swiftness, grace, and savage playfulness.

"The Cat is surely most like to the Leopard, and hathe a great mouthe, and sharp teeth, and a long tongue, plyante, thin and subtle. He lappeth therewith when he drinketh, as other beastes do that have the nether lip shorter than the over ; for, by cause of unevenness of lips, such beastes suck not in drinking, but lap and lick, as Aristotle saith, and Plinius also. He is a swifte and merye beaste

in youthe, and leapeth, and riseth on all things that are tofore him ; and is led by a straw, and playeth therewith, and is a righte heavye beaste in age, and full sleepe, and lyeth slyly in waite for Mice ; and is ware where they bene more by smell than by sighte, and hunteth, and riseth on them in privy places. And when he taketh a Mouse, he playeth therewith, and eateth him after the play. He is a cruell beaste when he is wilde, and dwelleth in woods, and hunteth there small beastes as conies and hares.”

There is something in the bald simplicity of the statement, “ And when he taketh a Mouse, he playeth therewith, and eateth him after the play,” which makes us wince. Why is the cat’s pathway trailed with blood? We have grown so accustomed to the little tragedy which is being acted over and over again under our roofs, that its grimness fails to move our hearts to pity. Moreover, apart from the fact that the mouse enjoys an evil reputation as an admittedly undesirable tenant, it is not the habit of mankind to concern itself deeply over the sufferings of small creatures. An animal must approach nearer to our own bulk to make its pain respectable. Only when Shakespeare uses this trivial incident as an illustration of mortal anguish, do we recognize its horror.

“ Yet, foul night-waking cat, he doth but dally,
While in his holdfast foot the weak mouse panteth.”

Maister Salmon, who published his "Compleat English Physician," in 1693, describes "Catus, the Cat," with careful minuteness, and with an admiration founded apparently on the strange cures wrought by a judicious use of its brains. "As to its Eyes," he continues gravely, "Authors say that they shine in the Night; and see better at the full, and more dimly at the change of the Moon. Also that the Cat doth vary his Eyes with the Sun; the Pupil being round at Sunrise, long towards Noon, and not to be seen at all at Night, but the whole Eye shining in the darkness. These appearances of the Cat's Eyes, I am sure are true; but whether they answer to the times of the Day, I have never observed. It is a crafty, subtle, watchful Creature, very loving and familiar with Mankind; but the mortal Enemy of the Rat, Mouse, and every sort of Bird, which it seizes on as its Prey. Its flesh is not generally eaten, yet in some Countries is esteemed an excellent dish."

The cat's eyes seem to have been used as a sort of rude clock for centuries in the East, where people have few household utensils, and plenty of leisure for observation. Père Huc tells us that, when travelling in the interior of China, he asked a peasant boy, who was leading a buffalo to graze, if it were yet noon. The child glanced first at the sky, where the sun was hidden by driving clouds; and,

reading there no answer to the question, he ran back to the house, reappearing in a moment with a large cat in his arms. Pushing open its eyelids with his forefinger, — an operation to which the animal submitted with a patience evidently born of long habitude, — he said carelessly, “Look, it wants still an hour and more to noon.” When the missionary expressed his amazement at this primitive time-piece, other natives explained to him that on cloudy days their cats always served them as dials. “They pointed out that the pupils of the creature’s eyes grew gradually narrower until noon, when they were little more than thin perpendicular lines, and that with the descent of the sun began their slow expansion.”

It was the waxing and waning of the light in Pussy’s beautiful eyes, with the waxing and waning of the day, which gave her, centuries before, her proud preëminence in the great Sun-temple of Heliopolis.

Maister Salmon is the only English writer who has a word to say on this subject, and even he confesses he has never taken the trouble to make any observations for himself. The sole use of the cat in England was to hunt mice and rats; and while there are constant allusions in early English letters to her vigilance and prowess, while she figures in proverbs, and old saws, and rude rhymes, it is sel-

dom that a flattering or grateful word is spoken. No pretty compliments here ; no charming allusions to her beauty and distinction, as in those flowers of Gallic verse. Chaucer, indeed, aptly compares Pussy, snug and sleek in her soft fur, to a benefited Canon ; but Chaucer had no place in his heart for cats. Perhaps his passionate love for birds prejudiced him against their destroyer ; perhaps his frankly masculine temperament debarred him from sympathy with a creature so subtle and seductive. He reproaches her bitterly because her passion for the chase exceeds all other passions in her breast ; and this is a just arraignment, for the cat which is, by courtesy, called domestic, is as pure a beast of prey as its wild cousin of the woods and mountains. He also recognizes her beauty, but with a grudging slur, — the slur which masculinity has, during all ages, delighted to cast upon femininity ; and in which femininity has, during all ages, failed to feel the sting.

“ For whoso woldè senge a cattès skyn,
Thenne wolde the cat wel dwellen in hir in ;
And if the cattès skyn be slyk and gay,
She wol nat dwelle in housè half a day.
But forth she wol, er any day be dawed,
To shewe hir skyn, and goon a-caterwawed.”

It may be remembered that John Bossewell, honest man, assigns the same trait to the male cat, —

wild or tame, — acknowledging it possibly as a universal and most excellent characteristic of all sentient creatures. “When he hath a fayre skinne, he is, as it were, prowde thereof, and then he goeth faste aboute to be seene.”

Other sins, more flagrant than vanity, were laid at Pussy's doors. Not only was she the “mortal Enemy” of rats and mice, which won her chill esteem from selfish utilitarians ; but, like a true free-booter, she waged war with the same frank enjoyment upon “every sort of Bird,” as Maister Salmon sadly confesses ; making no nice distinction between the feathered nestling of the woods and her master's treasured possessions. Farmers' wives were wont to fasten little sprigs of rue beneath the wings of their chicks and ducklings, in the belief that the cat's distaste for this herb of grace would save the barnyard innocents. The marauding spirit that sent her pillaging the cupboard, and revelling in the dairy, prompted her patient and sinister ambush beneath the swinging wicker cage, wherein piped a tame bullfinch or spiritless captive lark. The Greek Agathias, passionately lamenting the death of his pet partridge in the cat's cruel claws, is outclamoured by John Skelton, who, for hundreds of lines in “The Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe,” bewails the fate of that insignificant bird, and hurls — in fair Margery's name — breathless and terrible denunciations at its destroyer.

“Gyb, our cat savage,
That in a furyous rage
Caught Phylp by the head,
And slew him there starke dead.”

Never was grief voiced with such sweet and shrill absurdity. Never was such a formidable array of curses launched at the head of any murderer, since murders were known to man.

“That vengeaunce I aske and crye,
By way of exclamacyon,
On all the whole nacyon
Of cattes wylde and tame;
God send them sorowe and shame!
That cat especyally
That slew so cruelly
My lytell pretty sparowe
That I brought up at Carowe.

O cat of churlyshe kynde,
The Fynde was in thy minde
When thou my byrde untwynde!
I would thou haddest ben blynde!
The leopardes savage,
The lyons in theyr rage,
Myght catche thee in theyr pawes!
And gnawe thee in theyr jawes!
The serpentes of Lybany
Myght styngge thee venymously!
The dragones with theyr tonges
Myght poyson thy lyver and longes!
The mantycors of the montaynes
Myght fede them on thy braynes!
Melanchates, that hounde
That plucked Actæon to the grounde,

THE FIRESIDE SPHINX

Gave hym his mortall wounde,
 Chaunged to a dere,
 The story doth appere,
 Was chaunged to an harte :
 So thou, foule cat that thou arte,
 The selfe same hounde
 Myght thee confounde,
 That his owne lord bote,
 Myght byte asondre thy throte !
 Of Inde the gredy grypes
 Myght tere out all thy trypes !
 Of Arcady the beares
 Myght plucke away thyne eares !
 The wylde wolfe Lycaon
 Byte asondre thy backe bone !
 Of Ethna the brennyng hyll,
 That day and nyghte brenneth styl,
 Set in thy tayle a blase,
 That all the world may gase
 And wonder upon thee !
 From Ocyan the greate sea
 Unto the Isles of Orchady ;
 From Tyllbery ferry
 To the playne of Salysbery !
 So trayterously my byrde to kyll,
 That never ought thee evyll wyll !”

Before this tremendous *anathema maranatha*, all ordinary cursing, the mere “current compliments of theological parting,” soften into insignificance. Was there ever such a wanton waste of wrath ! Was ever a trivial sin so exalted by punishment ! Not only is poor Gyb doomed to ignite his tail at Etna, and

“like another Helen,”

fire Salisbury plain with his blazing torch ; but the Arcadian bears, (she-bears probably, like Elisha's terrible allies), the "serpentes of Lybany," dragons, lions, leopards, and those formidable

"mantycors of the montaynes,"

— whatever they may be — are all summoned from the ordinary business of their lives to avenge a sparrow's death upon a cat.

" These vylanous false cattes
Were made for myse and rattes,
And not for byrdes smalle ; "

explains Phylp's mistress between her sobs ; but this is precisely the point upon which she and Gyb would naturally take issue. No broad-minded cat recognizes such trivial classifications.

Gilbert, abbreviated to Gyb or Gib, was the common name for a male cat in Skelton's England, just as Thomas or Tom is the common name to-day. On the continent, Tybalt or Tybert — familiar to all readers of "Reineke Fuchs" — became, by the same process of contraction, Tyb or Tib. Mercutio, in "Romeo and Juliet," insults Tybalt on this easy score : —

" Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk ?

Tybalt. What wouldst thou have with me ?

Mercutio. Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives."

The term gib cat or gil cat came in time to signify an old male, well past the heyday of his prime.

“I am as melancholy as a gib cat,”

sighs Falstaff wearily. Grimalkin, on the other hand, was less a domestic than a poetical appellation, given often to Pussy in literature, but never in friendly fireside intercourse. John Philips deemed the word sufficiently Miltonic to fit his parody, “The Splendid Shilling,” published in 1703.

“Grimalkin, to Domestick Vermin sworn
An everlasting Foe, with watchful Eye
Lies nightly brooding o’er a chinky Gap,
Protending her fell Claws, to thoughtless Mice
Sure Ruin.”

Through long association with witchcraft — witches’ cats seem to have been constantly christened Grimalkin — the name became deservedly unpopular.

“Grimalkin, the foul Fiend’s cat,
Grimalkin, the witche’s brat.”

runs an ancient and unsavoury rhyme, — one of a number which served to blacken an innocent animal’s reputation.

From many an old adage, from many a proverb and rude snatch of rhyme, we may judge for ourselves how Pussy gradually, and with soft insistence, won her place by cottage hearth, and in the snug English farm. Her characteristics were so marked, her habits so unalterable, that she came in time to stand for certain qualities, and to serve as their homely illustration. Her chimney-corner

life made her, more than any other animal, the target for hourly observation ; and the sagacity of our forefathers wove from her wise and wicked ways some shrewd lessons for their own enlightenment. "A blate cat makes a proud mouse," and "A half-penny cat may look at a king," are among the pithiest of Scotch proverbs. "The cat with a straw tail keeps away from the fire," is English. "Care killed a cat," — originally "Care clammed a cat," comes from Herefordshire. "The cat sees through shut lids," and "Honest as the cat when the meat is out of reach," reflect more credit upon Pussy's acuteness than upon her rectitude. "No playing with a straw before an old cat," is John Heywood's contribution in 1562, and so is the well-known couplet,

"Fain would the cat fish eat,
But she is loth to wet her feet ;"

while the still more familiar nursery rhyme,

"When the cat is away,
The mice may play ;"

was written by Thomas Heywood in 1607. Even George Herbert did not disdain to borrow an illustration from this ever useful animal. "Send not the cat for lard," is his method of saying, Lead not your neighbour into temptation.

Mr. Harrison Weir has compiled a curious and valuable glossary of words and idioms which owe

their derivation to the cat ; such as “ cat-handed,” a Devonshire term for awkward ; “ a cat’s walk,” which in Cornwall signifies a little walk near home ; “ cat-lap,” very weak tea or broth, fit only for Pussy’s food ; “ cat-nap,” the lightest of dozes ; “ cat-call,”

“ Sound, sound, ye viols ; be the cat-call dumb.”

“ caterwauling,”

“ What a caterwauling do you keep here ! ”

and the familiar “ cat’s-paw,” “ cat’s-eye,” and “ cat o’ nine tails.” Allusions to the animal’s nine lives — Heaven knows she needed them ! — are frequent in early English plays. “ ’T is a pity you had not ten lives, — a cat’s and your own,” says Jonson in “ Every Man in His Humour ; ” and Middleton in “ Blurt, Master Constable,” makes the off-hand assertion that cats “ have nine lives apiece, like a woman.”

Some of the most common expressions seem meaningless enough, yet have been handed down from parent to child for endless generations, until they have become a tradition in every nursery. How often has the word “ she ” been checked upon our infant lips by the certainty of hearing for the fiftieth time that “ she ” is the “ cat’s mother ? ” Little English children, however, especially if they be bred in Norfolk, are told that “ she ” is the

“cat’s aunt;” while a foolish boy who grins and stammers instead of answering promptly is called — Oh! stinging reproach! — the “cat’s uncle.” There is even a name to denote this feline consanguinity, — Grinagog, which sounds like the very embodiment of contempt.

The wild-cat, that splendid and courageous beast which roamed the English woods in savage freedom, was hunted both for the beauty of its skin, and because, though small in stature, its strength and fierceness made it a noble quarry. In those old rough days the chase was a dangerous diversion, and men loved it for the peril that it brought. Richard the Second granted to the Abbot of Peterborough, who was a man of mettle, a license to hunt wild cats in the royal forest. In Beaumont and Fletcher’s “Scornful Lady,” we find this allusion to the sport: —

“Bring out the cat-hounds; I’ll make you take a tree.”

and Shakespeare does infinite honour to the animal’s spirit when he likens Katharine to one, in “Taming of the Shrew.”

“But will you woo this wild-cat?”

It was the admitted courage of cats, both wild and tame, which gave them their conspicuous place in heraldry, ever since the days when Roman legions and Vandal hordes carried their cat banners

streaming on the wind. The ancient Burgundians adopted the cat as their heraldic device, to intimate an abhorrence of servitude; and Clotilde, the fair and saintly Burgundian wife of Clovis, had blazoned on her armorial bearings a cat sable springing at a mouse. The same symbol served many a noble house. The Katzen family carried an azure shield, with a cat argent holding a rat. The Chetaldie family of Limoges carried two cats argent on an azure shield. The princely Della Gatta of Naples bore a cat — a splendid cat couchant — on their crest; and in Scotland the well-known cognizance of the Clan Chattan was a wild-cat, with the significant motto, “Touch not the cat but” (*i. e.* without) “the glove.” Of a truth, Cervantes strayed not so far into extravagance when he wrote of the “ever victorious and never vanquished” Timonel of Carajona, Prince of New Biscay, who carried upon his shield a golden cat, with the expressive motto, “Miau,” in honour of his lady, the beautiful and peerless Miaulina, daughter of the great Alfeniquen of the Algarve.

More peaceful memories cling around the ancient sign-boards, on which Pussy was ever a favourite figure. “*La Maison du Chat qui Pelote,*” and “*La Maison du Chat qui Pêche,*” commended themselves especially to French merchants; and M. Champfleury sadly regrets the disappearance of

"*Le Chat Noir*," once so familiar above restaurants and bakeries. The English "Cat and Fiddle," that most common sign-board for rural inns, is said to have been borrowed, not from the venerable nursery rhyme, but from the French "*Chat Fidèle*," which was equally — and more deservedly — popular with Gallic landlords. So numerous were cat signs in London two hundred years ago, that the "Spectator" tells a pleasant story of a man who, being made ill and faint by the proximity of a live cat, suffered a corresponding degree of discomfort when passing under the swinging boards on which Pussy was repeatedly painted.

Yet for all the frequency with which we encounter the cat in every phase of English life, for all the maxims and proverbs and familiar superstitions with which her name is linked, there is little to show that she won more than tolerance in the "free, fair homes" of that benighted land. If she sneezed on a wedding-day, she brought luck to the bride. If she jumped on a corpse, she presaged misfortune. If she washed her face, or turned her tail to the fire, men knew that rain was coming.

" Scratch but thine ear,
Then boldly tell what weather 's drawing near."

wrote Lord Westmorland, who had ample leisure in which to observe the habits of his cat during the long imprisonment which she shared.

“ True calendars as Pusse’s eare,
Wash’t o’re to tell what change is neare,”

sang Herrick in his Devonshire vicarage; and John Swan, writing his “*Speculum Mundi*” in 1643, tells us very seriously that the cat “*useth therefore to wash her face with her tongue; and it is observed by some that if she put her feet beyond the crown of her head in this kind of washing, it is a signe of raine.*”

In fact there was scarcely a movement of the cat which had not its meaning for the villager, who did his domestic Sphinx the honour of close scrutiny, and who attached so much significance to her simplest actions that the poor creature, like other oracles, was too often held responsible for the evils she presaged. Thus the yokel, being told that Pussy’s ablutions foretold rain, passed, by an easy mental process, to the conviction that they brought rain; and so — eager for the harvesting — killed his cat, as the simplest method of escaping showers. The sailor’s wife, in her uncertainty as to whether the fast rising wind was the cause or the effect of Tabby’s nervous clawing at bed curtain and table leg, deemed it but common prudence to drown the animal which might otherwise drown her good man at sea. It is not wise nor well to herald calamity. The part of Cassandra is ever an ungrateful one to play.

There are a few isolated cases of cats who were lauded and distinguished in England before the eighteenth century, from which late period may be traced their general popularity. The most striking instance is, of course, the cat of Cardinal Wolsey, who shared his master's wool-sack, or at least his master's seat in Council, the wool-sack — emblem of protected industries — being all unknown before Elizabeth's day. He is said to have been a large and beautiful beast with brindled fur, as arrogant as the Lord Chancellor, but better bred; delighting in display and ostentation, yet ever mingling suavity with pride. More pleasing to contemplate is the faithful cat of that unfortunate Duke of Norfolk who was imprisoned by Elizabeth for his intrigues with her fair cousin of Scotland. This loyal and valiant little friend followed her master to the Tower, and, being denied admission, actually made her way down a chimney into the Duke's apartment, and was permitted thenceforth to share that nobleman's captivity.

As a fact, imprisonment has scant terrors for the cat. It accords too well with her serene and contemplative disposition. Restless wanderer though she appears, and true lover of liberty though she is, and has ever been, she can yet live her life with tranquil enjoyment in a ship, on the seventh floor of an apartment house, in a granary which she is

never permitted to leave, or in London's Tower. There were probably many French cats who passed their days meditatively in the Bastille, content to be immured with their masters, and accepting like philosophers the restraints and the indulgences of that ill-omened, but singularly comfortable fortress.

“ Stone walls do not a prison make ”

for a creature whose independence of character remains untouched by the sternest and narrowest of environments. Rather perhaps does she feel herself a captive when surrounded too strenuously by the doting and troublesome affection of mortals, who cannot be made to understand or to respect her deep inviolable reserve. Lord Westmorland's cat freely shared her master's confinement. Sir Henry Wyatt's cat not only followed him to the Tower, but is said to have saved him from starvation by bringing him pigeons to eat ; and though it is difficult to pin our faith to this part of the story, we know that there still exists, by way of confirmation, a painting of the knight, seated in his cell, and of his cat dragging a pigeon through the window bars. The present Earl of Romney, who is the happy inheritor of this historic relic, likewise possesses a separate portrait of the animal, with an inscription stating plainly, “ This is the cat that saved Sir Henry Wyatt.” Why should we remain sceptical

in the face of such interesting and cumulative evidence!

It is a matter for endless regret that Shakespeare, in whose plays we find so many allusions to the cat, never once mentions it with admiration or esteem. That tepid phrase of Shylock's,

“a harmless necessary cat,”

which might have been written by Joanna Baillie, is about the kindest word vouchsafed to a creature whose beauty alone should have won warmer praise. And this chillness of comment is the more trying to our souls because it is impossible to read any of these allusions without knowing that Shakespeare had looked closely at a number of cats, had noticed their habits and characteristics, and had felt the subtlety of their association with the supernatural.

“Thrice the brinded cat hath mewed,”

says the Witch in “Macbeth,” and this simplest and commonest of statements is fraught with dire significance of evil. Falstaff knows whereof he speaks when he declares he is “as vigilant as a cat to steal cream;” and so does Antonio, in “The Tempest,” when he uses the admirable similitude:—

“For all the rest,

They'll take suggestion as a cat laps milk.”

How full of stealthy horror these two lines in “Pericles”:—

“ The cat, with eyne of burning coal,
Now couches 'fore the mouse's hole.”

How keenly descriptive of the struggle we have all of us witnessed between Pussy's caution and cupidity, is Lady Macbeth's scornful jibe : —

“ Letting *I dare not* wait upon *I would*,
Like the poor cat i' the adage.”

Yet in all this there is no touch of kindness ; and when we go further, we fare worse.

“ Every cat and dog,
And little mouse, every unworthy thing,”

moans Romeo, who ought to have been ashamed of such a speech, even in the extremity of his anguish.

“ Creatures vile, as cats and dogs,
Of no esteem ; ”

says Cornelius in “ Cymbeline.”

“ Hang off, thou cat, thou burr : vile thing, let loose ! ”

cries Lysander to poor Hermia ; and Bertram, in “ All 's Well that Ends Well,” must needs air *his* unwelcome views.

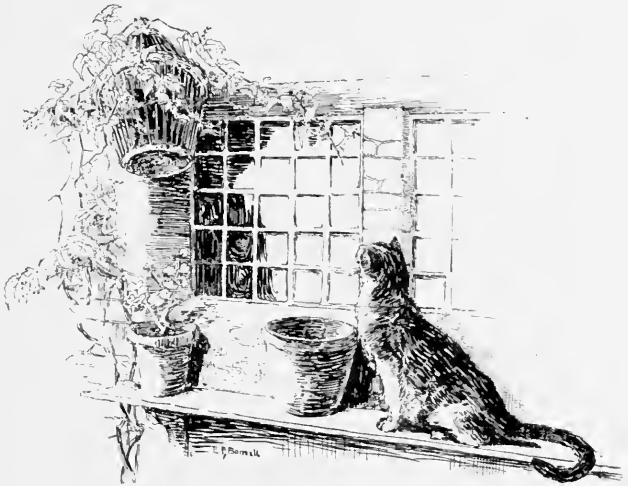
“ I could endure anything before but a cat, and now he's a cat to me : ”

is the angry word he flings at Parolles ; and, as his resentment flames hotter and hotter, he can apparently find no more stinging reproach : —

“ He is more and more a cat.”

“ He 's a cat still.”

What wonder that Pussy failed long of her triumph upon English soil, when the great poet of England had nothing better than this to say in her behalf?





CHAPTER VI

THE CAT IN ART

“A little lion, small and dainty sweet,
With sea-grey eyes and softly stepping feet.”

IF the cat has been exiled from ecclesiastical architecture, she has triumphed in Christian art. The early Italian masters admitted her over and over again into their sacred pictures, painting her lovingly, and with a delicate appreciation, not only of her grace, but of her domestic character, as though they sought to represent through her the human, earthly, simple life which they blended so sweetly with the mysterious and divine. In many pictures of the Annunciation we find a cat drowsing upon the Blessed Virgin's work-basket, or curled up on a corner of her azure robe. We see her repeatedly in paintings of the Last Supper, the Marriage Feast at Cana, and the birth of the Blessed

Virgin ; which final subject — so dear to the Italian heart — was seldom deemed complete without the introduction of a cat into the spacious bed-chamber of Saint Ann. This is all the more pleasing because of Pussy's conspicuous absence from Pagan art. The dog leaps by the side of Artemis, or bays at the moon while Endymion slumbers. The kid drinks from the shepherd's bowl, the young bull is led garlanded to the sacrifice, the stag falls, pierced by the hunter's dart. But of the little fire-side Sphinx we have no sign nor token. She and she alone finds no place among the marble animals of the Vatican. Those wise and watchful hounds, those lions and wolves and spotted leopards make no room for her. We see the hare couching upon her form, and the lobster lying on its rocky bed ; but for the most beautiful of domestic animals we search, and search in vain. Only in the Capitoline Museum may be found a spirited bas-relief, of a late period, which represents a woman trying to teach her cat to dance to the music of a lyre. The cat, a sullen beast with no love of music or dancing in its soul, has paused in the unwelcome task to snap viciously at a young duck, which, with obvious lack of caution, is thrusting forward its inquisitive head. Centuries later, Tintoretto painted just such a pussy snapping at just such a duck, in his charming picture of Leda, — Leda caressing the amorous swan,

while a dear little dog jumps up at her, vainly striving to attract attention. She was evidently partial to pets.

Among the mosaics taken from Pompeii, and placed in the Museum of Naples, are several animated representations of cats. Two of the finest were found in the House of the Faun,—unlovely pictures both of them, revealing Pussy as an outlaw and marauder. That there were homes in which she was prized and cherished is prettily proven by a mutilated marble preserved at Bordeaux. It is a Gallo-Roman tomb of the fourth century, and on it we discern the broken outlines of a young girl clasping her cat in her arms, as though in death they were not divided.

From these fleeting glimpses of Pussy, before she plunged into the long darkness of the Middle Ages, it is a pleasure to turn to those later, calmer years, when, having survived the depreciation and persecution of centuries, we see her once again basking in the light and warmth of a rapidly ripening civilization. Even during the stormiest period of her career she was better off in Italy than in fierce Northern lands; and, with the dawning of fairer days, no happier proof could be afforded of the affection she inspired than her constant presence in Italian art. It is true that she makes an equally early appearance upon Flemish canvases.

In the Gallery of Madrid there is a fantastic picture by Hieronymus Bosch, representing the birth of Eve, in which a fierce but very badly painted cat is prematurely breaking the peace of Paradise by eating a poor little tadpole; and in Van Tulden's "Orpheus taming the Beasts," — also in Madrid, — we see the animals great and small listening to the melody in a state of mild rapture, — like Germans in a Munich beer-cellar, — with the solitary exception of the cat, who erects an angry tail, and evinces a disposition to fight a sleepy and music-loving lion.

The faithfully wrought scenes of common life, which were the delight and triumph of the Dutch and Flemish schools, afforded a sympathetic setting for the cat. It would have been strange indeed if Jan Fyt, who copied beast and bird with such patient fidelity, had slighted this little model sitting in his chimney corner, or prowling panther-like along his neighbour's wall. He was well aware of her value. He knew how finely her pliant strength contrasted with the stillness of the poor dead pheasants whose ruffled plumage he so loved to paint. In one of his pictures in Milan there are two splendid, greedy, thievish cats, instinct with life and energy, that creep with cautious steps and gleaming eyes about the heaped-up game. The subject commended itself to other artists, but few gave it such lively and forcible expression. Compare the treat-

ment of Jan Fyt's work with that of the "Poulterer's Shop," by Van Mieris, which hangs in the National Gallery of London, and in which a pretty tortoise-shell pussy, soft-furred and innocent-eyed, looks wistfully at a dead duck hanging well out of her reach. The Flemish painter felt, and felt with reluctant admiration, the lawlessness of the animals he drew; the Dutchman transferred to canvas his own sleepy pet, curled up in the warmest corner of his hearth. His cat is as gentle, for all her greed, as is that comfortable beast, so drowsy and unconcerned, in Jordaens's tumultuous "Twelfth Night;" or the mother puss who watches her five kittens with tender and over-anxious solicitude in Jan Steen's equally uproarious "Revellers."

Such pictures seem made for cats. To paint a kitchen without one would be like painting a meadow without cows. Worse, indeed; for there is no such air of destitution, of utter and melancholy incompleteness about a cowless meadow, as about a catless kitchen. No effort of imagination was needed to introduce Pussy into a Dutch interior. She was there by virtue of natural selection, of justifiable and inevitable proprietorship; but to gently insinuate her into the company of saints and angels required more courage, or more affection. Only now and then an early Flemish painter ventured upon such a flight of fancy. There is in

Munich an Annunciation by Hendrick met de Bles, in which the Blessed Virgin's cat, a large handsome white animal, sits sleeping serenely by her side.

When we turn to Italy, however, we are charmed to see how naturally and sweetly the cat slips into sacred art. We expect to find her in the Garden of Eden, though Domenichino, aware perhaps of the legend which denies her this privilege, has carefully excluded her from the group of animals pressing uncomfortably close to his beautiful and seductive Eve. Jacopo Bassano, on the contrary, either did not know the story, or refused to give it heed. The Ark with its crowded freight was, as might be supposed, the great resource of such a painter, forced by the current of his time into a religious groove. Bassano profited by the Deluge all his life. He painted the beasts entering their asylum; he painted them departing; he painted them scattered upon Mount Ararat, making up their minds where they would go next; and always he painted a cat, filling the most conspicuous place, supercilious, combative, and alert. Among the beautiful frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli, on the walls of the Campo Santo at Pisa, is one which represents the animals leaving the Ark; and here, too, we see a large cat facing all its companions with the resolute and somewhat condescending air of an assured favourite.

In pictures of the Annunciation, the cat that occasionally lies curled at the Blessed Virgin's feet lends to a subject, so fraught with spiritual significance, an air of homely simplicity. Her presence, like that of the water jar, or the open basket heaped with unfinished sewing, serves to indicate the modest routine of daily life, interrupted so strangely by the Archangel's message. There is an Annunciation by Barocci which hangs in the Vatican Gallery, and in which we see a fine grey cat sleeping undisturbed upon the Virgin's work; while in another painting by the same artist at Budapest, a cat rests tranquilly on a cushion, looking with half-shut, indifferent eyes at the angelic visitor. Indifference is, in fact, her rôle in art. The most riotous Annunciation in all Christendom is a partly obliterated fresco by Taddeo Zuccherò, on the portico of the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova in Florence. Scores of angels, broad-pinioned, athletic, and, for the most part, naked, accompany Gabriel on his mission. They wing their tumultuous flight through the air, darting hither and thither, playing clamorously upon every kind of musical instrument, and circling about the Blessed Maid, who stands, timid and frightened, in the farthest corner of the room. On a chair close at hand lies a cat, drowsily watching the celestial multitude. She uncurls her limbs, and lifts her head a little, as though startled from sleep, but that

is all. Another minute, and she will settle softly down again upon her cushions. She is not in the least disturbed.

The same spirit of unconcern distinguishes Saint Ann's cat, who, keeping close to her mistress, affects no interest in anything beyond her own comfort and convenience. Among the frescoes by Puccio, in the choir of the Orvieto Cathedral, are two which represent respectively the vision of Saint Ann, and the birth of the Blessed Virgin. In the first, the Saint is accompanied by a very fine white cat, who, with back high arched and tail erect, drives from the room a meek, intruding dog. In the second, the same pussy stands on her hind-legs, and, profiting by the concentration of everybody's attention upon the new-born baby, helps herself with cool audacity from a little table which has been neatly spread by the bedside. In the Oratorio of Saint Bernardino at Sienna there is a charming treatment of the same subject; and here Saint Ann's cat is coal-black, with gleaming yellow eyes. She looks intelligent, but unamiable, and watches with grave attention the bustling maids who, pleased and smiling, bathe the pretty child.

The picture which of all others, however, best illustrates the temper of the cat, as the Italians knew her two hundred years ago, and as we know her to-day, was painted by Luca Giordano, and

hangs in the Imperial Gallery of Vienna. It is another presentation of that ever familiar theme, the birth of the Blessed Virgin. Saint Ann sits upright on her bed. Saint Joachim enters the door. The spacious room is full of attendants, engaged in waiting on their mistress, in airing the baby linen, in washing and admiring the infant. Everybody is busy and excited. Everybody, save Saint Ann, is standing, or kneeling on the floor. There is, in fact, but one chair in the room. On that chair is a cushion, and on that cushion sleeps, serene and undisturbed, a cat.

It is to be regretted that Titian and Velasquez and Murillo gave their manifest preference to dogs. Titian's lap-dogs are the most engaging in art; and the little white woolly creatures — like toy lambs — that Murillo painted, beguile our souls with their air of wistful and sympathetic intelligence. Who does not remember — and remembering, love — the poor little beast in the Louvre, who holds up one paw beseechingly, and begs for a peep at the newborn Virgin? A small, fat, azure-winged angel, carrying a basket of baby linen, and bursting with pride over the importance of his task, decides upon his own authority that no dogs shall be permitted to enter, and huffs the petitioner away. Velasquez, though he painted a fine puss in "Las Hilanderas," ignored the race as a rule. His partiality was for

hounds. If we want to see cats, — splendid, pampered, luxurious, quarrelsome cats, — we must look for them in the great glowing canvases of Veronese; in those sumptuous scenes where noble Venetians feast opulently, and which are christened — out of courteous deference to the demands of the Church — the “Marriage at Cana,” the “Last Supper,” or “Christ in the house of Simon the Pharisee.” It is true that the Church, ungrateful for an attention so manifestly insincere, protested from time to time against the purely mundane character of these pictures; but Venice loved her painter too well to suffer him to be unduly harassed. He might receive grave warnings, gently spoken. He might be officially bidden to blot out the offending jesters, dwarfs, and monkeys. But the Republic, albeit deeply and passionately religious from her birth, — when she turned brigand, it was to steal the relics of a saint, — refused to be scandalized by Veronese’s art. Nothing *was* blotted out, not even the cats; and so we see them to-day curled around the water jars on the floor, and paddling away vigorously with their soft hind paws; or tranquilly devouring some chance bone under shadow of the table; or spitting at the handsome, spiritless dogs; or blinking and purring in the arms of negro attendants. They are carelessly painted, all of them. It evidently never occurred to the master to make an

accurate study of his feline model. What he sought was that decorative touch which Pussy imparts so graciously when in accord with her surroundings. Her supple limbs, her thick soft fur, her air of ease and arrogance harmonize beautifully with the rich Venetian setting. The utmost point of splendour and self-indulgence reached by nations can do no more than meet and suffice the ordinary tastes of a cat.

A very different view of the subject is afforded us by the Florentine Cenacolas, those monastic frescoes which, with exquisite taste and feeling, adorned the refectory walls. In them we find the sleek convent cat, who appears to have presented herself invariably to the painter's notice, and to have met with every possible attention at his hands. Over and over again we see her; sometimes curled sleepily on the floor, as in Allori's fine but defaced picture in the Carmine; sometimes pilfering gravely from the bread-basket; oftenest sitting — where we least like to see her — at the feet of Judas. In that most lovely fresco by Ghirlandajo in the smaller refectory of San Marco, the Apostles are ranged round the board on high-backed settles. Saint John as usual rests his head upon the table. Judas, quite apart from the others, is balanced uncomfortably on a three-legged stool. An open arcade beyond reveals rich glimpses of leafy trees, with peacocks and

other bright-hued birds perched on their branches. In the foreground, close to Judas, sits bolt upright a very intelligent cat, mistrustful, unfriendly, sullen. Her attitude and expression cannot be misunderstood. We all know how a cat looks when compelled to endure the society of a dog, with whom she is assumed to be on friendly terms, but for whom she cherishes the deep suspicion, and deeper animosity, of her race.

It was one of the traditions of Italian art to introduce a cat into representations of the Last Supper, even when these were not painted for convent walls. There is a very fine puss in Andrea Schiavone's picture which hangs in the Borghese Gallery; and, amid the gloom of Tintoretto's giant canvases, we may occasionally see — if we look long enough — a black cat lurking in the densest shadows, its rounded back a mere patch of darkness against the deeper darkness beyond. Even Benvenuto Cellini has placed a cat at the feet of Judas in one of his most beautiful bas-reliefs; but then Cellini was without doubt enamoured of the whole furry race. Delicacy, daring, and an absence of moral standards could not fail of their attractions for him. Among the admirable specimens of his workmanship in the treasury of the Pitti Palace is a silver dish, showing in relief the blessing of Jacob. Rebecca's cat lies curled close at Isaac's feet, watching father and son

with contemptuous scrutiny, as if she fully understood the deception which was being practised, but forbore, in indifference, to betray it. On another dish, Orpheus plays to the ravished beasts; and here a stately cat, very courteous and attentive, has a whole section of the border to herself, the bigger animals keeping at a respectful distance.

Raphael has introduced Pussy into at least one of his cartoons, — the “Supper at Emmaus.” He has presented her in a most aggressive and disagreeable humour. She crunches a big bone greedily, eyeing meanwhile an unhappy dog that would fain share the feast. Her roughened fur and undulating tail betray the angry disturbance of her mind. If we contrast this cat, so true to nature’s self, with some of the other animals wrought into the Vatican tapestries; — with that more than doubtful elephant, upon whose back a playful ape is sporting; or with those curious, portly, short-necked beasts, having heads like horses, and rings through their noses to prove to the world they are camels, we see the supreme advantage of the living model, however seldom she may sit, however slightly she may be handled. Think of the infinite variety of lions — none of them in the least like lions — that accompany Saint Jerome in art! Sometimes these faithful creatures stand on their hind legs, or trot by their master’s side, like amiable dogs; sometimes

they have little bullet heads no larger than panthers ; sometimes they are all head, like the American bison ; and occasionally they resemble overgrown lambs, woolly, foolish, and innocent. It is a genuine relief to look at that quaint old picture by Antonello da Messina, in the National Gallery, and see Saint Jerome sitting placidly in his study, — his lion having gone out for a stroll, — while a very nice cat lies curled up affectionately at his feet. The painter's conception of the desert's king might have been as vaguely humorous as Carpaccio's ; but, when it came to cats, he had no lack of subjects for his inspiration. By the close of the fifteenth century, Pussy had reëstablished her position — albeit a somewhat precarious one — throughout Italy.

In all the pictures we have been considering, — Italian, Dutch, or Flemish, — the cat is introduced as a detail, usually as a bit of household furnishing. She gives a pretty homelike touch, whether we see her enjoying a bowl of Martha's bread and milk ; or seeking her share of the feast at Cana ; or merely basking in the sun, as Giulio Romano painted her, while the Blessed Virgin and Saint Ann watch their babies at play. She is never the first object of the poet's art, and never even the salient point of a composition ; though Barocci has not hesitated to lodge a family of young kittens in the Madonna's

lap, nor to represent the little Saint John as mischievously teasing a cat, by holding a captured bird just beyond the reach of her claws. When she accompanies Andrea Doria, it is merely because that great sailor — after the fashion of sailors — loved her heartily, and gave her a place of honour by his side. There is, indeed, in the Academy of Saint Luke in Rome, a well-known study of cats' heads by Salvator Rosa, — a study ill calculated to awaken enthusiasm, or to soften the asperity of the disaffected. All Salvator's pussies are miauling bitterly, their furry faces drawn into lines of wrath and excitation. Involuntarily the chance spectator covers his ears when he looks at them. Few mortals can stand unmoved the curious and complicated vocalism of the cat.

With this melancholy exception, however, we search long ere we see Pussy drawn with the careful and conscientious art of Albrecht Dürer's hare, drawn or painted by herself, and for her own attractions. Cornelius Wissher's famous print is probably the first and finest of its kind. His great round *Chat Couché* sleeps so soundly, its head lowered, its paws tucked out of sight, that we can almost hear the measured breathing, and see the sleek furry sides heave gently in the very abandonment of repose. A hundred years later, Gottfried Mind, the sullen recluse of Berne, was deemed

a little mad because he painted nothing but cats, and would endure no other companionship. All day he sat in his shabby garret, sufficiently occupied by his work, sufficiently amused by his models. Kittens perched on his shoulders, and frolicked gayly among his few possessions. Their mothers purred a murmurous accompaniment, and smiled on him with indulgent contempt. For absolute veracity, his feline portraits have never been surpassed. Mme. Lebrun, who deeply admired his genius, and who purchased many of his finest works, gave him the infelicitous title, "Raphael of Cats;" and the genuine stupidity of the expression fixed it naturally and inevitably in all men's memories. To this day no one ever dreams of alluding to Mind in any other words. His attachment to his furry friends was as ardent and unchanging as was his aversion to intrusive mortals. The sorrow of his life was the massacre of cats in 1809, an epidemic having broken out that year among the pussies of Berne which necessitated this drastic measure. Eight hundred perished at the hands of the police; and though Mind contrived to save most of his own pets, yet the thought of those eight hundred innocents troubled his poor heart until he died.

Eastern artists, the Chinese and Japanese more especially, have devoted their skill for centuries to painting the cat, lavishing upon this congenial sub-

ject all the delicate subtlety of the Orient. Their work is little known in Europe and America. Only now and then some rash collector hoards a few priceless pictures, at which his friends stare superciliously, valuing them, as Macaulay valued Celtic manuscripts, — sixpence for the lot. Fifty years ago, however, the drawings of Fo-Kou-Say, or, as the Parisians christened him, Hok'sai, aroused great enthusiasm throughout France; and M. Champfleury, in a somewhat fantastic spirit, likens the Japanese to the Spanish painter, Goya, finding in both the same capricious fancy, the same wanton grace of outline, the same exquisite conception of the waywardness of women and of cats. Several of Hok'sai's beautiful sketches have been reproduced — though with little skill — in M. Champfleury's volume; and their finely imaginative character suggests to the sympathetic mind those charming Oriental stories, so different from the sombre legends of mediæval Christendom. The sinuous and light-limbed pussies that Hok'sai copied so daringly must surely have attended the midnight dances, held in flowery gardens heavy with perfumes and soft with scattered petals, where — so says an ancient Japanese tradition — assemble under the round white moon such cats as are able to pay the entrance fee, — a stolen silken handkerchief. Or perhaps, in calmer mood, they may plod

patiently through the pleasant task which for centuries has been assigned to all Persian pussies in the East, — the reading of the “Arabian Nights,” from the first page to the last, twice in every year.

Vastly different from these mysterious darlings is the sober simplicity of Burbank’s honest cats; or the tigerish fierceness, so frank and free, of the splendid creatures drawn by Delacroix; or the innocent playfulness of Lambert’s kittens, almost as well known and well beloved as those of Mme. Henriette Ronner. In truth, Lambert and Mme. Ronner may be said to divide the honours easily between them, the larger share falling to the lady’s lot. Their pictures hang in the Luxembourg and other great modern galleries. Prints and photographs have made their work familiar to the world. They should both be held in some degree responsible for the great wave of cat-worship which has engulfed all Christendom in the past twenty-five years. The lively affection which Mme. Ronner’s cats inspire in every heart has softened the asperities of life for the whole feline race. No one can look without love upon these pretty creatures, these baby pussies all gayety and grace, scrambling with foolish temerity over chair and table, radiant in their self-sufficiency, and always the objects of deep maternal solicitude.

“Kittens, than Eastern Houris fairer seen,
Whose bright eyes glisten with immortal green.”

If Mme. Ronner's family groups are distinctly artificial in composition, each kitling playing its little part in a manner too effective for individual caprice, her simpler studies are open to no such untimely criticism. She has painted placid meditative cats, immersed in thought or sinking sweetly into slumber, that charm our souls with the dignity of their egotism, the frank expression of their supreme self-love. The weakness of her work is possibly its aristocratic narrowness of field. Like Watteau, she is a "Prince" — or Princess — "of Court Painters," never wandering from the sumptuous atmosphere of ease and elegance and repose. Her earlier pictures were not cast in this mould; but for many years her pussies have been soft pampered playthings, who frolic through life without a care, and whose only burden is the courtly one, — ennui. What Mr. Pater says of Watteau's men and women might well apply to Mme. Ronner's cats.

"Half in masquerade, playing the drawing-room or garden comedy of life, these persons have upon them, not less than the landscape he composes, and among the accidents of which they group themselves with such a perfect fittingness, a certain light we should seek for in vain upon anything real."

In this engaging mummery, Mme. Ronner's beau-

tiful Persians play their parts to perfection ; but while no one has a right to quarrel with an artist's chosen field, or with the limitations thereof, we cannot help wearying a little of so much softness and luxury, of such perpetual alternations of pastime and sleep. Life has other aspects for a cat of character. The pleasures of the chase in field and barn and cupboard ; the excitement of being chased in turn by her ancestral enemy, the dog ; the sweet stolen moments of vagabondage ; the passionate exaltation of the midnight serenade ; the joy of combat ; the amorous duplicity of courtship ; — what fields of action stretch limitlessly out before a free-born cat whose hardihood is tempered by discretion,

“Quickened with touches of transporting fear.”

Of all these things, Mme. Ronner's darlings, snug in their silken bondage, reveal nothing. But turn to Briton Riviere's spirited “Blockade Runner,” in the Tate Gallery of London. See how his cat flattens herself upon the wall along which she scuttles, while the frantic dogs dance helplessly beneath. What concentration of purpose in that swift yet stealthy pace. She lowers her ears, and shortens her legs, and depresses her tail, until she is little more than a moving shadow on the bricks. Hatred fires her heart ; terror speeds her on her way. The king in his palace is not more safe than she, yet

never for an instant is her vigilance relaxed. She is the inheritor of ancient animosity and of ancient wrongs.

Another and equally admirable view of plebeian cathood is presented in a picture by Claus Meyer, which is one of the gems of the modern gallery in Dresden. Three women sit gossiping in the bare grey sacristy of a church or convent, and three young cats sit near them on the floor;— gutter cats these, rough-coated, scrawny, suspicious from infancy of a dubious world. A shallow dish of milk has been set forth for their refreshment; but only one ventures hesitatingly, and, with her gaze fixed on her companions, to lap a very little. The other two eye each other cautiously from a safe distance. The smallest and raggedest of the group is a mere kitten, all ears and neck after the fashion of its kind, owlish in aspect, and wise with uncanny wisdom. Little

“ Cat-gossips full of Canterbury tales,”

and only waiting for matured acquaintance to exchange confidences that will put mere human scandal to the blush, they are all three adorable in their hideousness. To the true lover of the race, shining fur and rounded limbs are not the only charms.

“ He that loves a rosy cheek,”

or its feline equivalent, may lose much in the char-

acter, the astuteness, the hundred winning and delightful traits that oftenest accompany humble parentage, and a plain little grey and black coat. Many a common puss holds the hearts of a household in her keeping, because of qualities too subtle to be defined, too dominant to be resisted or ignored. When we know just what it is that we value in friend or cat, the analysis blights our affection.





CHAPTER VII

THE CAT TRIUMPHANT

“ He stood, an ebon crescent, flouting that ivory moon,
Then raised the pibroch of his race, the Song without a Tune.”

OUT of the murky shadows which shroud the cat during long centuries of passive neglect or active persecution, there gleam here and there flashes of brilliant light in which we see her sheltered by those whose protection was an honour, cherished by those whose love was a consecration. In Italy, poets as well as painters felt the sweet charm of her companionship, and strove to give their sympathy expression. Tasso addressed to his cat a sonnet brimming with tender flattery; and of Petrarch's pet it has been prettily said that she was her master's joy in the sunshine, his solace

in the shade. When she died, her little body was carefully embalmed; and travellers who visited Arquà, and the poet's home, hidden among the Euganean Hills, have stared and mocked and wondered at this poor semblance of cathood, this furless, withered mummy, which, more than five hundred years ago, frolicked softly in the joyousness of youth. Upon the marble slab on which she lay were cut two epigrams by Antonius Quærenus, one of which gracefully commemorated the rival passions that shared Petrarch's heart. "Maximus ignis ego; Laura secundus erat." Doubtless of these conflicting emotions, the more simple and sincere was the poet's affection for his cat.

As we search for Pussy's records in literature, that we may better trace her half-hidden history through several centuries of fluctuating fortunes, we find that the striking of the personal note invariably heralds a growing appreciation and esteem. When she figures in folk-lore, she is unsanctified and maleficent, a candidate for "the uncharitable votes of Hell." In proverbs, she serves as an illustration of characteristics without charm, and of wisdom without distinction. In fable, she — or he — is, for the most part, a clever hypocrite, the Raminagrobis of La Fontaine, the Tybert of "Reineke Fuchs." This latter rascal, if less sanctimonious than the *chatemite*, or than the austere hermit of

the Ganges, is still an unscrupulous knave, and for that reason, and that alone, is chosen as ambassador by his great kinsman, the Lion.

“’T was then agreed the Cat should try
 If he could not the Fox outvie
 In trickery and dissimulation,
 And thus do service to the nation.
 For he was, by all men’s admission,
 A wary, skilful politician.”

Frankly does the King of the Beasts admit the cousinship and honourable station of his little relative. There is respect, mingled with cajolery, in the monarch’s parting words.

“Tybert, forget not, I beseech,
 How far back doth your lineage reach ;
 Much farther back than mice and rats,
 Which but created were for cats.
 So foolish folks who sometime curse them,
 Were only made that they might nurse them.
 Never forget, I pray, that ye
 Spring from our old nobility.”

“Well taught you are, and quick and wise,
 Fulfilled of wit in all men’s eyes ;
 And plenteous therefore is my hope
 That with this sinner you may cope.
 For craft with craft may better fight,
 Than mere brute strength that lacks foresight.”

Tybert is foiled by the arch-villany of the Fox. He comes to grief, and his prestige fades before Reynard’s superior knavery ; yet, even in defeat, his

wariness saves him from the utter ruin of nobler and duller beasts.

In the fable, as in folk-lore, it is always astute rascality which wins a final triumph. Honesty is never the best policy, and the Master Thief still shines, a dazzling hero, despite our centuries of ethics. Not for his integrity do we value Puss-in-Boots, that hardy and brilliant impostor, who lifted the miller's son on the crest of his splendid lies until he landed the stupid lout, who could n't lie for himself, at the foot of a throne, with a princess for a bride. "Puss-in-Boots" was translated from Italian into French in 1585, and from French into English a few years later; but the story itself is very, very old. Like so many fairy tales, it may be traced to India, where the cat's part was originally played by a fox, — a fox as unscrupulous as Reineke, but more faithful, through whose cunning and devotion a peasant lad becomes the son-in-law of a king. The surpassing cynicism of the Eastern tale lies in the ingratitude of the peasant, who, having reached the summit of his ambition, has no further need of his colleague, and drives him shamefully from the palace doors. One is glad that this touch of unutterable baseness has never contaminated our nurseries; and that all children who rejoice — as good children should — in the triumphant scampishness of Puss-in-Boots, are told in

the concluding sentence of his history that, after his master's elevation, he was so well fed, he never hunted mice any more, save for exercise and amusement.

“The White Cat,” one of the prettiest and most popular of fairy stories, comes from France. The Comtesse D'Aunoy gave it to her grateful country in 1682; and if the central theme of three rival brothers bringing home the wonders of the world be nearly as old as the world itself, yet the charming figure of the Cat — as lovely in her white fur, and with *pattes de velours*, as after her transformation into a Princess — is distinctly modern, and marks the fast swelling tide of admiration for feline beauty, which during centuries of darkness had been stupidly and blindly ignored. In France it was Pussy's grace and sweetness which triumphed finally over prejudice. In England and in Germany it was the recognition of her domestic qualities which won her, first tolerance, then esteem, then loving and loyal devotion. Slowly and surely it dawned upon dim mortal minds that a house is transformed into a home when the small fireside Sphinx takes tranquil possession of its chimney-corner. With this discovery came the elevation of individual pussies to the scrutiny, and consequently to the admiration, of the world. The personal note was struck, and the victory of the cat was won.

Herrick, as might be imagined, was the first of English poets to feel the charm of her presence by his hearth. In that pleasant Devonshire vicarage where each season brought its appropriate joys; which, in fancy, we see decked with the hawthorn boughs of May, and with the holly and mistletoe of Christmas tide; where the Bride-cake and the was-sail-bowl,

“Spiced to the brink,”

passed cheerfully around in the glittering firelight; where the “little buttery” and “little bin” were well stocked with more than pulse and water-cress; — surely this sweet old manse, sunshiny, rose-covered, cowslip-scented, was the fitting Paradise for a cat. One envies the happy puss who spent her days amid such pastoral plenty.

“A cat

I keep, that plays about my house,

Grown fat

With eating many a miching mouse,”

writes Herrick when counting up his “private wealth;” and when he urges the pleasures of a country life — which none knew better than he — upon his town-bred brother, this is one of the allurements he has to offer:

“Yet can thy humble roof maintaine a quire

Of singing crickets by thy fire;

And the brisk mouse may feast herselfe with crumbs,

Till that the green-eyed kitling comes.”

Nothing could be prettier than these four lines. They surpass even the four lines in Heine's "Fire-side Piece," where the poet sits meditating by the hearth, while his cat, close cuddled, drowsy with warmth, purrs a soft refrain to his rhythmic dreams. They find their echo in that charming letter of Shelley's to Peacock, which describes the shrines of the Penates, "whose hymns are the purring of kittens, the hissing of kettles, the long talks over the past and dead, the laugh of children, the warm wind of summer filling the quiet house, and the pelting storm of winter struggling in vain for entrance."

Such things bring peace to our souls; even the reading of them is fraught with an exquisite sense of tranquillity; but be it remembered that little kittens purr the first soft notes of this domestic hymn.

Herrick alone in his generation paid tribute to Pussy's fireside qualities. Other English poets had observed her valour and grace; and George Turberville, half a century earlier, had expressed in amorous verse his ardent desire to be a cat, inasmuch as his dear Mistressse greatly feared a mouse.

"The Squirrel thinking nought,
That featly cracks the nut;
The greedie Goshawke wanting prey,
In dread of Death doth put;

But scorning all these kindes,
I would become a Cat,
To combat with the creeping Mouse,
And scratch the screeking Rat.

“ I would be present, aye,
And at my Ladie's call,
To gard her from the fearfull Mouse,
In Parlour and in Hall ;
In Kitchen, for his Lyfe,
He should not shew his hed ;
The Pease in Poke should lie untoucht
When shee were gone to Bed.

“ The Mouse should stand in Feare,
So should the squeaking Rat ;
All this would I doe if I were
Converted to a Cat.”

It is grateful to find Pussy's courage and devotion so happily vindicated ; but we cannot ignore the fact that this glowing tribute to the joys of war is addressed — not to the valorous cat the poet envies — but to the fair coward whom he loves. In the same spirit of delicate flattery, Prior inscribes some verses to “ My Lord Buckhurst, Very young, Playing with a Cat,” which begin

“ The am'rous youth, whose tender breast
Was by his darling cat possest,
Obtained of Venus his desire ; ”

and which go on to implore the little lord never to prefer “ so rash a prayer,” lest the goddess of love,

beholding his beauty, should think her lost Adonis restored to life, and grow jealous of the kitten in his arms. These pretty conceits, in which Pussy but serves to illustrate the text, have nothing in common with the directness of Herrick, or with the personal studies of cat and kittenhood which Cowper and Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold subsequently gave to the world. They are not even akin to Gray's famous lines, half mocking and half piteous, which deplore the untimely death of Walpole's Selima, "Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes." That Horace Walpole should have delighted in cats was inevitable. Their beauty, their refinement, their delicate appreciation of luxurious surroundings, could never have appealed more surely to any nature than to his. "Not English," was the censure habitually passed upon him by his contemporaries, to whom a taste for curios, and a distaste for hard drinking, were equally unintelligible eccentricities. Even that fine statesman, Lord Minto, pronounced him "a prim, precise, pretending, conceited savage ; but a most un-English one ;" and in proof, either of his primness, or of the gentle character of his savagery, Walpole loved and cherished cats. When his favourite met her tragic death, he wrote to Gray, bewailing the loss he had sustained ; and the poet, in doubt as to which of his friend's cats had been drowned, replied with a playful letter

of condolence, ("Learn, my son, to bear tranquilly the misfortunes of others,") and with the charming verses which have immortalized Selima's memory.

"It would be a sensible satisfaction to me," he wrote, "before I testify my sorrow, and the sincere part I take in your calamity, to know for certain who it is I lament. I knew Zara and Selima, (Selima, was it, or Fatima?) or rather I knew them both together; for I cannot justly say which was which. Then as to your 'handsome Cat,' the name you distinguish her by, I am no less at a loss, as well knowing one's handsome cat is always the cat one loves best; or, if one be alive and one dead, it is usually the latter which is the handsomer. Besides, if the point were never so clear, I hope you do not think me so ill-bred or so imprudent as to forfeit all my interest in the survivor. Oh, no! I would rather seem to mistake, and to imagine to be sure it must be the tabby one that has met with this sad accident."

The poem which accompanied the letter, and a portion of which was subsequently inscribed upon the pedestal which held the ill-omened bowl, is familiar to all readers of English verse; but no book upon cats would be complete without it.

"'T was on a lofty vase's side,
Where China's gayest art had dyed
The azure flowers that blow;

THE FIRESIDE SPHINX

Demurest of the tabby kind,
The pensive Selima reclined,
Gazed on the lake below.

“ Her conscious tail her joy declared ;
The fair round face, the snowy beard,
The velvet of her paws,
Her coat that with the tortoise vies,
Her ears of jet, and emerald eyes,
She saw, and purred applause.

“ Still had she gazed, but 'midst the tide
Two angel forms were seen to glide,
The Genii of the stream :
Their scaly armour's Tyrian hue,
Through richest purple, to the view
Betrayed a golden gleam.

“ The hapless Nymph with wonder saw :
A whisker first, and then a claw,
With many an ardent wish,
She stretched in vain to reach the prize :
What female heart can gold despise ?
What Cat's averse to fish ?

“ Presumptuous Maid ! with looks intent,
Again she stretched, again she bent,
Nor knew the gulf between.
(Malignant Fate sat by and smiled :)
The slippery verge her feet beguiled,
She tumbled headlong in.

“ Eight times emerging from the flood,
She mewed to every watery God
Some speedy aid to send.

No Dolphin came, no Nereid stirred,
Nor cruel Tom, nor Susan heard ;
A Favourite has no friend !

“ From hence, ye Beauties, undeceived,
Know one false step is ne'er retrieved,
And be with caution bold.
Not all that tempts your wandering eyes
And heedless hearts is lawful prize ;
Nor all that glisters, gold.”

Mr. Edmund Gosse, in his notes on this poem, objects to Gray's use of the word “tabby,” “as if it were synonymous with female cat.” “Selima,” he says, “cannot have been a tabby, if, as we presently read, she was a tortoise-shell. Tabby cats are those whose fur is of a cold brindled grey, like the surface of the rich watered silk from Bagdad, called '*attäbi*, and, in English, *tabby*.” Mr. Harrison Weir, however, who is an excellent authority upon cats, points out conclusively that the word tabby, though derived from ribbed or watered silk, refers to the markings only, and does not designate any especial colour. He quotes, to prove his words, two lines of English verse, dating from 1682,

“ Her petticoat of satin,
Her gown of crimson tabby.”

A brindled or brinded cat,

“ Thrice the brinded cat hath mewed,”

is the same as a tabby, and in Norfolk and Suffolk

is still often called a Cyprus cat ; though the cloth woven of hair and silk in wavy lines, and originally brought from Cyprus, (as were many cats,) has disappeared from English markets for perhaps two hundred years. Cats can be "brindled tortoise-shell," and are occasionally so described ; though, when well-bred, the colour lies in broad deep blotches, rather than in bars. That Gray did not mean to indicate Selima's sex by the word tabby — an inaccuracy of which the precise little poet was wholly incapable — is proven by the letter in which he refers to Fatima and Selima, both plainly females, and says, "I would rather seem to mistake, and to imagine to be sure it must be the tabby one that has met with this sad accident."

After Herrick, no English poet seems to have fully recognized the domestic qualities of the cat until Cowper paid her his little tribute of song. From Goldsmith, indeed, we have the pretty verse which illustrates his cheerful British conception of a hermitage.

" Around, in sympathetic mirth,
Its tricks the kitten tries ;
The cricket chirrups on the hearth,
The crackling fagot flies."

But Cowper is more explicit. The well-ordered household at Olney must necessarily have been dominated by a cat. It offered precisely the atmos-

phere in which Puss is born to reign. Warm fires by which to purr and drowse ; a bountiful tea-table amply provided with cream ; the swirling of autumn leaves around the garden paths if a little brisk exercise was desired ; a comfortable supply of over-fed mice when conscience suggested work ; eight pairs of tame pigeons when Satan prompted mischief. There were, to be sure, other pets ; too many of them, by far, from a cat's point of view ; — goldfinches, canaries, and a caged linnet, all jealously guarded from hostility ; the spaniel Beau, a foolish squirrel, two imbecile guinea-pigs, and the ever-famous hares, "canonized pets of literature," with surly tempers that brooked no liberties. "One evening," writes Lady Hesketh, "the cat giving one of the hares a sound box on the ear, the hare ran after her, and punished her by drumming on her back with two feet as hard as drumsticks, till the poor creature would actually have been killed, had not Mrs. Unwin rescued her."

This was worse than encountering vipers, or being shut up in a drawer. The tranquil home at Olney was not without its dangers and alarms, and Cowper did his cat the honour of immortalizing two of her adventures. In that "delightful '*lusus poeticus*,'" as Mr. Austin Dobson has kindly christened "The Colubriad," he narrates her rescue, at his own hands, from the snake which she was softly patting with

all the temerity of ignorance, "not in anger, but in the way of philosophic inquiry and examination."

"As curious as the kittens erst had been,
To learn what this phenomenon might mean."

Cowper, who always made a point of looking at things before he described them, which habit enabled him to convince eighteenth century readers that there was such a thing as Nature, watched the three kittens gathered close around the viper, regarding him with polite attention, and speculating innocently on his possibilities as a playmate.

"Forth from his head his forkèd tongue he throws,
Darting it full against a kitten's nose ;
Who, never having seen in field or house
The like, sat still and silent as a mouse ;
Only projecting, with attention due,
Her whiskered face, she asked him, ' Who are you ? ' "

He also watched on more than one occasion their sedate and serious parent, the "Retired Cat," who loved, like himself, a quiet corner in which to sit and think.

"I know not where she caught the trick, —
Nature perhaps herself had cast her
• In such a mould *philosophique*,
Or else she learned it of her Master.
Sometimes ascending, *débonnaire*,
An apple-tree, or lofty pear,
Lodged with convenience in the fork,
She watched the gardener at his work ;
Sometimes her ease and solace sought

In an old empty watering-pot ;
There wanting nothing save a fan,
To seem some nymph in her sedan,
Apparelled in exactest sort,
And ready to be borne to Court."

Finally her taste for seclusion beguiled her into an open drawer half full of linen, delicately laid away in fragrant lavender by Mrs. Unwin's careful fingers.

"Puss, with delight beyond expression,
Surveyed the scene, and took possession.
Recumbent at her ease erelong,
And lulled by her own humdrum song,
She left the cares of life behind,
And slept as she would sleep her last ;
When in came, housewifely inclined,
The chambermaid, and shut it fast,
By no malignity impelled,
But all unconscious whom it held."

For two days and a night the little prisoner remained immured in her dungeon, and then at last her

"long and melancholy mew"

reached the sleepless poet's ears, and he hastened to save another of her lives by pulling open the drawer.

The advent of a new and very frolicsome tortoise-shell kitten filled Cowper with delight, and he describes her enthusiastically in a letter to Lady Hesketh. — "In point of size, she is likely to be a

kitten always, being extremely small for her age ; but time, I suppose, that spoils everything, will make her also a cat. You will see her, I hope, before that melancholy period shall arrive ; for no wisdom that she may gain by experience will compensate her for the loss of her present hilarity."

What would the poet's pleasant winter evenings have been worth, if uncheered by such gay companionship ?

With the waning of the eighteenth century and the dawn of its successor, the English cat assumes a more intimate place in letters. Never granted the tender and flattering preëminence of her French sister, she is in some sort recompensed by the tranquil domestic atmosphere, the fireside warmth and glow in which we see her play her gentle part. For a hundred years and more she had not wanted friends. In 1702 the Duchess of Richmond, that fair and lovable creature who had "less wit and more beauty" than any lady at court, bequeathed a maintenance to her old servants, her old cats, and to several old gentlewomen whom she had long befriended. It was this bounty that provoked from Pope the ever-quoted line,

"Die, and endow a college or a cat :"

but to most of us it would seem as though such gracious kindness merited a less satiric recogni-

tion. Lord Chesterfield, to whom the urbane companionship of his cats brought many a soothing hour, also provided like an honourable gentleman for these little comrades who otherwise had been left homeless at his death. Sir Isaac Newton's affectionate solicitude for his cat and kittens is well known, while the records of humbler life show many similar instances of benignity. Fielding, in his pathetic "Voyage to Lisbon," vouches for the high regard in which the ship's cat and her troublesome young family were held by the captain and his crew. On the 11th of July, when off Spithead, he writes in his Journal:—

"A most tragical incident fell out this day at sea. While the ship was under sail, but making, as will appear, no great way, a kitten, one of the four feline inhabitants of the cabin, fell from the window into the water. An alarm was immediately given to the captain, who was then upon deck, and who received it with many bitter oaths. He immediately gave orders to the steersman in favour of the poor thing, as he called it; the sails were instantly slackened, and all hands employed to recover the animal. I was, I own, surprised at this; less, indeed, at the captain's extreme tenderness, than at his conceiving any possibility of success; for if Puss had had nine thousand instead of nine lives, I concluded they had all been lost. The

boatswain, however, was more sanguine; for having stripped himself of his jacket, breeches, and shirt, he leaped boldly into the water, and, to my great astonishment, in a few minutes returned to the ship, bearing the motionless animal in his mouth. Nor was this, I observed, a matter of such great difficulty as it appeared to my ignorance, and possibly may seem to that of my fresh-water reader. The kitten was now exposed to air and sun on the deck, where its life, of which it retained no symptoms, was despaired of by all.

“The captain’s humanity did not so totally destroy his philosophy as to make him yield himself up to affliction. Having felt his loss like a man, he resolved to show he could bear it like one; and, after declaring he had rather have lost a cask of rum or brandy, he betook himself to threshing at backgammon with the Portuguese friar, in which innocent amusement they passed their leisure hours.”

Strange to say, this much prized kitten recovered from its prolonged submersion, only to be found smothered in a cabin bed a few days later, having recklessly squandered all its little lives before one of them reached maturity.

Steele makes constant allusions to his cat in the “Tatler,” — pretty homelike allusions, all of them, though no man was more impatient than he of the prodigal affection lavished by ladies upon their pets.

Who does not remember how Flavia buried with equanimity two husbands and five children, but never recovered from the loss of her parrot? "I know at this Time," he complains, "a celebrated Toast, whom I allow to be one of the most agreeable of her Sex, yet who, in the presence of her Admirers, will give a Torrent of Kisses to her Cat, any one of which a Christian would be glad of."

His own caresses were of a more temperate character. The first thing he did, on reaching home, was to stir his fire and stroke his cat; and he contented himself night after night with the silent company of Pussy and her friend, a little dog whom, from long association, she had learned first to endure, then to appreciate, and then almost to love.

"They both of them sit by my Fire every Evening, and await my return with Impatience; and, at my Entrance, never fail of running up to me, and bidding me Welcome, each of them in its proper Language. As they have been bred up together from Infancy, and have seen no other Company, they have acquired each other's Manners; so that the Dog often gives himself the Airs of a Cat, and the Cat, in several of her Motions and Gestures, affects the Behaviour of the little Dog."

On one occasion some audacious rogues penetrated into this quiet sanctuary, and endeavoured to

persuade Mr. Bickerstaff that they could turn water into wine by merely adding to it a few drops of some mysterious elixir. He asked to see and taste this potent drug, and then — forgetful of friendship and unworthy of confidence — ventured upon a most unpardonable experiment.

“My Cat at this Time sat by me on the Elbow of my Chair; and, as I did not care to make the Trial myself, I reached it to her to sip of it, which had like to cost her her Life. For notwithstanding that it flung her at first into freakish Tricks, quite contrary to her usual Gravity, in less than a Quarter of an Hour she fell into Convulsions; and, had she not been a Creature more tenacious of Life than any other, she would certainly have died under the Operation.

“I was so incensed by the Tortures of my innocent Domestick, and by the wicked dealings of these Men, that I told them if each of them had as many Lives as the injured Creature before us, they deserved to forfeit them for the pernicious Arts which they used for their Profit.”

After all, who gave the cat the poisonous stuff? Steele's virtuous indignation at the consequence of his own act must have amused Dr. Johnson, who bade Miss Susan Thrale read Bickerstaff's account of his pet. It was not in such fashion that the great scholar cherished his own cats. When we

come to *them* in the natural sequence of history, we feel we are on the borderland between the old life and the new ; between the tepid affection or playful panegyrics which characterized the eighteenth century, and the more sincere emotions which succeeded. Dr. Johnson died sixteen years before Cowper, yet it is plain that his sentiment for Hodge was something very different from the temperate regard of the poet, based upon unworthy utilitarianism. Cowper, it is true, killed the viper, lest it should rob the Olney household of the

“ only cat

That was of age to combat with a rat ; ”

but Johnson would have slain a wilderness of vipers without thought of a mouse in the cupboard. “ Indulgence ” is the term applied by Boswell — who cordially hated cats — to his patron’s amiable weakness ; and it is plain that it cost him some effort to sympathize with so strange a partiality.

“ I shall never forget the indulgence with which he treated Hodge, his cat, for whom he himself used to go out and buy oysters, lest the servants, having that trouble, should take a dislike to the poor creature. I am, unluckily, one of those who have such an antipathy to a cat that I am uneasy when I am in the room with one ; and I own I frequently suffered a good deal from the presence of this same Hodge.

“I recollect him one day scrambling up Dr. Johnson’s breast, apparently with much satisfaction, while my friend, smiling and half whistling, rubbed down his back and pulled him by the tail; and, when I observed he was a fine cat, saying, ‘Why yes, sir, but I have had cats whom I liked better than this;’ and then, as if perceiving Hodge to be out of countenance, adding, ‘but he is a very fine cat, a very fine cat indeed.’

“This reminds me of the ludicrous account which he gave Mr. Langton of the despicable state of a young gentleman of good family: ‘Sir, when I heard of him last, he was running about town shooting cats.’ And then, in a sort of kindly reverie, he bethought himself of his own favourite, and said, ‘but Hodge shan’t be shot; no, no, Hodge shall not be shot.’”

Since Montaigne played with his cat in sleepy Périgord, there has been no simpler or finer picture than this of mutual understanding and regard. When we consider Dr. Johnson’s unconcern at putting mere mortals “out of countenance,” and his occasional indignation that they should presume to have their feelings crushed under the heavy sledgehammer of his wit, we cannot help feeling that this nice regard for the sensitiveness of a cat shows what a humanizing influence Hodge had upon his master. I wonder if the “white kitling,” Lilly,

was the pussy whom Johnson "liked better" than Hodge. On this point no light has ever been thrown; but Lilly was fair to see, and Hodge, though Boswell politely called him a fine cat, appears to have been but modestly endowed in respect to personal beauty. He had parts, and he had that rare gift of sympathy which is so seldom manifested by his race, perhaps because there is so little in most of us to quicken it. His was a happy fate. To sit purring on Johnson's knee, secure of kindness, safe from that forcible contempt which no one but Boswell could bear smilingly; to be fed with oysters by that generous hand, and to be immortalized by the companionship which crowned his little life with content; — this seems to me the best of feline fortunes, equalled only, and not surpassed, by the joy of being Sir Walter's cat at Abbotsford.

Of Hinse of Hinsefeld it becomes us to speak with respect. Staid in demeanour, irreproachable in conduct, happily mingling affability with reserve, a courteous cat along old-fashioned, gentlemanly lines, he maintained the dignity of his position through many tranquil years. For his master he entertained a steadfast affection, the affection which, as we well know, Scott inspired in every animal he met. Cat or dog, pig or hen, it mattered not. There lived no beast nor bird so stupid or so ill-conditioned as to withhold allegiance.

The delightful thing to remember is that Scott, who was not by nature a lover of cats, granted to Hinse a fair share of friendship. He was wont to say that his growing esteem for cats in general, and for Hinse in particular, was a sign of old age, of chimney-corner life, — dogs having been his boon companions in the vigorous years of manhood. Maida is a name to conjure by, and there is nothing in the wide world of English letters more touching than that first lament for Abbotsford, when the clouds were gathering fast, and the hopes of his heart were broken. “I feel my dogs’ feet on my knees. I hear them whining and seeking me everywhere.”

Yet Hinse lorded it over the great hound with all the arrogance of his race, and no one enjoyed more than Sir Walter such superb and unwarranted effrontery. Soon after the coming of Maida, he wrote in high glee to Joanna Baillie: —

“I have added a most romantic inmate to my family, — a large bloodhound, allowed to be the finest dog of the kind in Scotland; perfectly gentle, affectionate and good-natured, and the darling of all the children. I had him a present from Glogarray, who has refused the breed to people of the very first rank. He is between the deer-greyhound and mastiff, with a shaggy mane like a lion; and always sits beside me at dinner, his head as high

as the back of my chair. Yet it will gratify you to know that a favourite cat keeps him in the greatest possible order, insists upon all rights of precedence, and scratches with impunity the nose of an animal who would make no bones of a wolf, and pulls down a red deer without fear or difficulty. I heard my friend set up some most piteous howls, and I assure you the noise was no joke, all occasioned by his fear of passing Puss, who had stationed himself on the stairs."

That other dogs were less forbearing than Maida, Hinse found to his cost, when Nimrod arrived to share the wide hospitality of Abbotsford. Maida's tolerance extended to all creatures, save deer, that he had been trained to hunt, and artists, whom he hated because of the weary hours spent in sitting for his portraits. The mere sight of a palette or a box of colours would send him yawning from the room. But Hinse's vanity was stimulated by having his picture hung on the library wall, and by the ever increasing respect and affection in which he was held. When his placid career came to its tragic close, Scott wrote to Richardson words of genuine regret. — "Alack-a-day! my poor cat, Hinse, my acquaintance, and, in some sort, my friend of fifteen years, was snapped at even by that paynim Nimrod. What could I say to him, but what Brantôme said to some *ferrailleur* who had

been too successful in a duel? 'Ah! mon grand ami, vous avez tué mon autre grand ami.' "

To have been, even "in some sort," Sir Walter's friend for fifteen happy years was as enviable a lot as to have shared Dr. Johnson's London lodgings. "Canonized pets of literature!" Why, here are two who may lord it in Elysium through all the centuries to come.

When Scott was absent from Abbotsford, he was not insensible to the charms of other cats who assiduously sought his society. "There are no dogs in the hotel where I live," he wrote on one occasion from London; "but a tolerably conversable cat, who eats a mess of cream with me in the morning." While at Naples, he visited the Archbishop of Taranto, — "a most interesting old man, whose foible is a passion for cats," — and was delighted with the ecclesiastical pets. "One of them," he noted in his journal, "is a superb brindled Persian, a great beauty, and a particular favourite. I remember seeing at Lord Yarmouth's house a Persian cat, but not so fine as the Bishop's." These pussies were famous in their day, and Scott was not the only traveller to sing their praises. Sir Henry Holland scarcely knew which he admired the more, — the prelate or his cat. Each was the exact picture of what each should be; and, as they sat side by side, the cat seemed

as grand a dignitary, if not as austere an ecclesiastic, as his master.

It was perhaps by way of compensation for their evil repute, and for the unholy nature of their associations throughout the Middle Ages, that cats, when struggling back to respectability, should have been so widely patronized and encouraged by the Church. The shadow that rested on their fair fame gave them, it may be, an added interest to the clerical mind, which has ever a turn for exorcism. Washington Irving, sitting in the library of Abbotsford, observed how attentively Hinse listened to the Arthurian legends which Scott was reading aloud. "Ah!" said the wise Sir Walter, "cats are a mysterious kind of folk. There is more passing in their minds than we are aware of. It comes no doubt from their being so familiar with warlocks and witches."

By this time they were equally familiar with the Christian hierarchy. Gregory the Great was not the only Pope who delighted to honour his cat. Richelieu and Mazarin were not the only Cardinals who cultivated the companionship of kittens. The Abbé Galiani was not the only ecclesiastic who had a passion for the race, though few others manifested it in so strenuous a manner. Losing one of his pets through the negligence of a servant, the inconsolable Abbé marked the severity of his displeasure

by dismissing his entire household. The Church of Rome, indeed, was not long permitted the exclusive privilege of sheltering and petting the cat. The day came fast when her Sister of England followed pliantly in her wake. If the poet Rogers felt genuine delight at being allowed to dine in Italy with a Cardinal and his cats, the guests of Bishop Thirlwall were destined to enjoy the same simple pleasure at Saint David's. His pussies sat on the arms of his chair at table, and shared — or dispensed — the hospitality of the palace. Of other luxuries they appear to have had the monopoly. A visitor who observed that his host looked wearied and uncomfortable, asked him why he did not take an easy chair. "Don't you see who is in it already?" said the Bishop, pointing to a grey cat fast asleep on the cushion.

Canon Liddon's "extravagant partiality" was equally pronounced, and, let us hope, equally agreeable to his friends. He was the proud possessor of a number of cats, who appear to have all had different residences assigned them. Two handsome brothers, christened stupidly Tweedledum and Tweedledee, lived at Amen Corner; another shared his chambers; a fourth, named *Campion*, was boarded out, and only visited the Canon occasionally; and a fifth preferred the Common room at Christ Church to any other quarters. This cat was

of a reserved nature, presenting invariably the same cold insolence of demeanour, the same "heartless and deliberate rudeness" to all church dignitaries save Liddon, whom he loved to distraction, and whom it was his delight to entertain with acrobatic feats. He would jump upon a bust of Dr. Busby which stood on a bracket near the door, balance himself for one instant upon that severe and reverent brow, take a flying leap to the mantelpiece, and returning, land with exquisite and unvarying accuracy on the bust, repeating this performance as often as his master desired. Liddon's great amusement was to stand with his back to the bracket, and fling a biscuit at Dr. Busby's head, the cat catching it dexterously, and without losing his precarious foothold.

One shivers even now at the thought of any man who had once been a little boy, or of any cat who had once been a little kitten, taking such unpardonable liberties with Dr. Busby. His awful shadow looms dark and terrible in the history of childhood. The brilliant scholars, the successful statesmen, the pious and learned divines whom his rod had assisted to eminence, trembled secretly when they heard his name; yet here were a canon and his cat encouraging each other in ribald acts of desecration. Was there no lesser light whose "animated bust" could have served as a pedestal for athletic sports?

That sound scholar and true lover of animals, Archbishop Whately, he who "ignored metaphysics and minimized theology," was wont to say that only one English noun had a true vocative case. "Nominative, cat. Vocative, Puss." And it is a happy circumstance which gives us this soft and pretty appellation, this endearing diminutive, so well suited to the little animal it summons. The French are less fortunate, and all their loving efforts to provide the cat with a permanent vocative serve only to show the greater fitness and sweetness of the English word; in frank recognition of which superiority, M. Taine drops *Moumoutte* and *Mimi*, and fits "Puss" prettily into his loving tribute of verse.

"Le plaisir, comme il vient ; la douleur, s'il le faut,
Puss, vous acceptez tout, et le soleil là-haut,
 Quand il finit son tour dans l'immensité bleue,
 Vous voit, couchée en circle, au soir comme au matin,
 Heureuse sans effort, résignée au destin,
 Lisser nonchalamment les poils de votre queue."

We could ill spare this ancient patronymic, since a somewhat ponderous Saxon humour is wont to wax sportive over the naming of cats. Instead of studying simplicity, as in *Hodge* and *Hinse*, or grace, as in *Selima* and *Fatima*, — on such points *Walpole* could not go astray, — we find too often either sheer stupidity, like *Canon Liddon's Tweedledum* and *Tweedledee*, or the fantastic foolishness

which made possible this often quoted passage in a letter of Southey's to Bedford.'

"Alas, Grosvenor, to-day poor Rumpel was found dead, after as long and happy a life as cat could wish for, if cats form wishes on that subject. His full titles were: The Most Noble, the Archduke Rumpelstiltzchen, Marcus Macbum, Earl Tomlefnagne, Baron Raticide, Waowhler and Scratch. There should be a court-mourning in Catland, and if the Dragon" (Bedford's cat) "wear a black ribbon round his neck, or a band of crape *à la militaire* round one of his forepaws, it will be but a becoming mark of respect."

People who admired "The Cataract of Lodore," or "The March to Moscow," may possibly have thought this letter amusing. We, if less easily entertained, should at least forgive it, remembering that Southey loved his cats, though he could joke clumsily over their graves. He was sincerely attached, not only to Rumpel, but to Othello, and "the Zombi," — which sounds like a litter, but was in reality a single puss, named after the chief of the Palmares negroes. All these animals enjoyed as much consideration and respect as Bentham's famous cat, who began life as simple Langbourne, was subsequently knighted, and known as Sir John Langbourne, and ended his dignified days as Rev. Sir John Langbourne, D. D.

Turn where we may in this Augustan age, we see the same consoling picture, — from Sterne's cat purring by the fire, to Charles Lamb's faithful old Pussy decorated with green ribbons to fit her for her pastoral part in Edmonton. Lamb, as we know, admired Miss Grey's "kitten eyes," with their sweet pretence of innocence; and offered his own solution of a hitherto unanswered problem. "I made a pun the other day," he writes to Manning, "and palmed it upon Holcroft, who grinned like a Cheshire cat. (Why do cats grin in Cheshire? — Because it was once a county palatine, and the cats cannot help laughing whenever they think of it, though *I* see no great joke in it.)"

Even Christopher North, guilty as he appears in the matter of that brutal sport, cat-worrying, had a sincere and well-founded admiration for his own puss, who was a Nimrod among hunters, a Cœur de Lion among fighters, and an Autolycus among thieves. The genial depravity of this gifted cat, and his wonderful readiness of resource, delighted Wilson's soul. He it was who, having adroitly removed the pigeon from a well-built pie, stuffed up the hole with his master's ink-sponge, as matter better suited to the literary appetite. He it was whose clamorous battle-cry, ringing through the frosty night, summoned all the warriors of the wall to mortal combat, until Wilson's back green

was "absolutely composed of cats." And he it was whose passionate love-songs banished slumber from the eyes of men, and stirred the gentle Ettrick Shepherd into an unwonted fury of denunciation. "I've often thocht it aneuch to sicken ane o' love a' their days," he observes indignantly in the "Noctes," "just to reflect that a' that hissin', and spitting, and snuffing, and squeaking, and squealing, and howling, and growling, and groaning, a' mixed up into ae infernal gallemaufry o' din, onlike onything else even in this noisy world, was wi' these creatures the saftest, sweetest expression o' the same tender passion that from Adam's lips whispered persuasion into Eve's ear, in the bowers o' Paradise."

Perhaps, indeed, much of the unreasonable fear and hatred with which the mediæval peasant regarded his cat may be traceable to its extraordinary vocal powers. Those long-drawn notes which suddenly pierce the silence of the night, so inhumanly human in their swelling cadences; those rising tides of passion, those sudden plunges into unveiled horror, — what wonder that they carried consternation to minds always attuned to the supernatural! One remembers how Coleridge wrote of the cats of Malta, who were in the habit of meeting under his bedroom window, and to whose nocturnal symphonies he listened with quaking heart. "It is the discord of Torment, and of Rage, and of Hate, of

paroxysms of Revenge, and *every* note grumbles away into Despair."

More sympathetic and less nervous hearers have found much to interest them in the cat's vocalism, with its flexibility and astonishing variations. "Le chat mise en possession d'une belle et grande voix," wrote Moncrif appreciatively. M. Dupont de Nemours, a close and loving student of animals, maintained that, whereas the dog possesses only vowel sounds, the cat uses in her language no less than six consonants, — m, n, g, h, v, and f. M. Champfleury professed to have counted sixty-three notes in the mewling of cats, though he acknowledged that it took an accurate ear and much practice to distinguish them. He also considered the sign or gesture language used by cats to be even more copious and expressive than their audible tongue. The Abbé Galiani could discern only twenty notes in the most elaborate mewling; but insisted that these sounds represent a complete vocabulary, inasmuch as a cat always makes use of the same note to express the same sentiment. He was able to distinguish clearly between the male and female tones, which he held to be as different in the cry of animals as in the singing of birds. It was his opinion, moreover, that not a single quaver in all the "infernal gallemaufry o' din," which we hear from the moon-lit wall, voices that tender passion

which the Ettrick Shepherd fancied to vibrate in every scale. Two cats, systematically separated by him from all other companionship, did their love-making silently, only a faint amorous purr or sigh betraying the nature of their emotions. Those clarion notes, those long wailing sobs, associated with feline dalliance, are rather calls to the absent, vituperations of rival suitors, jealous upbraidings, protestations of innocence, clangorous summons to battle, and pæans of victory over a routed foe. Courtship, without these attendant agitations, must be rather a colourless affair. To woo in a corner, instead of in a tournament, is dull work for a spirited cat.

For that Puss is, above all things, a hunter and a fighter must never be forgotten nor ignored. Little beast of prey unwearingly pursuing her quarry, little denizen of woods and caves installed under our roofs, and softened into domesticity, — the cat has retained her wild instincts through centuries of repression. Chosen companion of students, valued friend of careful housewives, and genius of the quiet fireside, she gives to man, in return for his protection, nothing but her gracious presence by his hearth. The serenity of her habitual attitude, which veils a stubborn fierceness of soul, her indolent enjoyment of cushioned ease and warmth, have endeared her naturally to men of

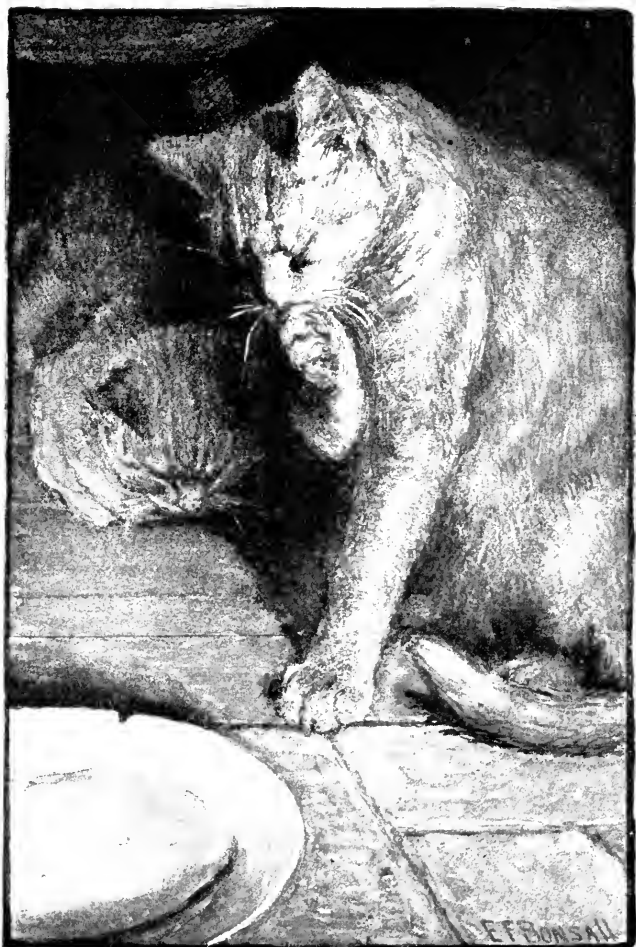
thought rather than to men of action. Shelley basking by the fire, Johnson immured in shabby London lodgings, Scott, when his increasing lameness deprived him of the outdoor pleasures that he loved, Matthew Arnold in the simple country life that pleased him best, — all learned to appreciate the gentleness, the composure, the exquisite urbanity of the cat. Statesmen have ever been partial to an animal whose subtlety of spirit far exceeds their own. Colbert, following the example of Richelieu, was wont to play for hours with his kittens, and Canning wrote verses in praise of his cat. It has even happened that sailors and soldiers, like Admiral Doria and Marshal Turenne, have frankly avowed the engrossing nature of their preference. Doria was painted with his cat by his side ; Turenne had whole families of pussies whom he loved and cared for. Lord Heathfield, when Gibraltar was besieged by the Spaniards, used to appear every day on the walls, attended by his cats, — quiet, composed beasts, who kept close to their master, and seemed in no wise disturbed by the roar and rattle of artillery. More strange and more pitiful to relate, there were found, after the battle of Sebastopol, a number of cats clinging, frightened and forlorn, to the knapsacks of the dead Russian soldiers. They had followed their only friends into the midst of that terrible carnage, and, desperate with terror, refused to be driven from the field.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the feline war record, so far as it is known in history, is not a brilliant one. The unwritten annals of the race are dark, indeed, with strife. For matchless courage, and for an animated joy in battle, the cat can hardly be surpassed. But the combat must be of his own choosing, and with his own kindred. To the perpetual wrangling of humanity he offers a mortifying indifference. That splendid spirit of partisanship which made Prince Rupert's dog fly at a Roundhead's throat is all unknown to the cat. That intelligent understanding of a political situation which induced the wise and wary greyhound, Math, to desert King Richard the Second, who had reared him from puppyhood, and fawn upon the victorious Bolingbroke; or which inspired the favourite spaniel of Charles of Blois to quit his master's side before the battle of Auray, and seek the safer shelter of John de Montfort's tent, would be impossible — let us hope — for the cat. When Puss has taken an active part in any warfare, — as in the dastardly attack of Cambyses upon the pious Egyptians, — he was but an irresponsible and unwilling agent. Therefore he has seldom been the admitted friend of fighting men. Be it remembered with regret that Napoleon detested cats as cordially all his life as Lord Roberts detests them now.

The irritable race of authors have, on the other

hand, found in Pussy's gentle presence a balm for their sensitive souls. Lord Byron stands forth, a striking exception to this rule. He was sensitive enough, and irritable enough, Heaven knows, and he had plenty of cats — five at one time in Ravenna — to have afforded him all the consolation of which he stood in need ; but he harboured them rather from a passionate fancy for every kind of animal than from a particular grace in selection. They shared his indiscriminate hospitality with eight dogs, ten horses, three monkeys, an eagle, a crow, a falcon, five peacocks, two guinea-hens and an Egyptian crane ; and must have had scant pleasure in such varied and over-animated society. There was even at one time a civet-cat added to this *ménagerie intime* ; but it wisely ran away, after scratching one of the monkeys, and was never heard of again. Shelley, being of a nervous temperament, was made unspeakably wretched by the superabundance of birds and beasts in the Ravenna palace, and expressed his views forcibly to Byron, who could not be made to understand such discomfort. He himself found them all delightful, and noted down with deep concern in his journal the temporary lameness of the crow, and his apprehension lest " some fool " had trodden on its foot.

In more homely households, Pussy's recognized corner was the kitchen hearth. There dwelt the



grey cat of the Brontës, watching Emily's bread-making with wise, attentive eyes. She was the silent sister's favourite, and Charlotte has recorded the grief at Haworth when the poor little creature died. There dwelt the cheerful colony of Edgeworthstown cats, or such of them, at least, as were not on police duty in the stables. Miss Edgeworth, though no enthusiast, has left us a pleasant description of these pussies, and of their delight at the reappearance of a maid who had been absent with the family at Longford. "I forgot to tell you a remarkable feature of our return," she writes to her cousin, Sophy Ruxton. "All the cats, even those who properly belong to the stable, and who had never been admitted to the honours of a sitting in the kitchen, crowded around Kitty with congratulatory faces, crawling up her gown, insisting upon caressing and being caressed, when she reappeared in the lower regions. Mr. Gilpin's slander against cats, as selfish, unfeeling creatures, is refuted by stubborn facts."

That is a pretty touch of "congratulatory faces," and worthy of the writer's pen. We can see the topaz eyes gleaming softly in the firelight; we can hear the welcoming purr, and feel the gentle rubbing of the furry sides. It is from Miss Edgeworth, too, that we learn of Joanna Baillie's cat, a splendid Amazon, who once avenged the wrongs of her race

by worrying a dog, to the huge delight of Sir Walter Scott; yet who, combining courtesy with valour, was wont to awaken her mistress when she lay late abed, by very gently placing one paw "with its glove on" upon the closed lids. Perhaps this peerless creature was also, in the main, a kitchen cat, Miss Baillie having strict views of her own as to the nature of feline duties.

" Still be thou deemed by housewife fat,
A comely, careful, mousing cat,
Whose dish is, for the public good,
Replenished oft with savoury food ; "

is the sober future she holds out to the kitten sporting by the fire, — the tiny comedian whose irresponsible gayety beguiled her heart, and prompted some of her prettiest lines.

" Backwards coiled, and crouching low,
With glaring eye-balls watch thy foe,
The housewife's spindle whirling round,
Or thread or straw, that on the ground
Its shadow throws, by urchin sly
Held out to lure thy roving eye ;
Then, onward stealing, fiercely spring
Upon the futile, faithless thing.
Now, wheeling round with bootless skill,
Thy bo-peep tail provokes thee still,
And oft, beyond thy curving side,
Its jetty tip is seen to glide.
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The nimblest tumbler, stage-bedight,
To thee is but a clumsy wight,

Who every limb and sinew strains
To do what costs thee little pains.
But, stopped the while thy wanton play,
Applauses too *thy* feats repay :
For then, beneath some childish hand,
With modest pride thou takest thy stand ;
Dilated then thy glossy fur,
And loudly swells thy busy purr ;
As, timing well the equal sound,
Thy clutching feet bepat the ground,
And all their harmless claws disclose,
Like prickles of an early rose."

If this verse be far less graceful and poetic than that in which Wordsworth has described for us the kitten playing with the fallen leaves, it has the merit of plain fidelity to facts. Joanna Baillie understood how dear to kittenhood are attention and applause, how much of the irresistible prancing and paddling is pure comedy, designed to dazzle an audience. Wordsworth, gazing serenely at the small impostor on the wall, was deceived by a specious show of innocence. With touching simplicity, he fancied her unconscious of the admiration she was exciting, and philosophized over the absence of that coquetry which was rampant in her little bosom.

" But the kitten, how she starts,
Crouches, stretches, paws and darts !
First at one, and then its fellow,
Just as light and just as yellow ;
There are many now, — now one, —
Now they stop, and there are none.

What intensesness of desire
In her upward eye of fire !
With a tiger leap half way,
Now she meets the coming prey,
Lets it go as fast, and then
Has it in her power again.
Now she works with three or four,
Like an Indian conjurer ;
Quick as he in feats of art,
Far beyond in joy of heart.
Were her antics played in the eye
Of a thousand standers-by,
Clapping hands with shout and stare,
What would little Tabby care
For the plaudits of the crowd ?
Over happy to be proud ;
Over wealthy in the treasure
Of her own exceeding pleasure."

Little Tabby was an arrant hussy to so shamelessly deceive a great poet ; but when any living creature contrives to look as supernaturally innocent as a kitten, we had best remember " L'Ecole des Femmes," and be sure *qu'elle fait l'Agnès*.

For Pussy at her very best, we must still turn to homely hearths where her place is held sacred, where her labours warrant her welcome, where her sleepy ease suggests comfort, and her beauty gives an indescribable touch of distinction to all her plain surroundings. It is in such a humdrum song as that of Auld Bawthren in the chimney-corner that we see the domestic sweetness of the cat.

" The gudewife birrs wi' the wheel a' day,
 Three threds an' a thrum ;
A walth o' wark, an' sma' time for play,
Wi' the lint sae white and worsset grey
Work hard she maun, while sing I may,
 Three threds an' a thrum.

" The gudewife rises frae out her bed,
Wi' her cozey nicht-mutch round her head,
To steer the fire to a blaze sae red,
An' her feet I rub wi' welcome glad.

" I daunder round her wi' blythesome birr,
An' rub on her legs my sleek warm fur ;
Wi' sweeps o' my tail I welcome her,
An' round her rin, wherever she stir.

" The men-folk's time for rest is sma',
They 're out in the sunshine, an' out in the snaw,
Tho' cauld winds whistle, or rain should fa',
I, in the ingle, dae nought ava'.

" I like the gudeman, but loe the wife,
Days mony they 've seen o' leil and strife ;
O' sorrow human hours are rife ;
Their haud 's been mine a' the days o' my life.

" Auld Bawthren grey, she kitten'd me here,
An' wha was my sire I didna spier ;
Brithers an' sisters smoor'd i' the weir,
Left me alane to my mither dear.

" As I grew a cat wi' look sae douse,
She taught me to catch the pilf'rin mouse ;
Wi' the thievish rotttons I had nae truce,
But banished them a' frae the maister's house.

“ Mither got fushionless, auld, an’ blin,
 The bluid in her veins was cauld an’ thin,
 Her claws were blunt, an’ she couldna rin,
 An’ t’ her forbears was sune gathered in.

“ Now I sit hurklin’ aye in the ase,
 The queen I am o’ that cozey place ;
 As wi’ ilka paw I dicht my face,
 I sing an’ purr wi’ mickle grace,
 Three threeds an’ a thrum,
 Three threeds an’ a thrum.”

There was one hearth, humble enough for the most part, where the cat led but a chequered and comfortless career ; there was one great writer whose supremely irritable soul she might have soothed into serenity, had she been granted fuller and sweeter sway. Carlyle should always have had a cat at his elbow. It was the influence he needed most, and which he vaguely welcomed, without understanding its tranquillizing power. The wisdom of the centuries is embodied in the contemplative self-sufficiency of the cat. Her superb repose modifies the restless fidgeting of men, and Carlyle fidgeted more than is permissible, even for a man. Unhappily, his incomparable wife surpassed him on this score, and it was she, alas ! who made Pussy’s post untenable. Her letters show as constant a succession of cats as of servants. Each new animal, like each new domestic, was received with enthusiasm ; and each was found, after a trial, to

be as far removed from an impossible standard of perfection.

One feline Sybarite took an unworthy advantage of Mr. Carlyle's absence to kitten on his bed ; and another stole the red herring which the maid-of-all-work had cooked for her own dinner. There was at no time a superfluity of good cheer beneath that meagre roof, and who, save the aggrieved maid, could have censured so natural and necessary a theft ? This hapless cat was afterwards — while its mistress was away — ruthlessly drowned, “for unexampled dishonesty,” being expected, apparently, to live upon nothing but mice.

The next incumbent was a vivacious black pussy, known by the pretty name of Columbine. There is an amusing letter from Mrs. Carlyle, — when is she not amusing ! — in which Nero, the little dog, gives his absent master a graphic picture of the unhomelike home, with its Spartan rigours, and bleak, clean, fussy discomfort. He winds up ruefully : “There was no dinner yesterday, to speak of. I had, for my share, only a piece of biscuit that might have been round the world ; and if Columbine got anything at all, I did n't see it.”

Possibly Columbine foraged for herself, after the free-booting fashion of her race ; but the white cat that succeeded her departed immediately from such dinnerless quarters. Then Mr. Darwin offered

Mrs. Carlyle his own excellent mouser, if she could tolerate "a cat with a bad heart." Apparently she could n't ; but preferred one that was admittedly clever, though "of an unsettled turn of mind." This beast, wise in its restlessness, withdrew after a brief experience ; and was followed by "a kitten, black as soot, — a most agile kitten, and wonderfully confiding."

Dear little kit ! How long she stayed, or was permitted to stay, we do not know. There is but one more letter on the subject, and that one is not included in the published volumes. It was unearthed recently, and printed in the "Glasgow News." Its recipient was Mrs. Carlyle's maid, Jessie, of whom, in other epistles, she makes bitter complaint ; but with whom she appears to have corresponded on the most intimate and animated terms. Writing from Folkestone, whither she has gone for sea air, she implores Jessie to have everything in readiness for Mr. Carlyle's return. He is visiting his brother in Annandale, and she has been trying hard to persuade him to remain there, or at Aldersley Park, for another week.

"I hold out the inducement that I should be in London, after Monday the twenty-eighth, to welcome him. But I don't know. Man is born to contradiction, as the sparks fly upward. The very persuasion that he should absent himself a few days

more may give him an unconscious but irresistible impulse towards home.

“Anyhow, you and Mrs. Warren will not be found, like the foolish virgins, with lamps without oil ; and, besides, you may be sure of his giving you due warning. Having his bedroom all right, and the upstairs room fit to be seen, no other preparation need be made 'till the day and hour of his coming have been announced to you by himself. I still hope that he may not come 'till I myself am home first ; but, if he should, there is one thing which you must attend to, and which you would not think of without being told. That cat ! I wish she were dead ! But I can't shorten her days, because, you see, my poor, dear, wee dog liked her. Well, there she is ! And as long as she attends Mr. C. at his meals (and she does n't care a sheaf of tobacco for him at any other time), so long will Mr. C. continue to give her bits of meat and driblets of milk, to the ruination of carpets and hearthrugs ! I have over and over again pointed out to him the stains she has made, but he won't believe them her doings. And the dining-room carpet was so old and ugly that it was n't worth rows with one's husband about. Now, however, that nice new cloth must be protected against the cat abuse. So what I wish is that you would shut up the creature when Mr. C. has breakfast, dinner, or tea ; and, if he remarks on her absence, say it

was my express wish. He has no idea what a selfish, immoral, improper beast she is, nor what mischief she does to the carpets. Kind regards to Mrs. Warren. Yours sincerely,

JANE CARLYLE."

Poor Pussy! Poor clean, sad, catless dining-room! Poor Mrs. Carlyle! In another year she was dead, and we can hardly fancy her resting unfretted in her grave. But it is pleasant to picture the great historian, whose disagreeable aspects have been put forward so relentlessly for the consideration of the world, feeding his cat with "driblets of milk," and excusing — or denying — the mess she made. There is a touch of Dr. Johnson's human kindness about the simple deed. Had Carlyle been permitted to live on terms of easy intimacy with Columbine or the soot-black kitten, he might have learned from

"The perfect balance of their ways"

some useful lessons in philosophy.

Happily there are other and brighter prospects to consider, even on England's uncongenial soil; there are other and brighter glimpses into homes which seem to have been made — like Herrick's vicarage — for Pussy's tranquil sway. To understand the character of a cat, to respect her independence, to recognize and deplore her pitiless instincts,

to be charmed by her gentler moods, to admire her beauty, to appreciate her intelligence, and to love her steadfastly without being loved in return, — these things are not often possible to the Anglo-Saxon nature. It is an upright nature, but iron-bound and exacting. It is wont to overrate the virtues it possesses, and to underrate those to which it lays no claim. It prizes the frank fidelity of the dog, it mistrusts the suavity and subtlety of the cat; but then, as the cat remarks to the dog in Mr. Froude's "Pilgrimage," "There may be truth in what you say, but I think your view is limited." It is at least worthy of note that the Englishman who so deeply offended his country-people by his admiration for French traits and French literature, embodied the one, and rivalled the other, in the few admirable lines that immortalize his cat. Mr. Arnold's Atossa is no "comely, careful" mouser, no guileless kitling, innocent of sin. She is a red-handed murderess, whose blandishments win easy pardon for her crimes. His letters prove the affection he felt for her; his poetry proves the clearness with which he saw the depths of her misdoing. He cheerfully fills page after page of his correspondence with minute descriptions of her behaviour by night and day, winding up with the heartfelt assurance; "She is a most interesting cat, and we get fonder and fonder of her all the time."

“I have just been called to the door,” he writes from Cobham to his mother, “by the sweet voice of Toss, whose morning proceedings are wonderful. She sleeps — She has just jumped on my lap, and her beautiful tail has made this smudge, but I have put her down again. I was going to say that she sleeps on an arm-chair before the drawing-room fire; descends the moment she hears the servants about in the morning, and makes them let her out; comes back and enters Flu’s room with Eliza regularly at half-past seven. Then she comes to my door and gives a mew, and then — especially if I let her in, and go on writing or reading without taking any notice of her — there is a real demonstration of affection, such as never again occurs in the day. She purrs, she walks round and round me, she jumps in my lap, she turns to me and rubs her head and nose against my chin, she opens her mouth and raps her pretty white teeth against my pen. Then she leaps down, settles herself by the fire, and never shows any more affection all day.”

Did ever another Englishman relate such infinitesimal details about a cat? “Morning proceedings are wonderful!” Why, all well-bred pussies give a courteous, and, in some sort, affectionate salutation, by way of beginning the day. None are so unwise as to prolong their caresses to the point of weariness.

ness. The same enviable instinct which prompts them to offer their gentle tokens of regard, teaches them sobriety and reserve.

Mr. Arnold had a second and less distinguished cat named Blacky, about whom we are told little, save that he lost one of his legs by some sad accident, and went about contentedly on the remaining three all the years of his life, the cheeriest and most agile of cripples. Atossa was a very beautiful Persian; and who that has read the pathetic lament for "Poor Matthias," can forget the description of her compelling and sinister loveliness?

"Thou hast seen Atossa sage
Sit for hours beside thy cage;
Thou wouldst chirp, thou foolish bird,
Flutter, chirp, — she never stirred!
What were now these toys to her?
Down she sank amid her fur;
Eyed thee with a soul resign'd,
And thou deemedst cats were kind!
— Cruel, but composed and bland,
Dumb, inscrutable, and grand;
So Tiberius might have sat,
Had Tiberius been a cat."

And so Montaigne might have written, had Montaigne been a poet. The attitude of the two men towards the animals they loved, but could not hope to understand, — an unmoral, unjudicial attitude, as remote from vindication as from denunciation, shows

them to have been serene students of natural laws. "Thus freely speaketh Montaigne concerning cats," observes Isaac Walton with gravity; and thus freely speaketh Matthew Arnold. Both knew whereof they spoke.





CHAPTER VIII

SOME CATS OF FRANCE

“Ella jouait avec sa chatte ;
Et c'était merveille de voir
La main blanche et la blanche patte
S'ébattre dans l'ombre du soir.”

IN the year 1865 a *juge de paix* of Fontainebleau, from whom several householders had demanded legal protection for their cats, pronounced this admirable judgment.

“That the domestic cat is not a thing of naught, but the property of its master, and, as such, entitled to the shelter of the law ;

“That the utility of the cat as a destroyer of mischievous rodents being indisputable, equity demands the extension of indulgence to an animal which the law tolerates and protects ;

“That even the domestic cat is of a mixed nature; that is to say, a creature which is partly wild, and which must ever remain so, by reason of its destiny and purpose.”

The decision further asserts that no citizen is justified in taking the life of a neighbour's cat, because of any depredations it may have committed; but the interesting clause is that which frankly acknowledges Pussy's independence of restraint. It is precisely because the French have always admitted this independence, and ungrudgingly granted to the cat her freedom, that they have learned to know her so well, and to cherish her so fondly. Buffon says she is the only brute which accepts the comforts, but rejects the bondage of domesticity; the only one which is tamed without servitude. M. Flourens maintains that she is not really domesticated at all, because she neither serves us nor associates with us, save capriciously, and as her own whims dictate. M. Fée, in his delightful book, “*Etudes philosophiques sur l'Instinct et l'Intelligence des Animaux*,” defines domesticity as that change in the habits of a bird or beast which brings it within the scope of our influence, so that it lives contentedly, and without severe restraint, amid whatever surroundings we provide. According to this definition, the cat is truly domestic. No animal enjoys more keenly the luxury it is in our power to

give, and no animal expresses its enjoyment with so much grace and courtesy. "The most untamable of the carnivora," says M. Fée, "is the panther; the most destructive is the cougar; the gentlest is the leopard; the most intelligent is the cat. This last consents to be our guest. She accepts the shelter we offer, and the food we provide. She even permits us to play with her, and fondle her, when she is in a responsive humour. But she never parts with her liberty. She will be neither our servant nor our friend."

True lovers of the race have been attracted rather than repelled by this spirit of equality, this attitude of reserve. "I value in the cat," says Chateaubriand, "the independent and almost ungrateful spirit which prevents her from attaching herself to any one, the indifference with which she passes from the salon to the housetop. When we caress her, she stretches herself, and arches her back responsively; but that is because she feels an agreeable sensation, not because she takes a silly satisfaction, like the dog, in faithfully loving a thankless master. The cat lives alone, has no need of society, obeys only when she pleases, pretends to sleep that she may see the more clearly, and scratches everything on which she can lay her paw."

This is what Chateaubriand called "labouring at the rehabilitation" of his favourite animal; but

there have been those who felt he did her scant justice. According to M. Fée, the cat is capable of profound affection, though it is an affection difficult to win, and easy to forfeit. Moreover, the manifestations of her regard can never be forced. We must wait for her caresses until she is pleased to bestow them; she will accept ours, only when she is in the mood for endearments. In all this she offers a striking contrast to the dog, who, as Mme. de Custine wittily said, "seems condemned to love us," — to love us, however contemptible or unworthy we may be. His steadfast, unreasoning loyalty is beautiful beyond measure; but we can hardly deny that it feeds our vanity. Here is a brave and intelligent animal with whom we can be always as lordly as we please; who never questions our godlike attributes; who accepts punishment meekly, and is exuberantly grateful for the smallest attention, the most trifling token of esteem. What wonder that we sound his praises, seeing that, in praising him, we reflect such credit on ourselves? What wonder that we are disposed to resent the self-sufficing nature of the cat, who will approach us only on equal terms, who cherishes no illusions concerning our goodness and greatness, and whose somewhat contemptuous indifference wounds our self-esteem? Why, it is asked, should we humble ourselves to win the fluctuating affections of a cat,

when a dog stands ever ready to give us his faithful heart, without condition or reserve?

Why, indeed, save that some of us most desire that which is difficult to obtain; that some of us value most that which we fear to lose. When with delicate blandishments we have beguiled a cat from her reserve, when she responds, coyly at first, and then with graceful *abandon* to our advances, when the soft fur brushes our cheek, when the gleaming eyes narrow sleepily, and the murmurous purr betrays the sweetness of her content, we feel like a lover who has warily and with infinite precaution stolen from his capricious mistress the first tender token of possible surrender. One cannot woo a cat after the fashion of the Conqueror. Courtesy, tact, patience are needed at every step; and it may happen that when the victory seems fairly won, and we think the wayward little animal is about to spring upon our knee, she turns aside instead with pointed coldness, retreats to the other end of the room, and either demands to have the door opened that she may escape from our presence, or coils herself with humped and displeased back in some shadowy corner where she may forget that we exist. This is perhaps what Sir Thomas Browne called "four-footed manners," but Pussy is never rude. She contrives, on the contrary, to convey the impression that it is the offensive nature of our

devotion which compels her to quietly and modestly withdraw.

All this, Chateaubriand understood, and accepted without protest, when he granted to the cat her freedom, and proclaimed himself the least exacting of her lovers. Even the mysterious nature of her past history allured rather than repelled him. He it is who tells us the fantastic story of Count Combourg's wooden leg, which, three hundred years after its owner's death, was wont to walk abroad on its own account, accompanied by a great black cat. When the moon waned, and sleepers woke trembling with the terrors of the night, they heard this leg hop slowly down the winding turret stairs, and they knew that, stealing before it in the darkness, crept the cat, with tail erect, and eyes of lambent flame. It would not have been a pleasant thing to meet that little phantom, guarding its impish prize.

The "Mémoires d'outre Tombe" contain some charming allusions to the many cats whom Chateaubriand loved and lost. Through all the vicissitudes of his changeful life, they were his solace, his diversion, his delight. The dreary days of his English exile were brightened and softened by the companionship of two beautiful pussies, "white as ermines, with black tips to their tails;" — pussies who possessed — or so at least the desolate French-

man fancied — more Gallic vivacity than falls to the lot of most Saxon cats. For it was one of Chateaubriand's favourite theories that domestic animals share in an extraordinary degree the national traits of the people among whom their lives are spent. He delighted, when travelling, to observe their expressions and demeanour, declaring that he saw reflected in them the expressions and demeanour of their masters ;—the gayety, the sadness, the intelligence, the stupidity which they daily encountered in man. Thus the German beasts had, he felt, “the temperate character of their reasonable owners ;” while the serious silence, the subdued reserve of English animals oppressed his cheerful soul. “The London sparrow,” he wrote in 1798, “all blackened with smoke, hops drearily about the streets. One seldom hears a dog bark, or a horse neigh, and even the free and independent cat ceases to mew upon the housetop.”

The supreme egotism of Chateaubriand could hardly fail to find expression in his most generous utterances, and it is amusing to hear him proclaim himself to M. de Marcellus the champion and advocate of the cat, because she was “one of the works of God which is most despised by man.” — “Buffon,” he added, “has belied this animal. I am labouring at her rehabilitation, and hope to make her appear a tolerably good sort of beast.”

In reality, men were far more occupied with cats about this time than they were with Chateaubriand, though he managed to play throughout life so prominent a part in the public eye. He followed the trend of popular enthusiasm, and thought he led it; but it cannot be denied that his devotion to his pets was sincere, intelligent, and interpretative. He stood midway between the harsh depreciation of Buffon and the ardent favouritism of M. Fée. Buffon declared the cat to be selfish, treacherous, and perverse; thievish by instinct; incapable of either domesticity or affection; and tolerated under men's roofs only because she destroyed an animal more disagreeable and more mischievous than herself. M. Fée, on the other hand, considered that whatever seemed lacking in Pussy was due to the stupidity or cruelty of her masters. She was, from his point of view, not only the most beautiful of beasts, but one of the most affectionate, if she could but find an object worthy of her regard. "The cat," he says proudly, "is not a commonplace creature when she loves."

Chateaubriand, free alike from antagonism or delusion, was the most clear-sighted of the three. He, at least, valued at her true worth the little Sphinx whose ways are gentle, whose heart is cold, whose character is inscrutable. Vain though he was, his vanity stopped short of any claim upon

her confidence or devotion. He neither demanded the loyalty he knew she would not give, nor ignored the friendship she was sometimes ready to bestow. Therefore there was a peculiar fitness in his inheriting from Leo the Twelfth the superb cat who had been for several years the Pontiff's most intimate companion, and who had aroused the ambassador's admiration by his beauty, his dignified demeanour, and a certain ascetic charm, derived from contact with the papacy. The Pope was abstemious, after the admirable fashion of Italians; the cat, Micetto, was abstemious too, living on a little polenta, and wholly weaned from the carnivorous habits of his race. Chateaubriand, in a well-known passage of his "Mémoires," has left us a pretty description of the pontifical pet, who lived in France to a serene old age, bearing his weight of honours with graceful propriety, and hardening into arrogance only when forced to repel the undue familiarity of visitors.

"My companion," he writes, "is a large grey and red cat, banded with black. He was born in the Vatican, in the loggia of Raphael. Leo the Twelfth reared him on a fold of his white robe, where I used to look at him with envy when, as ambassador, I received my audiences. The successor of Saint Peter being dead, I inherited the bereaved animal. He is called Micetto, and surnamed 'the Pope's cat,' enjoying, in that regard, much consideration

from pious souls. I endeavour to soften his exile, and help him to forget the Sistine Chapel, and the vast dome of Michael Angelo, where, far from earth, he was wont to take his daily promenade."

Many Popes besides Leo have been ardently attached to their cats, since the far-off days when the great Gregory set them so honourable an example. One of those who bore his name most worthily, the gentle and learned Gregory the Fifteenth, — he who founded the Propaganda, yet forbade harsh treatment of the heretic, — was, as might be surmised, the friend and patron of the race, cherishing his own pets with exceeding fondness. Pius the Ninth so delighted in his cat that he shared his meals — simple as Leo's — with this little companion, whose dish was placed at his feet, and filled by his kind old hands.

Victor Hugo, as supreme an egotist as Chateaubriand, but one whose egotism was more strongly fortified by genius, found his path to humility lay in the comradeship of his cats. The world shouted itself hoarse over his greatness. France flung her homage at his feet, and dashed her applause into his face, until adamant would have softened into vanity. "The nineteenth century," cried M. Barbou in a wild access of hysteria, "will have but one title for posterity. It will be called the century of Victor Hugo." — "The twin towers of Notre Dame

are the H of Hugo," said M. Vacquerie ; and the remark seems to have been considered impressive, rather than exceptionally foolish. Even in childhood, this favourite of fortune was fed with sugared praise. His schoolboy verses on "The Happiness which Study Affords in all Situations of Life," were received with serious transport, as though so admirable a sentiment were newly born ; and Chateaubriand, reading them, exclaimed fervently, "Cet enfant est un enfant sublime."

A man who is talked to and written about in this fashion all his life needs the corrective influence of cats, and happily Victor Hugo was blessed in his feline society. His pussies were one and all serene, supercilious, and inclined to ostentation, deeming themselves of more importance than the whole race of human scribblers. There was Mouche, a magisterial cat, defiant and reserved ; and the beautiful Chanoine, too indolent for self-assertion, who spent most of her life sleeping gracefully and undisturbed, like the enchanted Princess in the fairy tale ; and there was that superb beast, deep-eyed and silken furred, whom M. Méry stroked one day with cautious joy, observing : "God made the cat that man might have the pleasure of caressing the tiger." The curtained and cushioned dais in the salon of the Place Royale mansion, about which ill-natured critics laughed maliciously, was

more frequently occupied by cats than by the august author of "Les Misérables." If he were well inclined to throne himself, so indeed were they; and the superior nature of their claims was readily granted by the man in whom their empire kept alive the saving grace of modesty. "When I was young," says M. Champfleury, "I had the honour of being received by Victor Hugo in a room with a big red dais, on which reposed a cat who seemed to await the homage of visitors. He had a huge ruff of white fur like a Chancellor's tippet, his whiskers resembled those of a Hungarian Magyar, and when he advanced in a stately manner, his brilliant eyes fixed full upon my face, I perceived that he had modelled himself on the poet, and was reflecting the majestic thoughts that seemed to fill the chamber."

Did the cat model himself on the poet, or the poet on the cat? When "each seemed either," it was a difficult matter to decide.

About the time that Victor Hugo was gathering his first rich crop of laurels, a certain M. Raton — unknown to fame — published in Paris a very serious little treatise, "Sur l'Education du Chat Domestique," preceded by "Son Histoire Philosophique et Politique," and followed by an elaborate "Traitement de ses Maladies." It is a book of amazing dulness. M. Raton did not love cats. How could

one of his name be reasonably expected to love them ! “ They are,” he says, “ deceitful and treacherous by instinct, depraved and cruel by habit.” The best that can be offered in their behalf is that their perversity is less criminal than that of men, being a natural trait instead of a premeditated ill-doing. Buffon’s traducing cynicisms are quoted lengthily to prove that even the youngest kittens are little monsters of iniquity, filled with inborn malice, and with that propensity to evil which the catechism teaches us is the dark shadow cast by original sin. “ Determined thieves, education only makes them more supple and alert. They know well how to conceal their purpose, to seize their opportunity, to cover their flight, and to escape retribution. They easily acquire the manners, but never the morals of society.”

How far the morals of society are in advance of the morals of cats, it would be hard to determine.

“ J’appelle un chat un chat, et Rolet un fripon ; ”

says Boileau, who plainly found little to choose between them.

The really curious thing about M. Raton’s treatise is that it is embodied in a series of letters addressed to Madame la Supérieure du Couvent des Visitandines ; and one cannot help wondering why the good nun should have desired so much information

upon such a subject. Is it possible that she did not know in what manner cats catch mice, and needed M. Raton's careful explanation? Was she educating little kittens as well as little girls in that particular Visitation convent, and did she feel the necessity for this manual of feline accomplishments, this *Young Cat's Guide to Learning*? Above all, why should the author have chosen the ear of a religious in which to pour the scandalous details of Pussy's moonlight courtship? The chapter entitled "*Des Amours des Chats*" appears hardly fit for cloistered readers. "I venture to say," writes the Frenchman blithely, "that this is not the least pleasant part of my narrative;" and one blushes at his temerity. What was Madame la Supérieure du Couvent des Visitandines thinking about, when she permitted such unseemly particulars to receive the sanction of her name!

Neither Buffon, however, nor M. Raton — feeble exponent of a fast dying antagonism — could destroy the natural affinity between men of letters and their cats, an affinity strengthened by mutual understanding, and hours of silent companionship. Sainte-Beuve's cat was perhaps the finest type of his thoughtful race, — a studious animal, disinclined alike to careless dalliance or to gladiatorial joys. His pleasures were all of a meditative, sedentary character. He would sit for hours on his master's table,

watching that swift and steady pen travelling down the page, and sometimes encouraging it with a soft approving pat. He would step gently backward and forward over the loose sheets; the delight which all cats take in the contact of crisp paper being doubtless enhanced in his case by appreciation of the *Causeries* with which those sheets were covered. He was a striking contrast in every regard to the vigorous animal that loved and scorned Christopher North; but then, if the cats were different, so were their masters. The verdicts of the great French critic were respected by his favourite; but what cat could be asked to respect the early criticisms of "Maga"?

M. Prosper Mérimée was one of the most ardent and enthusiastic cat-lovers of his day. He found no fault with these cherished creatures, save that they were exquisitely sensitive, and too easily disillusioned. Their intelligence amazed, their politeness enchanted him. M. Taine was inspired by *his* cats to rare poetic flights. Historian, essayist, and critic, he willingly abandoned the paths of studious prose to compliment in verse the suave little guests who sat purring in white tippetts by his fire. Twelve sonnets prove the graceful nature of his attachment. They are dedicated, "To three cats, 'Puss,' 'Ebène,' and 'Mitonne,' residing at Menthon-Saint-Bernard, Haute-Savoie;" and they are signed, with mingled

confidence and humility, "their friend, master, and servant, Hippolyte Taine." The prettiest of them all is aptly christened —

" LA PRATIQUE

" 'Cultive ton jardin,' disaient Goethe et Voltaire ;
 Au-delà ton ouvrage est caduc et mort-né ;
 Enfermons nos efforts dans un cercle borné ;
 Point d'écart ; ne cherchons que le ciel sur la terre.

" Ainsi fait notre ami. Comme un vieux militaire,
 Il brosse son habit sitôt qu'il a dîné ;
 Dans son domaine étroit, librement confiné,
 Ministre de sa peau, tout à son ministère.

" Il s'épluche, il se lisse, il sait ce qu'il se doit.
 Pauvre petit torchon moins large que le doigt,
 Sa langue est tour à tour éponge, étrille ou peigne.

" Son nez rejoint son dos ; il lèche en insistant ;
 Pas un poil si lointain que la râpe n'atteigne.
 Goethe, instruit par Voltaire, en a-t-il fait autant ? "

No Frenchman, save Baudelaire and Gautier, have carried their appreciation to a higher pitch than did Taine ; and, if his sentiment lacks the fervid grace of Baudelaire's, it is of a simpler, saner, and more comprehensible order. How far the author of "Fleurs du Mal" was sincere in his fantastic passion for cats ; how far he diverted himself by provoking the curiosity of the world, or by alarming its prejudices ; and how far the world — its curiosity and prejudices being well aroused — exag-

gerated the extravagant behaviour of the poet, are questions hard to determine, and perhaps not worth determining. M. Champfleury, who was a friend, admits the lack of discretion in all of Baudelaire's fancies. They began prettily, soon grew burdensome, and ended too often in the grotesque. "Many a time," he writes, "when he and I have been walking together, have we stopped at the door of a laundry to look at a cat, curled luxuriously on a pile of snow-white linen, and revelling in the fragrant softness of the newly-ironed fabrics. Into what moods of contemplation have we fallen, while the coquettish laundresses struck pretty attitudes at their ironing-boards, under the delusion that we were admiring them. If a cat appeared in a doorway, or crossed the street, Baudelaire would coax it softly, take it in his arms, and stroke its fur, — sometimes the wrong way. Although I may seem to confirm the stories that were circulated when the poet was attacked by hopeless paralysis, I must admit that his enthusiasm had in it something startling and excessive. This made him a charming companion for an hour or so, after which he became fatiguing, from the extreme excitability which all who knew him recognized as characteristic."

The foolish tales current at the time may easily be discarded. It is not probable that the poet,

entering a friend's house, was "restless and uneasy" until he had seen the cat; or that, when the animal was presented, he became so absorbed in its society as to forget his hostess and her guests. But in his own home, and during his brief years of health, Baudelaire found an exquisite and soothing pleasure in the companionship of

"Those suave and puissant cats, the household's pride,
Who love the sedentary life, and glow of fire."

He sang their praises in verse as delicate as their gentle footfalls, as brilliant as their half-shut opal eyes, as mysterious as their ineffable and sphinx-like repose, which seems like the repose of centuries. He pleaded their cause with the fervour of a lover and the skill of an advocate. Their sweet and subtle charm, "lost on the vulgar," has never been more finely expressed than in the little poem called "Les Chats," which is simpler, even in its fantasies, than Baudelaire's verse is often wont to be.

"Les amoureux fervents et les savants austères
Aiment également, dans leur mûre saison,
Les chats puissants et doux, orgueil de la maison,
Qui comme eux sont frileux, et comme eux sédentaires.

"Amis de la science et de la volupté,
Ils cherchent le silence et l'horreur des ténèbres;
L'Erèbe les eût pris pour ses coursiers funèbres,
S'ils pouvaient au servage incliner leur fierté.

“ Ils prennent en songeant les nobles attitudes
Des grands sphinx allongés au fond des solitudes,
Qui semblent s’endormir dans un rêve sans fin.

“ Leur reins féconds sont plein d’étincelles magiques,
Et des parcelles d’or, ainsi qu’un sable fin,
Étoilent vaguement leur prunelles mystiques.”

When the poet grows more personal, when he addresses himself in an ecstasy of adulation to a particular cat rather than to the whole beloved race, his lines become as extravagant in sentiment as they are harmonious in utterance. The little verses beginning —

“ Viens, mon beau chat, sur mon cœur amoureux,
Retiens les griffes de ta patte,”

are riotous in their blandishments ; and even this longer and finer poem, which I cannot forbear to quote entire, is the most fantastic, if the most felicitous, tribute ever laid at Pussy’s little feet, the most highly imaginative verse that ever immortalized the memory of a cat.

“ Dans ma cervelle se promène,
Ainsi qu’en son appartement,
Un beau chat, fort, doux et charmant.
Quand il miaule, on l’entend à peine.

“ Tant son timbre est tendre et discret ;
Mais que sa voix s’apaise ou gronde,
Elle est toujours riche et profonde ;
C’est là son charme et son secret.

THE FIRESIDE SPHINX

“ Cette voix, qui perle et qui filtre
Dans mon fond le plus ténébreux,
Me remplit comme un vers nombreux,
Et me réjouit comme un philtre.

“ Elle endort les plus cruels maux,
Et contient toutes les extases ;
Pour dire les plus longues phrases,
Elle n'a pas besoin de mots.

“ Non, il n'est pas d'archet qui morde
Sur mon cœur, parfait instrument,
Et fasse plus royalement
Chanter sa plus vibrante corde,

“ Que ta voix, chat mystérieux,
Chat séraphique, chat étrange,
En qui tout est, comme en un ange,
Aussi subtil qu'harmonieux !

II

“ De sa fourrure blonde et brune
Sort un parfum si doux, qu'un soir
J'en fus embaumé, pour l'avoir
Caressée une fois, rien qu'une.

“ C'est l'esprit familier du lieu :
Il juge, il préside, il inspire
Toutes choses dans son empire ;
Peut-être est-il fée, est-il dieu ?

“ Quand mes yeux, vers ce chat que j'aime
Tirés comme par un aimant,
Se retournent docilement,
Et que je regarde en moi-même,

“ Je vois avec étonnement
Le feu de ses prunelles pâles,
Clairs fanaux, vivantes opales,
Qui me contempnent fixement.”

“The boast of our age,” says a modern cynic, “is the reverse of simplicity;” but then the cat is not a simple animal. When poets have chosen to write simply about a creature so curiously complex, they have succeeded merely in portraying a single trait or aspect; something easily compassed by even a limited understanding, as Wordsworth described the gambols of the kitten on the wall. Nevertheless, there is a sweeter, homelier side to man’s tenderness for any animal; there is affection distinct from infatuation. It does not inspire the poet, — how should it! — but it warms our hearts, as nothing save kindness and the knowledge of kindness can ever warm them in a world chilled by indifference to pain. Madame Michelet, the clever wife and collaboratrice of the historian, has told us in “L’Oiseau” a plain pathetic little story, which contains all the elements of tragedy and of consolation that go to make up life.

“My father,” she writes, “had a strong sympathy for cats. This was the result of early experience. He and his brother, knocked pitilessly about in their childhood between the harshness of home and the cruelty of school, had, for solace and alleviation,

two well-loved cats. Affection for these animals became a family trait. When we were young, each of us had a kitten. We gathered round the fire at night, and our sleek, well-fed pets sat at our feet, basking in the grateful warmth.

“There was one cat, however, that never joined the circle. He was a poor ugly thing, and so conscious of his defects that he held aloof with invincible shyness and reserve. He was the butt, the *souffre douleur* of our little society ; and the inborn malignity of our natures found expression in the ridicule with which we pelted him. His name was Moquo. He was thin and weak, his coat was scanty, he needed the warm fireside more than the other cats ; but the children frightened him, and his comrades, wrapped snugly in their furry robes, disdained to take any notice of his presence. Only my father would go to the dim, cold corner where he cowered, pick him up, carry him to the hearth, and tuck him safely out of sight under a fold of his own coat. There, warm, safe, and unseen, poor Moquo would take courage, and softly purr his gratitude. Sometimes, however, we caught a glimpse of him, and then, in spite of my father’s reproaches, we laughed and jeered at his melancholy aspect. I can still recall the shadowy creature shrinking away, and seeming to melt into the breast of his protector, closing his eyes as he crept backward, choosing to see and hear nothing.

“There came a day when my father left us for a long journey, and all the animals shared our grief at his departure. Time after time his dogs trotted a little way along the road he had taken to Paris, howling piteously for their master. The most desolate creature in the house was Moquo. He trusted no one ; but, for a while, would steal to the hearth, looking wistfully and furtively at my father’s vacant place. Then, losing hope, he fled to the woods, to resume the wild and wretched life of his infancy ; and, though we tried, we never could entice him back to the home where he no longer had a friend.”

The faithful annalist is one who records with equal grace the life of court and cottage. Not like the gay old historians of the past who told of nothing but kings and the doings of kings, of battles and the glory of empire ; nor like their modern descendants whose joyless work is confined to blue books and statistics, who devote pages to the amendments of some insignificant bill worrying its way through Parliament, but apologize to their readers for a chance allusion to the Queen. Rather should the chronicler pass *con amore* from high to low, and gladly back again ; leaving the “suave and puissant” beasts of Baudelaire’s fireside for their poor cousin of the woods, and returning with pleasure to the courtliest records of cat or kittendom ever penned

by Frenchman, since Moncrif flattered the high-born pussies of Paris and Versailles.

The Black and White Dynasties that reigned over M. Théophile Gautier's hearth have been chronicled by him with surpassing gayety and grace. He is the true "historiogriffe," rather than poor Moncrif, who writhed under the ridicule implied by a title, which — albeit the pun is but a poor one — would have delighted Gautier's soul. The author of "Ménagerie Intime" was as catholic in his affection for animals as was Cowper or Lord Byron. To dogs he was ever faithfully attached, and was wont to make some boast of his friendship for them, finding, as so many of us have found, that when he said he liked dogs, people at once gave him credit for frank and generous sentiments. Magpies, chameleons, and white rats were also favourites, though he vaunted their charms less loudly to a prejudiced world. But cats were his supreme delight, the crowning passion of his life. Unswerving in his devotion, he loved them ardently from childhood; and tells with grateful pride how his mother's big grey cat invariably took his part when he was in disgrace, and used to bite Mme. Gautier's legs when she scolded her little son. If, later on, he transferred his allegiance lightly from one beautiful pet to another, he excuses this apparent fickleness by pleading the sad brevity of feline life, the incur-

able inconstancy of the human heart. "Dynasties of cats, as numerous as the dynasties of the Pharaohs, succeeded each other under my roof," he confesses. "One after another they were swept away by accident, by flight, by death. All were loved and regretted; but oblivion is our common fate, and the memory of the cats we have lost fades like the memory of men."

Which — or rather who — of these famous pussies reigned preëminent over the rest? To whom did Gautier grant his flattering preference? We cannot tell, though Madame Théophile, first and fairest of the group, held a more distinguished, — a more legitimate position I had almost said, in the poet's house. He acknowledges that he gave her his name to show the intimacy of their friendship, the closeness of their mutual regard. Like Chateaubriand's Micetto, Madame Théophile was a reddish cat, with snowy breast, soft blue eyes, and the pinkest of little pink noses. She slept at the foot of her master's bed; she sat on the arm of his chair while he wrote; she walked sedately up and down the garden by his side; she was present at all his meals, and frequently intercepted a choice morsel on its way from his plate to his mouth. She was the heroine of the delightful adventure with the parrot, which is so well known to readers, but which I cannot refrain from quoting once again.

Indeed, though the whole history of the Black and White Dynasties has been told and retold until it is as familiar as fairy stories, it must bear yet one more telling, because of the melancholy incompleteness of any cat-book from which it were omitted. Like Gray's verses to the ill-fated Selima, like the legend of Dick Whittington, like Puss-in-Boots, or the oft-repeated tale of Mohammed's Muezza, it is part of the annals of cathood. To exclude this narrative because of its charming familiarity, would be like excluding the Crusades, the tournaments, the Cavaliers, from England's glorious chronicles. Great Pasht forbid that the history of pussies should be written from the blue-book and statistic point of view; or that the shades of Madame Théophile, of Eponine, of Don Pierrot, and Gavroche should ever cease to smile upon their little brothers and sisters who frolic by our hearths to-day.

The parrot that figures so dramatically in Gautier's story was not by rights a member of the *ménagerie*. It was sent to the poet's hospitable home to be entertained during its owner's absence from Paris, and the fact that Madame Théophile had never before seen such a bird, intensified the interest of their meeting. "Motionless as a cat mummy in its swathing-bands," says Gautier, "she fixed a profoundly meditative gaze upon the creature, summoning to her aid all the notions of natural history

that she had picked up in the garden and on the roof. The shadow of her thoughts passed over her changing eyes, and we could plainly read in them the conclusion to which her scrutiny led: 'Decidedly this is a green chicken.'

"Having determined so much, Madame Théophile leaped from the table whence she had made her observations, and crouched flat on the ground, in the attitude of Gérôme's panther, watching the gazelles as they come down to drink. The parrot followed every motion with feverish anxiety. He ruffled his feathers, rattled his chain, lifted his feet nervously, and rubbed his beak against the side of his trough. Instinct told him that the cat was an enemy, and meant mischief. Madame Théophile's eyes were now fixed upon the bird with terrible intensity, and they said in language which the poor parrot distinctly understood: 'This chicken ought to be good to eat, although it is green.' We watched the little drama breathlessly, ready to interfere at need. The cat crept slowly, almost imperceptibly, nearer and nearer. Her pink nose quivered, her eyes were half closed, her claws moved in and out of their velvet sheaths, slight thrills of pleasure shivered along her spine at the thought of the repast that awaited her. Such novel and exotic food tempted her appetite.

"Suddenly her back bent like a bow, and with

a vigorous and elastic spring she leaped upon the perch. The parrot, seeing the imminence of his danger, cried in a voice as deep as M. Prudhomme's : 'As-tu déjeuné, Jacquot ?'

"This utterance so terrified the cat that she fell backwards. The blare of a trumpet, the report of a pistol, could not have frightened her more thoroughly. All her ornithological ideas were overthrown.

"'Et de quoi ? — Du rôti du roi ?' continued the parrot.

"Then might we, the observers, read in the countenance of Madame Théophile : 'This is not a bird ; it speaks ; it is a gentleman.' "

The cat so loved and honoured by her master had other tastes less carnal, other instincts less murderous. She delighted in perfumes and in music. India shawls, lifted from their boxes of sandalwood, and exhaling faint aromatic odours of the East, intoxicated her voluptuously. She stretched her delicate limbs on their soft folds, and dreamed vague dreams of caravans, and of fair Persian pussies carried over the red sands of Arabia. The vibrations of the piano or of the human voice thrilled her with pleasure and with pain. She would listen drowsily while the musicⁿ was faint and low ; but high notes irritated her nerves, and if a soprano grew too piercingly sweet, she would leap up and

lay a gentle, remonstrating paw upon the singer's lips. Again and again, says Gautier, this experiment was tried by guests who deemed such interruption an amusement; and again and again it had the same result. Beyond a certain pitch, their voices were never permitted to rise. "The dilettante in fur was not to be deceived."

After Madame Théophile, the cat who seems to have lain closest to his master's heart was Pierrot, so named in infancy because he wore spotless white; though later in life he won for himself a more distinguished title, — like Bentham's Sir John Langbourne, — and became known to Parisian society as Don Pierrot de Navarre. He was of an affectionate disposition, though tranquil and self-contained; never effusive, but delighting in the refinements of confidential and sympathetic intercourse. "He shared the life of the household," writes M. Gautier, "with that enjoyment of quiet fireside friendship which is a characteristic of cats. He had his own place on the hearth, and would sit there for hours, listening to conversation with a well-bred air of intelligence and interest. He glanced occasionally from speaker to speaker, and addressed them with little half-articulate sounds, as though protesting politely against their statements, or offering an opinion of his own upon the matter under discussion. He loved books, and, when he found one

open upon the table, would lie down on it, turn over the edges of the leaves with his paw, and, after a time, fall asleep, for all the world as if he had been reading a fashionable novel. He gave a good deal of attention to my work, and, while I wrote, would follow the movement of my pen with serious scrutiny, taking note of each new line, and sometimes pushing the penholder gently from my fingers, as though anxious to add a few words of his own. He was an æsthetic cat, like Hoffmann's Murr, and had, I strongly suspect, been guilty of writing his memoirs ; scribbling away probably at night, in some shadowy gutter, by the light of his own lambent eyes. Unhappily these invaluable reminiscences have been lost.

“Don Pierrot made a point of never going to bed until I came home. He used to wait for me in the hall, greet me with friendly purrs, and precede me to my chamber like a page. I have no doubt that, if I had asked him, he would have carried the candlestick. He slept on the back of my bedstead, carefully balanced like a bird on a bough, and, when I awoke in the morning, would jump down and nestle beside me until I arose. He was strict as a concierge, however, in his notions of the proper time for all good people to be indoors, and would tolerate nothing later than midnight. In those days I belonged to a little society, known as ‘The

Four Candles Club;’ — the light in the room being restricted to four candles, burning in four silver candlesticks, at the four corners of the table. Sometimes the talk became so animated that, like Cinderella, I forgot the hour; and once or twice Pierrot sat up for me until two o’clock in the morning. This appeared to him unreasonable; therefore he ceased his attentions altogether, and retired to rest without me. I was touched by his mute protest against my innocent dissipation, and resolved to return thenceforth faithfully at twelve. Pierrot, doubtful at first of the permanency of my reform, waited until he saw that my conversion was sincere, and then resumed his old post by the door.

“It is a difficult matter to gain the affection of a cat. He is a methodical animal, tenacious of his own habits, fond of order and neatness, and disinclined to extravagant sentiment. He will be your friend, if he finds you worthy of friendship, but not your slave. His tenderness never costs him his freedom. Yet what confidence is implied in his steadfast companionship through hours of solitude, of melancholy, and of work. He lies for long evenings on your knee, purring contentedly, and forsaking for you the agreeable society of his kind. In vain, melodious mewings on the roof invite him to one of those animated assemblies where fish bones take the place of tea and cake. He is not to be

tempted from his post. Put him down, and he will jump up again with plaintive murmurs of reproach. Sometimes he sits at your feet, looking into your face with an expression so gentle and caressing that the depth of his gaze startles you. Who can believe that there is no soul behind those luminous eyes!

“Don Pierrot de Navarre had a sweetheart as dazzlingly white as he was himself. By her side the ermine would have looked yellow. Seraphita, for so this lovely creature was named in honour of Balzac’s Swedenborgian romance, was gentle, dreamy, and contemplative. She would sit motionless on her cushion for hours, wide awake, her eyes following, in a rapture of attention, sights invisible to us. She was the most luxurious of all my cats, and was ever to be found on the softest rug, or in the easiest chair. Though reserved, she was fond of caresses, and would return them with grace to those whom she favoured with her esteem. She devoted a great deal of time every day to her toilet, cleaning and polishing her glossy coat with her pink tongue until it shone like burnished silver. If any one rumbled the sleek fur, she would instantly and carefully lick it smooth again. To be dishevelled was beyond endurance. Perfumes delighted her, and she would thrust her little nose into bouquets, bite daintily at scented handkerchiefs, and walk with wary footsteps

among the bottles on a toilet-table, smelling wistfully at the stoppers. No doubt she would have used the powder puff, had she been permitted.

“Don Pierrot, who came from Havannah, required a hothouse temperature, and in this he was always gratified. The house was surrounded, however, by spacious gardens, over the walls of which cats could easily climb. Pierrot would often take advantage of an open door, and go bird-hunting at dusk through the wet grass and flower beds. It even happened, now and then, that his cries for readmission were not heard, and he was compelled to spend the night out of doors. In this way he caught a heavy cold which rapidly developed into phthisis. Before the end of the year he had wasted to a skeleton, and his fur, once so silky, was of a dull harsh white. His eyes looked large in his shrunken face, the pink of his little nose had faded, and he dragged himself slowly along the sunny side of the wall, looking with melancholy listlessness at the yellow leaves as they danced and whirled in the wind. We did all in our power to save him. The doctor felt his pulse, sounded his lungs, and ordered him ass's milk. He drank it with ready obedience out of his own especial saucer. For hours he lay upon my knee like the shadow of a sphinx. I felt his spine under my finger tips like the beads of a rosary, and he tried to respond to my caresses with a feeble

and rattling purr. On the day of his death he was lying panting upon his side, when suddenly, and as though by a supreme effort, he arose and staggered weakly towards me. His great eyes were wide-stretched, and raised to mine with a look of agonized supplication, as though they said: 'Save me, save me, you who are a man!' Then they glazed; he took a few faltering steps and fell down, uttering a cry so lamentable and full of anguish that I stood staring, dumb and horror-stricken, at his little corpse. He was buried in the garden under a white rose-tree which still marks his grave. Three years later, Seraphita died, and was laid by his side. With her the White Dynasty became extinct."

Of the Black Dynasty which succeeded, Gautier has much to say; but he never evinces for its small autocrats the same tenderness of affection lavished upon Pierrot and Madame Théophile. Nature, in a jesting mood, had bestowed on Seraphita and her mate three kittens, black as ebony. To indifferent eyes they looked as much alike as three ink-spots; but, from their earliest infancy, Gautier distinguished with ease the little faces, "sooty as Harlequin's mask, and lighted by discs of emerald with golden gleams." These kittens offered striking contrasts of character and disposition. Enjolras was solemn, pretentious, aldermanic from his cradle; even theatrical at times in his vast assumption of

dignity. Gavroche was a born Bohemian, enamoured of low company, and of the careless comedies of life. Their sister Eponine — best loved of the three — was a delicate, fastidious little creature, with an exquisite sense of propriety, and of the refinements of social intercourse. Enjolras was a glutton, caring for nothing so much as for his dinner. Gavroche, more generous, would bring in from the streets gaunt and ragged cats, who devoured in a scurry of fright the food laid aside for him. "I was often tempted to remonstrate," writes Gautier, "and to say to the little scamp, 'A nice lot of friends you do pick up!' But I refrained. After all, it was an amiable weakness. He might have eaten his dinner himself."

Eponine was piquant rather than beautiful. Her little velvety nose looked like a fine truffle of Périgord. Her eyes had the oblique slant of the Orient, and were sea-green like the eyes of Pallas-Athene, or of that fair Dame de Fayel, to whom the Sire de Coucy, dying in the Holy Land, sent back his heart by a trusted squire, and whose husband, discovering the contents of the box, forced her to eat it, of which horror she died. In the Sire de Coucy's passionate verses, his lady's eyes are described as green "like a cat's;" for no other colour, cries the lover rapturously, can inspire ardour and adoration in the human heart.

Eponine, with her sea-green eyes, her narrow face, her impertinent nose, her small and delicate limbs, had an air of distinction which charmed Gautier's appreciative friends. She was a polite little cat, rather fond of company, and would receive his guests with cordial pleasure, purring as she stepped from one chair to another, as though to say: "Don't be impatient. Look at the pictures, or talk to me, if I amuse you. My master is coming down." On his appearance, she would retire discreetly to an armchair, or to a corner of the piano, and listen to the conversation without interrupting it, being French, and accustomed to good society.

If Gautier dined alone, Eponine's place was laid opposite to his; and, when he came into the dining-room, he found her always in her chair, waiting serenely for his arrival. She would place her forepaws daintily on the edge of the table, and present her smooth forehead to be kissed, "like a well-bred little girl who is affable and affectionate to relatives and old people." Even the best trained children, however, have their likes and dislikes in the matter of food, and Eponine sometimes found it a hard task to eat everything that was placed before her. Soup was her particular aversion, and once in a while she tried to omit that course from her dinner. Then Gautier would say to her courteously but firmly: "Mademoiselle, a young lady who is not

hungry for soup is not expected to have any appetite for fish ;” — whereupon — sensible to the reproof — she would obediently lap up her little plate of *potage*, and wait for her reward to come at fish time.

Eponine survived her brothers many years. Enjolras was tragically slain. Gavroche, seduced by wild companions, envying them the uneasy freedom of their lives, and agreeing, doubtless, with Meyerbeer’s small daughter that it was a great misfortune to have had genteel parents, leaped one morning from an open window, and was never seen again. Little Bohemian of Paris, he bartered all the luxuries of home for the hardships, the perils, the sweet transient joys that the great, cruel, beautiful, and best loved city in the world gives to its vagabond children.

His place was filled by a silver-grey Angora named Zizi, who spent her days in a kind of contemplative trance, like a Buddhist saint. Music alone could rouse her from her dreams. She would listen with sleepy satisfaction, and even exert herself so far as to walk up and down the keys of the piano, imitating, according to her fancy, the sounds that she had heard. Zizi had little of the tact and social grace which distinguished Eponine, and which never deserted that adorable cat, even in advanced age. Like so many famous Frenchwomen, she re-

tained her sprightliness and charm until the end; and left behind her nothing but cheerful memories upon which it is a pleasure to dwell. She was the last of the Black Dynasty. In her corner of Elysium she plays forever with the other pussies of her royal race; and perhaps her urbane little shade was the first to greet and welcome two cats, — two fortunate and famous cats who died in France not very long ago; Moumoutte Blanche and Moumoutte Chinoise, immortalized by M. Loti's facile pen.

No one familiar with the "Vies de Deux Chattes," can hope to rival these short and exquisite biographies. Their perfection is at once the delight and the despair of other toilers in the field. Written, says the author, "for my son, Samuel, when he knows how to read," they have recompensed many of us for the sad labour of the alphabet; for the double labour of two alphabets, if we chance to be Saxon born. People to whom a primrose is a primrose, and a cat a cat, may be liberally educated by a sympathetic study of these delicate and discriminating memoirs. Less playful and amusing than M. Gautier's chronicles, they show a deeper insight into feline character; they are more close and accurate in their descriptions, more touching in their pathos, more clear-sighted in their generalizations. Gautier's cats have, each and all, a charming individuality. We feel their beauty, we acknowledge their

virtues, we love their faults. But the two little creatures who shared between them the fickle heart of M. Loti have been painted for us in such generous colours, and with such consummate art, that they live in his pages as the Black Prince and Du Guesclin live in the heroic pages of Froissart.

Never were friends more widely separated by birth, breeding, or the accidents of early life. Moutte Blanche was a Persian pussy, beautiful as Scheherazade, gentle as Zobeide, discreet as Fatima, — the Prophet's fair daughter, not Bluebeard's prying wife. She was adopted by M. Loti in early kittenhood, when the innocence of infancy still lingered in her lovely eyes, and the playfulness of infancy prompted her to much "ground and lofty tumbling," wherein he took delight. She was not wholly white, as her name would imply; and her patches of black fur suggested to his fancy — which is a Gallic fancy always — a little bonnet shading her smooth brow, and a little *pélerine* thrown over her snowy shoulders. Her gentleness was reserved for her master and for his household. Like the beautiful and intrepid *Ménine* of Mme. de Lesdiguières, she was

"Chatte pour tout le monde, et pour les Chats, Tigresse."

"Refined, correct, an aristocrat to the tips of her little claws," says Loti, "she so detested other cats, as to forget her manners sadly whenever a visitor

ventured to call upon her. In her own domain she brooked no intrusion. If over the garden wall two little ears were raised, two little eyes peered furtively ; if a rustle in the boughs, a trembling of the ivy leaves awakened her suspicion, she sprang at the stranger like a young Fury, her fur bristling to the point of her tail. It was impossible to hold her back, and presently we who listened would hear the sound of scuffling, a fall, and lamentable cries."

A wayward, spoiled, capricious beauty was Moumoutte Blanche, loving her master after the fashion of her race, steadfastly but without docility, and extending some portion of her careless regard to other members of the family. For five years she reigned without a rival. For five years M. Loti came and went, as the fortunes of war called him to sea or permitted his return ; and ever she was the first to welcome him under the roof she deemed her own. Then came a day when, three thousand miles from France, fate flung across his path the strange and bizarre little creature known to us as Moumoutte Chinoise, and he made swift surrender of his affections.

" Men were deceivers ever ;
One foot in sea, and one on shore,
To one cat constant never."

The new favourite — like so many favourites — was meanly born, poor and wretched. She was

also, which is the unusual feature of the case, distressingly ugly. It was at the close of a long skirmish — hardly worthy to be called a battle — in the Yellow Sea, that she leaped from a Chinese junk to the French warship, and, guided by instinct or destiny, took refuge in Loti's cabin, — a pitiable object, meagre, terrified, miserable, the most forlorn and desolate of intruders, but absolutely determined to remain.

Loti, to do him justice, did not yield without protest. The strange Moumoutte was not attractive, and she was sadly in the way; but, when he put her out, she scuttled directly back again, always fixing on him a gaze so human and so imploring that he was fascinated by its intensity. In the end she triumphed, and was for seven months his close and constant companion; while Moumoutte Blanche far away in France, drowsed in the sunny garden paths, and dreamed of his return. Propinquity, as we know, is the one sure road to love; and, during those seven months, master and cat had rare opportunities for intimate acquaintance. A man-of-war offers few distractions to the growing charms of companionship.

“I well remember,” writes M. Loti, “the day when our relations became really affectionate. It was a melancholy afternoon in September. The first winds of Autumn roughened the sullen seas.”

We were sailing eastward, and the ship groaned and creaked as she slid into the hollow of the waves. I sat writing in the semi-obscurity of my cabin, which grew darker and darker as the green waters rose and broke into foam over my closed port-hole. Suddenly I saw a little shadow steal from under my berth, very slowly, and as though with infinite hesitation. There was something truly Oriental in its fashion of holding one paw suspended in air, as if uncertain where to place it for the next step. And always it regarded me with a look of fixed and plaintive interrogation.

“‘What can the cat want?’ I said to myself. ‘She has had her dinner. She is not hungry. What is it she is after?’

“In answer to my unspoken question, *la Chinoise* crept nearer and nearer until she could touch my foot. Then, sitting upright, with her tail curled close about her, she uttered a gentle little cry, gazing meanwhile straight into my eyes which seemed to hold some message she could read. She understood that I was a thinking creature, capable of pity, and accessible to such mute and piteous prayer; and that my eyes were the mirrors in which her anxious little soul must study my good or bad intentions. It is terrifying to think how near an animal comes to us, when it is capable of such intercourse as this.

“For the first time I looked attentively at the little visitor who for two weeks had shared my lodgings. She was tawny as a wild hare, and spotted like a leopard. Only her face and neck were white. Certainly an ugly and attenuated cat, yet perhaps her very ugliness had in it a piquancy which appealed to the discriminating mind. For one thing, she was so unlike the beautiful cats of France.” (Alas ! poor Moumoutte Blanche !) “Stealthy and sinuous, with great ears standing erect, and a preposterously long tail, she had nothing attractive save her eyes, — the deep, golden orange eyes of the Orient, unquiet, and wonderfully expressive.

“While I watched her, I carelessly laid my hand on her head, and stroked for the first time the yellow fur. It was not mere physical pleasure that she felt in the caress ; but a consciousness of protection, of sympathy in her abandonment. It was for this she had crept from her hiding-place ; it was for this, and not for food or drink, that she had come to beg, after so much wistful hesitation. Her little cat soul implored some company, some friendship in a lonely world.

“Where had she learned this need, poor outcast Pussy, never before touched by a kindly hand ; never the object of affection, unless, indeed, the paternal junk held some forlorn Chinese child, as joyless, as famished, as friendless as herself ; — a

child who, perishing of neglect, would leave in that miserable abode no more trace of its feeble existence than she had done.

“At last one small paw was lifted, Oh! so delicately, so discreetly; and, after a long anxious look, Moumoutte, believing the time had now come for venturing all things, took heart of grace, and leaped upon my knee.

“There she curled herself, but with subdued tact and reserve, seeming to make her little limbs as light as possible, a mere feather-weight, — and never taking her eyes from my face. She stayed a long while, inconveniencing me greatly; but I lacked the courage to put her down, as I might have done unhesitatingly, had she been pretty and plump and gay. Nervously aware of my least movement, she watched me with intentness; not as though fearing I would do her harm, — she was far too intelligent to believe me capable of such a thing, — but as though to ask, ‘Is it possible that I do not weary or offend you?’ After a time her expression softened from anxiety to cajolery, and her eyes, lifted to mine, said with charming distinctness: ‘On this Autumn evening, so dreary to the soul of a cat, since we two are isolated, and lost in the midst of dangers I do not understand, let us bestow upon each other a little of that mysterious something which sweetens misery and softens death, which is called affection,

and which expresses itself from time to time by a caress.' ”

When M. Loti returned to France, he was met by Moumoutte Blanche, and was accompanied by Moumoutte Chinoise. It was an embarrassing situation, not unlike that of the Crusader who brought home a Saracen wife, and presented her to his Christian spouse. The poor little intruder was lifted from her basket amid outcries at her ugliness ; and, with an anxious heart, her master awaited the result of the first crucial interview. It was unlike anything he had anticipated, and reflected credit on both rivals. The two cats flew to arms, and had a battle royal for supremacy. The kitchen was the scene of combat, desperate valour was shown by the combatants, and only a liberal and impartial application of cold water chilled their martial ardour, and put an end to hostilities. Once separated, they never fought again. Moumoutte Chinoise, wary and alert, Moumoutte Blanche, pensive and sombre, met each other in the daily intercourse of life, disdainfully at first, then with growing cordiality, and finally with an ardent friendship, beautiful to behold. Jealousy was banished from their little hearts. Intimate and inseparable, they dined and dozed and played together, even making their toilets in common, and licking and smoothing each other's fur with mutual tenderness and pride.

Summer came, and la Chinoise, born and bred upon the melancholy waters, revelled for the first time in the joyous garden life which all cats dearly love;—that life, partly of hermit-like meditation and repose, partly of venery and cruel sport. The odour of rose and jasmin; the tall trees, on whose branches unsuspecting birds nested and sang; the miniature rocks circling the fountain, amid which she lay concealed like a Liliputian tiger in its lair; all these wonders enraptured her sensitive soul. She became sleek and gay, her brilliant eyes lost their shadow of fear, her timidity vanished, her delicate limbs grew round and strong. Even her unconquerable ugliness lent a distinction of its own to her intelligence and grace. Moumoutte Blanche, once the proud and intolerant queen of this lovely place, now shared its delights generously with the stranger, with the little Mongolian who had come from the Yellow Sea to claim half of her master's home, and two thirds of his affection. I know of no nobler cat in Christendom than Moumoutte Blanche.

When summer waned, and the days grew short and chill, la Chinoise abandoned the garden walks for the greater luxury of the warm fireside. "It is with the approach of winter," says M. Loti, "that cats become in an especial manner our friends and guests. They sit in our chimney-corners, watch

with us the dancing flames, and dream with us vague dreams, misty and melancholy as the deepening dusk. It is then, too, that they wear their richest fur, and assume an air of sumptuous and delightful opulence. With the first frost, Moumoutte Chinoise patched up her meagre coat, which no longer showed its old distressing rents; and Moumoutte Blanche adorned herself with an imposing cravat, a snow-white boa, which encircled her pretty face like a vast Medicean ruff. Their affection for each other was increased by their mutual love of warmth and repose. On the hearth, on their cushions, in the armchairs they slept for whole days, snugly rolled into one great round ball of white and yellow fur.

“It was Moumoutte Chinoise who, in an especial manner, courted this comfortable companionship. When, after a short and chilly stroll in the garden, she found her friend sleeping before the fire, she would steal up to her very, very softly, and with as much caution as if she were surprising a mouse. Blanche, always nervous, pettish, and averse to being disturbed, would sometimes resent intrusion, and give her a gentle slap by way of remonstrance. It was never returned. La Chinoise would merely lift her little paw with a mocking gesture, looking at me meanwhile out of the corners of her eyes, as though to say, ‘She has a difficult temper, has n’t

she? But you know I never take her seriously.' Then, with renewed precaution, she would return resolutely to her purpose, which was always to nestle up against her slumbering friend, and bury her head in that warm, soft, snowy fur. This accomplished, she would compose herself to sleep, with a final glance of triumph in my direction, which said drowsily, but distinctly, 'This is what I was after, and here I am.'"

Assuredly there was never a sweeter cat in Christendom than the beautiful Moumoutte Blanche.

Readers who seek to preserve as far as possible the gayety of life may be pardoned for wishing that M. Loti had spared them some of the pathetic details in which his soul delights. The few short years allotted to a cat are spent so swiftly that we who linger on our way are perpetually mourning some little vanished friend, —

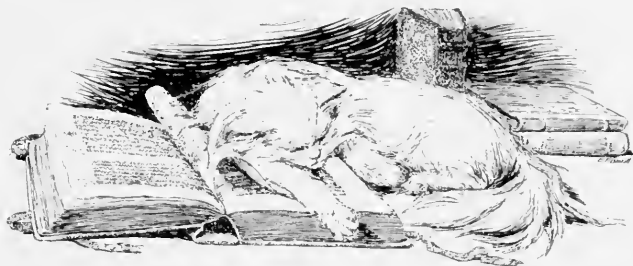
"doubly dead,
In that she died so young."

It would be kinder not to awaken our buried grief, nor probe our wounds afresh; but he who wrote "Le Livre de la Pitié et de la Mort," has no compassion for our selfishness. Every step the two cats took to their graves is described with minute and haunting melancholy. The black dejection that seized poor Moumoutte Chinoise as her end drew near; her last sad impulse to die away from

pitying eyes and helping hands ; the prolonged agony of Moumoutte Blanche who fought piteously for her fast ebbing life ; — these things we have read in mournful moments, wishing them all the time untold, just as we wish their author would not suddenly intrude some unseemly jest upon us when we are least attuned to its reception.

Yet never has a cat of character been drawn with the careful and sympathetic art bestowed upon Moumoutte Chinoise. She is the Jane Eyre of pussies ; ugly, intelligent, sensitive, passionate, self-controlled, intrepid, and vivacious. M. Loti can hardly be said to resemble Rochester ; but, like that beatified barbarian, he had the quality of discernment, which enabled him to see the spirit and charm hidden beneath so mean and shabby an exterior.

“ Elle a, dans sa laideur piquante,
Un grain de sel de cette mer,
D'où jaillit, nue et provocante,
L'âcre Vénus du gouffre amer.”





CHAPTER IX

THE CAT TO-DAY

“Sphinx of my quiet hearth ! who deignst to dwell
Friend of my toil, companion of mine ease.”

PERHAPS some portion of the tenderness which falls to Pussy's happy lot in these smooth days, when her star — eclipsed since the fall of Pasht — has once more reached its zenith, is due to the nursery rhymes which present her so constantly to infant eyes and ears. “The cat,” says M. Champfleury, “is the nurse's favourite, and the baby's earliest friend. It plays its part in little rhythmical dramas, cunningly presented to the drowsy child, who falls asleep with a familiar image parading fantastically through his brain.” French rhymes are much the prettiest ; less bald than the English, less banal than the German. There is a

gayety in their dancing measures, and the simplest narratives have a touch of picturesqueness, never lost on infancy. Even an A, B, C verse, which we try to make as imbecile as words will allow, can assume a pleasing form in the nurseries of France. What, for example, could be more hopelessly uninteresting or irrelevant than the English

“Great A, little a, Bouncing B,
Cat’s in the cupboard, and can’t see me.”

Such a vapid statement insults the intelligence of a baby. The Germans do better. They have several rhymes, the shortest and simplest of which was the first word picture ever grasped by my own dawning intelligence.

“A, B, C,
Die Katze liegt im Schnee,
Der Schnee ging hinweg,
Die Katze liegt im Dreck.”

Prettier than this is the version sung in Saxony and Austria.

“A, B, C,
Die Katze liegt im Schnee;
Als sie wieder ’raus kam,
Hatt’ sie weisse Stiefeln an;
Weisse Stiefeln muss sie haben,
Dass sie kann nach Dresden traben.”

Little Parisians, as well as little Teutons, delight in Pussy’s snowy socks.

“ A, B, C,
 Le chat est allé
 Dans la neige ; en retournant,
 Il avait les souliers tous blancs.”

All white like Baby's knitted shoes, held up for illustration. The children see Pussy picking her dainty way through the soft snow with little shivers of cold, and little shakings of her paw at the chilliness of her new foot-gear, just as they see her making her careful toilet in this bit of rhyme equally familiar to their nurseries.

“ Le chat à Jeannette
 Est une jolie bête.
 Quand il veut se faire beau,
 Il se léche le museau ;
 Avec sa salive
 Il fait la lessive.”

I wonder why the French cat is always “he,” and the English cat is almost always “she,” even when confessedly a Tom. I have heard of college cats, grave Fellows of Baliol and Magdalen, who deeply resented being called “she” by feminine visitors, unaware apparently of the laws which govern such institutions. But in the French nurseries, no insult is ever offered to masculinity.

“ Il était une bergère,
 Et ron, ron, ron, petit patapon,
 Il était une bergère
 Qui gardait ses moutons,
 Ron, ron,
 Qui gardait ses moutons.

“ Elle fit un fromage,
Et ron, ron, ron, petit patapon,
Elle fit un fromage
Du lait de ses moutons,
 Ron, ron,
Du lait de ses moutons.

“ Le chat qui la regarde,
Et ron, ron, ron, petit patapon,
Le chat qui la regarde
D'un petit air fripon,
 Ron, ron,
D'un petit air fripon.

“ ‘ Si tu y mets la patte,
Et ron, ron, ron, petit patapon,
Si tu y mets la patte,
Tu auras du baton,
 Ron, ron,
Tu auras du baton.’

“ Il n'y mit pas la patte,
Et ron, ron, ron, petit patapon,
Il n'y mit pas la patte,
Il y mit le menton,
 Ron, ron,
Il y mit le menton.”

Pussy is scampish, and Pussy is pitiless in too many of the verses meant for infant ears ; and it is a proof of our innate depravity that youthful listeners love her none the less.

“ Le chat sauta sur les souris,
Il les croqua toute la nuit.
 Gentil coquiqui,

Coco des moustaches, mirlo, joli,
Gentil coquiqui."

Children might dance over the bridge of Avignon
to the lilt of this cruel little song.

The most popular English and Scottish rhymes
are less gay, but not more merciful. If the perse-
cuted mice save their necks, it is only because they
sit starving at home.

"There was a wee bit mousikie,
That lived in Gilberaty, O ;
It couldna get a bite o' cheese,
For cheety-poussie-catty, O.

"It said unto the cheesikie :
'Oh, fain wad I be at ye, O,
If it were na for the cruel paws
O' cheety-poussie-catty, O.'"

There are only three verses hallowed by Mother
Goose's sanction, in which the cat does not appear
as Nimrod, and which, in their way, are as pretty
as the French favourites.

"Pussy sat beside the fire,
Pussy was so fair ;
In came a little dog,
'Pussy, are you there ?'"

"Pussy cat, mew ! jumps over a coal ;
And in her best petticoat burns a great hole !
Pussy cat, mew ! shall have no more milk
Until her best petticoat 's mended with silk."

And, best and oldest of the three ;

“ ‘ Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat,
Where have you been ? ’
‘ I ’ve been to London,
To look at the Queen.’
‘ Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat,
What did you do there ? ’
‘ I frightened a little mouse
Under her chair.’ ”

It was good Queen Anne whom this adventurous kitten had journeyed to see, and the history of her exploit has been told to children ever since. These verses prepare the way for the fairy tales to follow : — “ Puss-in-Boots,” “ The White Cat,” and the legend of Dick Whittington. Perhaps in some favoured nurseries — as, long ago, in mine — the charming French story of “ Mère Michel et son Chat ” has a place of honour on the bookshelves ; and little readers follow with breathless suspense the wonderful escapes of Moumouth, whose crowning victory over the wicked Lustucru was one of the joys of my childhood ; a joy as fresh at the twentieth reading as at the first, — more satisfactory, perhaps, because then I knew it all along, and so could better bear the trials and dangers that preceded it. Sir Thomas Browne would never have envied “ the happiness of inferior creatures, who in tranquillity enjoy their constitutions,” had he known Mother Michel’s cat. Mr. Aldrich translated this story some years ago, so that it is now as accessible

to American as to French children ; and all may read how Moumouth lived, suffered, triumphed, died, and was honoured in his grave ; while the cruel steward who persecuted him was appropriately cooked and eaten by avenging cannibals, sighing out with his last breath the name of the innocent animal he had so barbarously sought to destroy.

M. Bédollière, author of this delightful and harrowing tale, borrowed *Mère Michel* and *Lustucru* from an old song, familiar to many generations of Gallic infancy.

“ C’est la Mère Michel qui a perdu son chat,
 Qui cri’ par la fenêtré à qui le lui rendra ;
 Et le Compère Lustucru qui lui a répondu :
 ‘ Allez, Mère Michel, votre chat n’est pas perdu.’ ”

“ C’est la Mère Michel qui lui a demandé :
 ‘ Mon chat n’est pas perdu ! vous l’avez donc trouvé ? ’
 Et le Compère Lustucru qui lui a répondu :
 ‘ Donnez une récompense, il vous sera rendu.’ ”

“ Et la Mère Michel lui dit : ‘ C’est décidé,
 Si vous rendez mon chat, vous aurez un baiser.’
 Le Compère Lustucru qui n’en a pas voulu,
 Lui dit : ‘ Pour un lapin votre chat est vendu.’ ”

With schooldays come La Fontaine’s Fables, — unless indeed a surfeit of mathematics has by this time driven even La Fontaine from the field, — and youthful students learn, or should learn, of Rodilard

and the saintly *chatemite*. When they have studied Gray's verses, "On the Death of a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes," their education may be held complete, and their tastes carefully cultivated in the right direction. No child brought up along these lines will be indifferent to feline character or charm. One source of pleasure, well worth the cultivation, has been secured for life.

Yet how much more there is to read and learn! Where shall we look without encountering an animal that has inspired poets and painters, that has been the companion of scholars, the delight of authors, the solace of statesmen, the friend of prelates, the beloved of saints! What an admirable story is that which the holy deacon, John, deemed worthy to be told in his "Life of Saint Gregory," and which has at once the exquisite grace of asceticism and the warmth and colour of humanity. There lived, he says, during the pontificate of Gregory, a poor hermit, pious, vigilant, and austere. To him it was revealed in a vision that he would share in Heaven the glory of the Pope, at which he marvelled much; partly because of his unworthiness, and partly because—owning nothing in the world but a female cat—he had hoped, in moments of spiritual exaltation, that some especial reward would be meted out to his rigorous self-denial. Then a second vision was vouchsafed; he looked into the

heart of the great Pontiff, and saw that it was detached from all the splendours of his throne ; and he knew that, fancying himself so poor in spirit, he yet loved and valued his cat more than Gregory loved and valued all his earthly possessions. The Pope was the truer ascetic of the two.

We need not wander so far afield to learn of Pussy's sweet seductiveness. Instances of her supremacy may be found much nearer home. Did not Washington's father rival the forbearance of Mohammed by sitting habitually and uneasily on the extreme edge of his chair, rather than disturb his cat who loved to lie curled up on the cushion back of him ? Such a man deserved to have George for a son. It is a common habit of cats, when their rule is unquestioned, to behave in this way, especially in winter time, — draughts being abhorrent to their souls. I knew a large black Baltimore puss who used to drive both household and visitors like sheep from chair to chair, by jumping up behind each unfortunate in turn, and curling his huge bulk in that narrow space. To make room for him was impossible, to put him down was out of the question ; there was nothing to do but move on, — like the poor Indian, — in the hope that after a while one might reach some place sufficiently undesirable for permanent possession.

Colonial records contain many pleasant allusions

to cats. In Watson's Annals we read of Elizabeth Hurd and her husband who came to Philadelphia with Penn's early colonists. They worked hard side by side to build their first rude home, living meantime, like so many of the poorer emigrants, in a cave by the river's bank. One day while Elizabeth was carrying water, and mixing the mortar for their chimney, her husband said to her with some asperity: "Thou hadst better think of dinner!" — an essentially masculine remark, when there was nothing but a little bread and cheese in the larder. Elizabeth walked soberly back to the cave, thinking very hard, but quite unable to translate her thoughts into provisions. On the way she met her cat, holding in his mouth a fine large rabbit, "which she thankfully received, and dressed as an English hare. *When her husband came in to dinner,*" — plainly expecting to be well fed, — "he was informed of the facts, whereupon they both wept with reverential joy, and ate their meal, which was thus seasonably provided for them, in singleness of heart."

The help afforded in this emergency was never ungratefully forgotten; for when Elizabeth Hurd died, after many years of prosperity, she bequeathed to her grand-niece, Mrs. Deborah Morris, a silver tureen, on which was engraved a cat bearing a rabbit in its mouth.

The interesting diary of Elizabeth Drinker tells us of the strange mortality that prevailed among the Philadelphia cats in the summer of 1797, and which seems to have somewhat resembled the epidemic of 1809 in Berne. Cherished pussies were found dead on doorsteps, in the streets, by the kitchen fires, — and none knew whereof they died. There was mourning and lamentation in many a home; and the “Cat’s Coronach” might have been chanted at night in the deserted yards, and on lonely walls, no longer guarded by resolute and valiant Toms.

“ And art thou fallen, and lowly laid,
The housewife’s boast, the cellar’s aid,
Great mouser of thy day!
Whose rolling eyes and aspect dread
Whole whiskered legions oft have fled
In midnight battle fray.
There breathes no kitten of thy line
But would have given his life for thine.”

It is not only of cats in general that Elizabeth Drinker deigns to write. She has much to say from time to time of her own puss, who, at a ripe old age, fell a victim to the prevailing disorder, and for whom she seems to have entertained a precise and Quaker-like esteem; — “as good a regard as was necessary,” is her rather chilly way of recording her affection. Neither does she deem it beneath the dignity of a diarist to note the arrival of a



little waif who sought shelter by her comfortable hearth.

“A very pretty cat intruded herself on us this evening. We did not make her welcome at first, but she seemed to insist on staying. Sally then gave her milk, and very soon after she caught a poor little mouse ; and she is now lying on the corner of my apron by ye fireside, as familiarly as if she had lived with us for seven years.”

It is pleasant to hear the kind-hearted Quakeress say “poor little mouse ;” for the unconcern with which most of us view the death agony of a mouse contrasts strangely with our sentimental outpourings over a murdered bird. The mouse might say with Shylock, “If you prick us, do we not bleed ?” —and feel with Shylock that no one heeds the shedding of such blood. But, for the slaughter of a bird, there is a different cry. Does not even that sweet saint, Eugénie de Guérin, bewail in no gentle words — in the most ungentle words her journal holds — such a calamity ?

“I am furious with the grey cat. The wicked creature has just robbed me of a young pigeon that I was warming by the fire. The poor little thing was beginning to revive ; I had meant to tame it ; it would have grown fond of me ; and now all this ends in its getting crunched up by a cat. What disappointments there are in life !”

Only the cat's impartial mind draws no distinction between mouse and bird.

"They call me cruel. Do I know if mouse or song-bird feels?
I only know they make me light and salutary meals."

"An ordinary cat," says Mr. Robinson unkindly, "will devote a whole day to the circumvention of the lodger's canary, rather than spend an hour upon the landlady's rats. A single bullfinch in the drawing-room is worth a wilderness of mice in the pantry."

This I believe to be calumnious; but, as St. George Mivart remarks with a sapiency too obvious to be instructive: "We cannot, without becoming cats, perfectly understand the cat mind." When an animal withholds its confidence, we have no power to break the barriers of its reserve; and who shall boast that he enjoys — save in rare and fugitive moments — the confidence or intimacy of a cat? Men have made this boast, I am aware, and they have themselves believed the truth of their assertion; yet even Gautier and Loti wove into their daily intercourse with their cats the brilliant web of their own imaginings. Gifted beyond most mortals with that delicate and subtle sympathy which enabled them to establish a basis of companionship, they unconsciously assumed a more complete understanding than could ever have existed. For whereas the dog strives to lessen the distance between him-

self and man, seeks ever to be intelligent and intelligible, and translates into looks and actions the words he cannot speak, the cat dwells within the circle of her own secret thoughts. She scorns *la vie de parade*, and makes no effort to reveal herself to us, save when we minister to her needs, or when, in some sweet impulse of cajolery, she gives us transient tokens of regard. Gautier and Loti enjoyed many such moments, because they were so sensitively attuned to their felicity; but that they held Madame Théophile or Moumoutte Chinoise in the bonds of indissoluble friendship, I cannot find it in my heart to believe. They would never have prized so highly an affection of which they entertained no doubt.

As for those foolish moderns who write papers for magazines to prove that the cat is a sorely slandered animal, and who represent their own pets as entertaining for them a profound and respectful passion, they cherish their illusions cheaply. "I observe authors," says Mr. Lang, "who speak concerning cats with a familiarity and a levity most distasteful." Like the people who write gossipy books about emperors and empresses, they assume an air of easy intimacy, "a great and disrespectful license," which they deem elevates them to equality. They also attribute to their cats a host of intolerable virtues which would put to shame the little girls

who shine in Sunday-school fiction. Thus a lady living near Belfast writes that, when she was ill, her devoted cat went poaching for her every day, braving the terrors of the law that he might provide her with the partridges her delicate constitution demanded, but which her purse was unequal to buying. He never touched the stolen birds himself, having more conscience in the matter than his mistress; and, when she had recovered and desired no more, he ceased his benevolent depredations. Elizabeth Hurd's rabbit-hunting beast, to whom she felt such life-long gratitude, sinks into insignificance alongside of this Irish Puss-in-Boots.

As for the astounding instances of feline generosity which we are daily requested to consider, they would lead us to suppose that cats live only to do good. Gautier's little Bohemian, who shared his dinner occasionally with disreputable friends out of pure love for low company, shines but dimly by comparison with the small Saint Elizabeths, who apparently have no use for their dinners save to give them to all the poor and starving cats in the neighbourhood.

M. Jumelin, for example, tells us of his own Angora who every day fed out of her allowance a hungry companion; and Mr. Larrabee is responsible for the edifying history of a Norman cat whose conscience was troubled by the overabundance of

her supplies. Accordingly she brought home one day a lean cottage animal to share the feast ; observing which, her master laid out for her a double portion the following morning. Rejoiced to see her opportunities for good thus unexpectedly increased, the philanthropic cat journeyed further into the village, and summoned a second impecunious pussy. Her master added a third plate to the dinner table. She found a third guest, and then a fourth and fifth ; until, as the meals kept increasing, she often had twenty pensioners around her generous board, all of whom, we are assured, recognized their position, and behaved with respectful propriety.

Stories of virtuous cats who cannot be tempted to dishonesty ; of faithful cats who watch over children confided to their care ; of affectionate cats who live on terms of sweet serenity with birds, and puppies, and guinea pigs, and white mice, would seem to prove — could we but credit them — that, of all four-footed prigs, Pussy is the most fundamentally priggish. These annals reach their climax in the affecting narrative of a Norfolk lady, whose pious Maltese — having apparently read “The Fairchild Family,” and “Elsie Dinsmore,” — not only attended family prayers with circumspection, but obliged her unfortunate kittens to be present, cuffing them fervently if they betrayed any restlessness under the ordeal.

Less difficult to believe, yet far removed from credence, are tales of Pussy's superhuman intelligence and craft. Some years ago the "Spectator" published, with enviable gravity, an account of a cat that hunted up and found articles lost about the house. He did not appear to have concealed these things, and then produced them for reward; but to have made painful search for scissors and spectacles, mislaid through the carelessness of the family. Enthusiasts are always telling us how their pets open closed doors, as though in training for burglary; and lay traps, like veteran hunters, for birds and squirrels. A Scotch gentleman assures me that his cat was in the habit of hiding in the shrubbery, and leaping out upon the poor little sparrows that came every morning to breakfast on the crumbs thrown them from the dining-room window. One winter day these crumbs were quickly covered over by falling snow; whereupon the astute highwayman was seen to lay them bare again, brushing away the soft snow with his paws, lest, from lack of decoy, he should lose his prey. Indignant at such murderous purpose, the family determined to circumvent the cat by scattering no more bread. Pussy waited and wondered for two mornings; and then, realizing the nature of the conspiracy, baffled it by the simple process of taking a roll from the breakfast table, and carrying it him-

self to the shrubbery path. It only remains to be told that he first baked the bread, and this voracious chronicle will be complete.

Still more astounding is another story related of a New England cat named June, who hid her four kittens in a hole under the garret floor. After the first week she ceased going to the garret, and the family, fearing the kittens were dead, felt some not unnatural annoyance at the thought of the trouble it would be to disinter them. The matter was discussed in the presence of June, who lay on the sofa, apparently asleep; and her mistress observed with asperity, — “I would give ten dollars this minute if those kittens were out from under the floor.” Immediately the cat jumped down and left the room, the door being shut after her. In a few minutes she was heard mewing in the hall; and, when the door was opened, there on the floor lay three of the dead kittens. Her mistress — who tells the tale in the “Spectator” — said, “Well done, June. Go now and fetch the other one;” whereupon she made a fourth trip, and returned with the last little corpse, laying it alongside of its brothers. It is to be hoped the ten dollars were promptly paid; but one fears that a cat of such cupidity would be capable of killing her innocent offspring for the sake of the promised reward.

“I am extremely distrustful of interesting or

touching stories about animals," observes M. Champfleury, who well knew on what slender foundations such pretty tales are built. Yet now and then even his skepticism was shaken by curious and clearly proven facts which seemed to indicate, not only affection and intelligence, but conscience and the power of reasoning, — uncomfortable attributes, from which the lower orders of creation are presumably exempt. Mere chance must be held responsible for many semi-miraculous things in a world full of wonders, and accident rules the lives of beasts as well as those of men. A country cat of my acquaintance was much disturbed and excited by the introduction of a tame chipmunk into the household where formerly she had reigned supreme. It was impressed upon her in the most strenuous manner that the intruder should not be molested, and for a few weeks she acquiesced sullenly in its unwelcome presence. Nature, however, has not intended that cats and chipmunks should dwell in amity together. One unlucky afternoon the tiny creature darted tantalizingly across the room. There was a flash of pursuit, a faint thin shriek, a dead squirrel lying limp and blood-stained on the carpet. Retribution followed swiftly. The cat was punished, reproached, held over its victim, and finally thrust angrily and ignominiously from the house. She disappeared for two days, and her mistress was beginning to

repent her severity, when, on the third morning, she returned, bearing in her mouth a little live chipmunk which she had captured in the woods, and which she intended, apparently, should take the place of the one she had murdered.

So at least believes every member of that deeply affected family. The fact that cats frequently bring live prey into the house, and that this particular cat had done so on several other occasions, counts for nothing. The coincidence was too striking, the logical inference too conclusive. No reputation for sanctity was ever more swiftly or more surely established. It will bear many a sad rent in the future before it ceases to cover a multitude of iniquities.

In one respect, and one only, the intelligence or instinct of the cat passes our comprehension, and leaves us lost in amazement. No homing pigeon speeds more surely to its goal than does poor Pussy when banished from the roof-tree that she loves. The bird wings its safe flight through the broad ether, without let or hindrance. The cat encounters and overcomes obstacles that seem insuperable when we think how small she is, how weak and helpless. The authenticated stories of her exploits in this regard are happily so marvellous that they cannot be outdone by man's industrious invention. One of the best is told by that "wise and honest traveller," Arthur Young, who leased Samford Hall,

an old Essex place, formerly tenanted by a gentleman named Farquharson. Mrs. Farquharson had a cat which she highly prized, and which she sent by coach in a closed bag or basket to her new home at Yatesby Bridge, in Hampshire. Five days later, Young received a letter from her, bewailing the loss of her favourite who had promptly disappeared as soon as released from constraint ; and, on the following morning, Pussy made her appearance at Samford Hall, looking very forlorn and out at elbows, but plainly delighted to be home again. She had not only travelled seventy miles over an unknown country filled with dangers ; but had actually crossed or skirted London, — “threaded the Metropolis,” says Young more poetically, — in the course of her adventurous journey.

Mr. Andrew Lang is responsible for the story of a cat which was carried from Saint Andrews to Perth. He came back in less than a week. “Did he swim the Tay and Eden,” asks Mr. Lang meditatively, “or did he travel by rail, changing at Dundee and Leuchars ?” A Flemish cat, living in the country near Malines, outsped twelve carrier pigeons, traversing eight leagues, crossing the Scheldt, Heaven knows how ! and reaching home well in advance of his winged competitors.

“Men prize the heartless hound who quits dry-eyed his native
land,

Who wags a mercenary tail, and licks a tyrant’s hand.

The leal true cat they prize not, that if e'er compelled to roam,
Still flies, when let out of the bag, precipitately home."

An amusing instance of Pussy's incurable nostalgia is related by M. Champfleury. A country curé of his acquaintance received a more important charge in a neighbouring town, and moved thither with his little household, consisting of an old servant, a tame crow, and a female cat. The crow was a clever and voluble vaurien; the cat — despite her sex — an unprincipled freebooter; the servant an affectionate scold; and the curé an amused spectator of their constant and animated bickerings. Two days after the journey to town, Pussy disappeared. The crow, uneasy at her absence, hopped disconsolately about his new abode. The house-keeper was loud in her lamentations. The curé felt a reasonable alarm lest the current of her hourly reproaches, checked in its ordinary course, might before long be diverted in his direction.

A week passed, and a former parishioner came to the priest's door, bearing in a bag the missing cat, whom he had found mewling disconsolately at the gate of her old home. She was welcomed with delight, and the household seemed restored to its former state of quarrelsome tranquillity, when, one fair morning, behold! her place by the hearth was again vacant. This time she was promptly sought for, and discovered prowling about the garden of

the village parsonage, thin, half-starved, wretched, the shadow of her old defiant self. Carried back once more to town, everything was done that might content her restless little heart. The housekeeper fed her with dainties, and even ministered delicately to her predatory tastes by leaving the cupboard door open, as if by accident, hoping to tempt her failing appetite with the sweetness of stolen cream.

“ Yet the fruit were scarce worth peeling,
Were it not for stealing, stealing.”

It was all in vain. The familiar walls called to her from afar, and, obeying an instinct too strong for rejection, she journeyed wearily back, to die, if need be, in her kittenhood's home.

Then the wise old servant, feeling that only radical measures could cure so obstinate a disease, devised a plan which shows how well she understood the nature of a cat. There was a little pond at the foot of the curé's country garden, where, erstwhile, Pussy had been wont to lie dreaming the summer days away. Going herself to the village, the woman directed one of the farmer boys—an active and mischievous lad—to catch her truant pet, and dip her three times deep under the cold and hateful water. It was enough. *Felis amat pisces, sed non vult tingere plantam.* And to be thus scandalously ill-treated in the spot she loved best, where she had lorded it over the neighbouring

cats, and where hitherto no human hand had ever dared to assail her. The dripping creature, furious, frightened, outraged in her best feelings, flew to her old friend for protection, went meekly back under her sheltering cloak, and never again sought to return to the now painful scene of her humiliation.

A ship cat loves its home as unswervingly as the happier animal whose lot is cast amid gardens and moonlit walls. To the landsman's prejudiced eye there is little choice in boats, especially in the dismal and dirty cargo boats "that sail the wet seas roun'." They may be "England's pride;" but, as permanent habitations, they seem to lack everything that would appeal to the refined instincts and restless habits of a cat. Yet Pussy is as faithful to her "hollow oak" as poets have ever pretended to be, and will not barter its manifold discomforts for the pleasant firesides of earth. A very beautiful cat, carried in infancy from some remote village in the Apennines, was given as a mascot to the Italian captain of an oil-tank steamer which ran between Savona and Point Breeze, Philadelphia. In the course of time she presented the ship with a family of kittens, who were less than a month old when the Philadelphia docks were reached. Like other sailors, Pussy indulged in some irregularities while on shore; and, as the result of prolonged dissipation, she was found to be missing when the Bayonne

was loaded, and ready to depart. Search was made in vain about the wharves, and Captain Hugo was compelled, not only to sail without his mascot, but to assume the responsibility for her abandoned infants.

Two days later the prodigal came back. Another and a larger boat filled the Bayonne's place. Repentant and dismayed, she visited every steamer in the docks; then, convinced that her indiscretions had made her both homeless and kittenless, she took up her quarters in a watch-box, and patiently awaited Captain Hugo's return. Week followed week; scores of barks arrived, and were each in turn anxiously inspected; and still, undiscouraged by repeated disappointments, she bravely kept her post. At last the Bayonne was sighted, and there was no need this time to hunt for the cat. There she stood, quivering with agitation, on the extreme edge of the wharf, as the malodorous little craft plied its way along the river. The captain's big black dog, Pussy's old friend and companion, barked his furious welcome from the deck. The sound increased her excitement, and, when the steamer was still twelve feet from the docks, she cleared with flying leap the intervening space, and, mid the cheers of the crew, ran straight to the captain's cabin where she had left her kittens two months before. They were well-grown young cats by this

time, and disposed to resent her intrusion ; but the mother's joy was as excessive as if she had been parted from them for but a single night.

In fact, maternal affection is the only sentiment which can compete in the cat's little heart with her fondness for her dwelling-place. She loves her kittens, and she loves her home ; and, when these two emotions contend for mastery, it will be generally found that her love for her kittens triumphs. A pathetic proof of this was afforded by a cat belonging to an English military chaplain at Madras. Her master, moving to the other side of the town, left her behind, or rather gave her to the new tenant, believing she would be more content under her familiar rooftree. Six weeks later she stood at his door, holding in her mouth a young kitten,

“ Sole daughter of her house and heart,”

which, when admitted, she laid at his feet for sanctuary. It was then discovered that the rest of her litter had been drowned ; and the poor mother, with an intelligence miraculously sharpened by love and fear, had carried the one little survivor to her only friend, to beg his pity and protection.

For what pangs are suffered all their lives by these animals whose fecundity is their bane ; little Rachels whose mute wretchedness no one heeds nor commiserates, and who mourn, briefly, it is true,

but bitterly, the perpetual murder of their offspring. Cases, indeed, are recorded of indifference, of neglect, and even of cold-blooded butchery on the part of young cat mothers; but they count for little when contrasted with the overwhelming evidences of care and affection. M. Pierquin de Gembloux, in his "*Traité de la Folie des Animaux*," asserts that female cats occasionally betray a jealous detestation of their kittens, and instances a Spanish Angora who destroyed all her young at their birth, twice only sparing male kittens, which she ignored, but permitted — through some cold caprice — to live.

More repellent still are the authenticated stories — happily very few — of pussies who prefer their own selfish ease to the joys of motherhood. Of two such cases I have melancholy knowledge. One was that of an English cat who so neglected her first litter that the poor little things were in danger of perishing through starvation. To prevent this catastrophe, and teach her the nature of her duties, she was shut up with her kittens in the tool-house; whereupon she indignantly trampled them to death, and, hiding the wee corpses in a corner, hastened, when the door was opened, to more luxurious quarters. She was young, and she was very pretty. Her master pardoned her, but showed, in a manner she could not mistake, his anger and disgust; caress-

ing the dead kittens with pitying hands, and refusing to reinstate her into favour. The lesson was not lost. Another litter arrived in the course of time, and was endured with tolerable patience; a third awoke some languid interest in the maternal heart; and she lived to rear a dozen families,—a solicitous, painstaking, but never affectionate parent.

The second criminal was a New England cat, and the motive for the crime was the same,—an aversion to the care of children, and an unwillingness to exchange the drawing-room rug for the kitchen fire. This mother deliberately carried out her kittens one by one, and dropped them in the water-butt; then returned to the house with a brow as calm as if her conscience were at rest, and no little dripping corpses could trouble her repose.

“She’s ta’en the ribbons frae her hair,
And bound their bodies fast and sair.

She’s put them aneath a marble stane,
Thinking a maid to gae her hame.”

But how rare these instances of depravity, and how perpetual the proofs of Pussy’s maternal love! What terrors fill her anxious little heart, when—warned by bitter experience—she tries to hide her unwelcome family from human eyes. In attic, in cellar, in barn or stable, she tucks them out of sight, stealing to them with many pitiful precautions, lest

her presence should betray them to their death. She sometimes seeks, in this her utmost need, help from those whom her instinct bids her trust, as the poor cat at Madras fled to her former master for protection. M. Pierquin de Gembloux tells us of a cat that belonged to M. Moreau de Saint Méry, and that had never been permitted to rear a single kitten. When she gave birth to her third litter, the servant, wishing to be as kind as cruelty would permit, stole from her only one little victim each day, in order that she might grow accustomed "tout doucement" to her loss. For five mornings this relentless robbery was continued, until but a single kitten remained in the basket. Then, desperate and determined, the cat carried this survivor into her master's study, leaped to his lap, and laid it gently upon his knee, looking in his face with a mute prayer that could neither be misunderstood nor rejected. M. de Saint Méry gave orders that the kitten should be spared; but its mother, too fearful to trust her good fortune, brought it back every morning for weeks, laid it regularly on his knee or at his feet, and besought anew his merciful interference.

Even in happier homes, maternity brings to the cat a host of tender cares. She is never without solicitude, and shows in a hundred pretty ways her anxiety for the safety and welfare of her children.

A Boston puss, seeing the family preparing for their summer exodus, deposited her kitten in one of the open boxes, as a timely hint that it was not to be left behind ; and another equally intelligent animal, before engaging in combat with a rat, dropped *her* kitten into a dresser drawer, determined to have it out of danger. Mr. Lang tells the story of a poor vagabond cat who, with her young son, came daily to his door to beg. The kitten, being pretty and vivacious, was adopted by a neighbouring family, and reared in luxury ; but still the mother, when any especial delicacy like a bit of fish was accorded her in Christian charity, scaled the dividing wall, and gave it to the greedy little lad, who,

“ With every wish of cathood well fulfilled,”

was not ashamed to eat his parent's scanty rations.

Nothing can exceed the bravery and devotion of the cat when any danger threatens her young. It is then that her apparent timidity — that feline instinct of flight which veils the resolute spirit beneath — hardens into intrepidity. It is then that she stands at bay, and shows the splendid courage of desperation, defying fate, whether it takes the form of dog, or children, or the destroying elements. St. George Mivart tells us of a cat who plunged into a swiftly running stream, and rescued her three drowning kittens, bringing them one by one

to shore. When Lusby's Music Hall in London was burned in 1884, it chanced that a cat belonging to the proprietor had recently kittened, and her little family lay in a basket at the rear of the stage. Three times that cat made her way through the smoke and fire, and reappeared, carrying a kitten in her mouth. The third time she was so terribly scorched as to be unrecognizable; she was blind, and of her beautiful fur hardly a patch was left. A fireman in sheer pity tried to catch the creature; but she leaped from his hands, and went straight back into the flames after the fourth kitten. That she reached it was proven by the two little bodies, burned to a crisp, that were found lying side by side when the fire was extinguished. It would be impossible to surpass the heroism of that London cat. Human mothers have done as much. It does not lie in the power of man or woman to do more.

In their ordinary family relations, cats show affection, consideration, and politeness. Paternity, which we stupidly imagine to be ignored, carries with it responsibilities that the father, when he is an honoured member of the home circle, never dreams of neglecting. M. Gautier found that the father's interest in his offspring was unremitting; and I once knew an English Tom who took the athletic training of his children entirely upon his

own capable shoulders, teaching them assiduously to climb trees, to scale walls, and to spring upon birds. M. Dupont de Nemours gives a charming instance of grandmotherly care and devotion on the part of a cat whose young daughter was very ill after the birth of her first kittens. She had a little family of her own at the same time; but she gathered her grandchildren into her overflowing basket, nursed them, and watched over them attentively, until their parent was able to assume her maternal duties.

“A kitten,” says M. Champfleury, “is the delight of a household. All day long a comedy is played by this incomparable actor.” As for a litter of kittens, a *nid de chatons*, as the French prettily phrase it, no misanthrope could resist their seductions. The spirit of mischief, the spirit of frolic, the spirit of drollery animate these small mummerys, and prompt them to their parts. Their curiosity is insatiable. “Everything that moves,” observes Moncriff, “serves to amuse them. They believe that all nature is occupied with their diversion.” The most intrepid of explorers, they make strange voyages of discovery in dark closets, underneath beds and bureaus, up curtains and table legs, trembling with excitement, and with a terror which is half pretence. Their agility is wonderful, yet no less ridiculous than their hardihood. The school-

boy who wrote in his composition, "A kitten is chiefly remarkable for rushing like mad at nothing whatever, and generally stopping before it gets there," should have made a great naturalist. Like Gilbert White, he knew how to observe.

A female cat is kept young in spirit and supple in body by the restless vivacity of her kittens. She plays with her little ones, fondles them, pursues them if they roam too far, and corrects them sharply for all the faults to which feline infancy is heir. A kitten dislikes being washed quite as much as a child does, especially in the neighbourhood of its ears. It tries to escape the infliction, rolls away, paddles with its little paws, and behaves as naughtily as it knows how, until a smart slap brings it suddenly back to subjection. Pussy has no confidence in moral suasion, but implicitly follows Solomon's somewhat neglected advice. I was once told a pleasant story of an English cat who had reared several large families, and who, dozing one day before the nursery fire, was disturbed and annoyed by the whining of a fretful child. She bore it as long as she could, waiting for the nurse to interpose her authority; then, finding passive endurance had outstripped the limits of her patience, she arose, crossed the room, jumped on the sofa, and twice with her strong soft paw, which had chastised many an erring kitten, deliberately boxed

the little girl's ears, — after which she returned to her slumbers.

Instances of friendship among cats — as that charming bond of intimacy which united *Moumoutte Blanche* and *Moumoutte Chinoise* — are very rare. The dog, it is said, lives contentedly without companions of his own species, because his all-absorbing affection for his master satisfies the desires of his heart. He has been well termed the friend of man. But nobody would dream of calling *Pussy* the friend of man. She is nothing of the kind; yet neither is she the friend of other pussies. Two cats will live for years under the same roof, without vulgar jealousy or coarse contention, but also without any approach to confidential intercourse. If one of them has a fancy for companionship, she will “take up” with a horse, — her favourite animal, especially if he be thoroughbred. Many racers have had warm friendships with cats, and the famous stallion, *Godolphin*, lived for years on terms of the closest intimacy with a black cat, who, it is stated, pined away with grief after his death. Failing horses, *Pussy* has been known to entertain herself with the society of a dog, a chicken, a rabbit, any alien thing rather than one of her own reserved race. Cats living in zoölogical gardens have formed erratic attachments for elephants, — big, gentle beasts, depressed

by close captivity, and grateful possibly for a little notice.

Such exceptional cases, however, count for little in the history of the cat. If disposed to be social, she will accord her good-will to any animal she fancies ; if disposed to be motherly, she will adopt and rear a puppy, a rat, or a young pigeon ; but as a rule she is sufficient to herself, is never bored by her own company, and preserves an immaculate freedom from enthusiasm, sympathy, or benevolence. She can be taught to live in amity with both birds and beasts, and even to tolerate indecent liberties of the "Happy Family" order, — sparrows hopping on her head, and white mice frisking foolishly at her feet. She can also be taught to ride a wheel, and jump through hoops of fire. These things denote the nadir of her degradation ; and happily she lends herself with such ill grace to exhibitions of this order, that, notwithstanding our base relish for all that is out of nature, they are not of very common occurrence.

Some amiable naturalists would have us believe that there is no especial hostility between cat and dog, — only a trifling jealousy, fostered by man. They quote instances of marked affection, and tell pretty stories about big Newfoundlands that protect small kittens, and wise old tabbies that rear and educate foolish and motherless puppies. As

well deny the animosity of Celt and Saxon, on the score of individual friendship, or chance deed of mercy. Like the deep-rooted hatred of nations, alien in race, yet thrust by fate upon one another's border lands, is the hatred that never sleeps in the hearts of these sworn enemies. The dog, a generous and chivalric beast, degenerates into a cruel bully the instant that he sees a cat. The cat, brave and courteous, falls into a sheer frenzy of rage and fear when she encounters her ancestral foe. St. George Mivart tells us that this antipathy — the inheritance of ages — is so strong in kittens only a few days old, that they have manifested both anger and terror, spitting with comical fury when touched by a hand that had recently fondled a dog.

Mr. Louis Robinson, in his interesting volume on "Wild Traits in Tame Animals," asserts that the spitting of young kittens, and their beautiful striped fur, are both due to "protective mimicry," nature's clever scheme for the deception of her stronger children, and the preservation of her weaker ones. She taught the kitten in its savage state to spit when disturbed or frightened, so that prowling enemies, like dog or wolf, might mistake the sound for the hissing of snakes; and she banded its fur so that birds of prey, glancing down from afar, might think the helpless creature a coiled serpent, and

forbear to swoop. Some of us have long laboured under the delusion — fostered by prints in early school books — that eagles are particularly addicted to pouncing upon snakes, but Mr. Robinson says they infinitely prefer to take their chances with a cat.

Another point upon which this clever writer dwells emphatically is the proof afforded by Pussy's household habits of her solitary life before domestication. Even now, after centuries of civilization, a dog bolts his food in evident fear of interruption, hides his bones underground, growls and snarls if another dog approaches his plate, and shows plainly that in old savage days he was a member of an active and not too honest community. The cat, never accustomed to tribal life, evinces a different disposition. "When given anything to eat," observes Mr. Robinson, "she first carefully smells the morsel, then takes it in a deliberate and gingerly way, and sits down to finish it at leisure. There is none of that inclination to snatch hastily at food held before her, which we see in even well-trained dogs ; nor does a cat seem in any hurry to stow her goods in the one place where thieving rascals cannot interfere with them."

It is but fair to state that Mr. Robinson's theories have been stoutly opposed by Mr. Andrew Lang, who, though not a naturalist, has enjoyed

ample opportunities for observation. He is ill pleased with hasty inferences where the cat is concerned, and even thinks them a little impertinent, as indicating a tendency on the writer's part to claim familiar acquaintance with an animal who politely, but resolutely, declines familiarity. No two cats, says Mr. Lang, have the same traits. One eats his dinner like a gentleman. His ancestors evidently lived in hermit-like seclusion. Another prefers raiding his companion's dish. His forefathers, by the same token, must have been accustomed to society. Even Mr. Robinson's conclusion that the tailless Manx cat is probably a representative of some ancient wild species, finds no favour in Mr. Lang's eyes. He has accounted long ago in a fashion satisfactory to himself, and on strict "principles of evolution," for this unfortunate animal's peculiarity.

"Man," he says, "is a Celtic island. The Celts (in Brittany at least) believe that if you tread on a cat's tail, a serpent will come out and sting you. This made people shy of cats with tails. But a tailless cat being born by a pure fluke (see Darwin on Sports), and transmitting its peculiarity to its offspring, these cats with no tails were especially adapted to their Celtic environment. People could make pets of *them*, without fear of serpents. The other cats were killed off, or died for lack of friendly

treatment. This could only occur in insular conditions. Hence the Isle of Man possesses Manx cats."

Why not accept the still more ingenious theory of the poet who suggests that these "isle-nurtured" pussies may possibly wear away their tails

" By sedentary habits,
As do the rabbits."

Manx cats are sometimes held to be of a cold and almost churlish disposition, occasioned perhaps by much sorrowful brooding over their lost tails. Yet I once made the acquaintance of a handsome young scion of the race, who lived in Penrith, and who, though lacking vivacity, possessed singular sweetness of character. Mr. Harrison Weir, the author of a very useful book upon cats, says that only the finest Manx varieties are absolutely tailless, the commoner sort possessing little stumpy apologies for the missing member. He gives warm praise to the beautiful Abyssinian cats, silver grey with orange eyes, whose ancestors are believed to have been Pasht's favoured pussies, and the little gods of Egypt. Also to the Siamese cats, once so jealously guarded in the palace of kings, but now exported occasionally to Europe and America. These feline royalties are small, muscular, and daringly athletic, of a chocolate or dun colour, "the shade of wood ashes," say the Siamese poetically, and have thin, pointed, and rather forlorn tails. Their eyes are

sapphire blue or pale amber, and they possess the human and undesirable accomplishment of shedding tears in moments of anger or agitation. Of a gentle and affectionate disposition, they are said to make devoted husbands and fathers,—an uncommon but by no means unknown trait among cats whose family ties are fostered by kindness and sympathy.

Notwithstanding the blueness of their blood, and the princely seclusion in which they have lived for centuries, Siamese cats are ardent mousers, and love the pleasures of the chase as well as any stable-born animal, bred to the sport from tenderest kittenhood. This is the ruling passion of the race, as we are told by *Æsop* and *La Fontaine*. The fair cat-bride of fable slipped from her husband's arms to chase a flying mouse; and among the happiest pussies to-day are probably those hard-worked servants of the public who do not know their own utility. The National Printing Office of France employs a large staff of cats to guard the paper from devastating rats and mice. No salary is paid them; but the cost of their daily meals and the wages of their custodian are regular items of expenditure. Cats are kept also in some of the French military magazines; and a recent report states with becoming gravity that the authorized allowance is not sufficient for their comfortable maintenance.

“The cats of the army,” confesses this report, “are very slow to accustom themselves to the diet prescribed by the government circular ;” and, with lamentable lack of patriotism, they desert their posts in favour of more liberal accommodation. Vienna has its official cats, supported in affluence by the municipality. When too old for service, they are placed on the retired list, and honourably pensioned, as becomes a city which leads the world in the wisdom and humanity of its laws, drawing a sharp line of distinction between the idle vagabond and the aged poor whose day for work is over.

The Midland Railway in England has eight cats among its employees. Their headquarters are at Trent, and they have under their care the corn-sacks — some four hundred thousand in number — which hold the grain carried by the road to its markets. Other railways are as well provided ; and the pussies that work in the London dock-yards seem to be among the most useful members of a busy community. It is even said that they assume airs of ridiculous importance, swaggering around the docks in off hours, and giving idlers to understand that the shipping industries of London depend largely upon their intelligence and activity. They are a closely organized body, and no one who knows them would feel surprised at hearing any day of a strike among the dock-yard cats. The same as-

sumption of responsibility may be observed in the shop-keeping pussies of France. These animals are as uniformly courteous as are their human assistants who stand behind the counters and sell goods ; but it is plain that they feel the dignity of proprietorship, and are deeply versed in all the mysteries of trade.

Cats play an important rôle in our great cold-storage warehouses. It was originally hoped that a temperature of six degrees above zero would prove too severe for vermin ; but rats have that singular adaptability of character with which nature loves to endow the least popular of her creatures. In a few months they were as much at home in the freezing atmosphere as if they had been accustomed to it for generations ; and were rearing large families of children, all comfortably clad in coats of double ply. Surrounded by wholesome food, they showed the discretion of their ancient race, scoffed at traps, and avoided poisoned bait.

It was then suggested that cats might learn to bear the rigours of this bitter cold ; and a few hardy pioneers were chosen to be forever banished from light and warmth, from sunshine and the joyousness of earth. Four fifths of them pined and died, martyrs to un pitying commercialism ; but the great principle which bids the fittest survive, triumphed once more over cruel conditions. Kittens raised in

the icy temperature began to look like little Polar bears, their fur was so thick and warm. By degrees their ears were hidden under furry caps, their tails grew short and bushy, their delicate whiskers, coarse and strong. They preserved their health, and developed incredible activity. At present, cold-storage cats are among the sturdiest of the species ; and we are even assured by those who hold them prisoners that they enjoy their dark captivity, and would be wretched if restored to normal conditions. A garden, sweet with June flowers, and flooded with June sunshine, would, it is said, kill them outright. This may or may not be true. It is much the fashion of men to assert that animals like what is done to them. There are plenty of people ready to declare that horses take pleasure in their check-reins ; and we have all of us heard a great deal about the indifference of dogs and rabbits to the discomforts of vivisection.

A happier lot has been assigned to the official cats who protect the mail bags of the United States postal service, and to those industrious mousers who toil in all the great marts of the world. For while Pussy dearly loves the country and the freedom of green fields, she can content herself wonderfully well in towns ; and leads a hard-worked, dissipated life, with great apparent satisfaction. Much regret was recently expressed by a big Lon-

don firm at the death of its "best foundry cat," — which phrase seemed puzzling until explanation was made. The sand used for casts is mixed with flour, and this flour attracts mice and rats that too often spoil the moulds. Cats are kept to eat the mice, and they in turn must be taught not to walk about on the moulds, nor scratch, nor injure them in any way. In these respects the "best foundry cat" had been made perfect by practice, and his loss was an event to be deplored. Every department of this house has its feline police corps, even the galvanizing shop, where a brindled veteran knows by long experience that hot metal spurts when plates are dipped in it, and has learned to get under cover at this critical juncture.

The recognition of the cat's utility, and her employment in public service, are not merely features of modern economics. Among the requisitions laid by Frederick the Great — the most hard-headed and hard-hearted of kings and soldiers — upon more than one little Saxon and Silesian town, was a levy of cats for the guarding of army stores. Sometimes it even happened that the town could not provide the number of pussies demanded (perhaps the poor war-ravaged inhabitants loved their pets, having little else left them in the world), and permission was humbly asked that weasels should be sent instead.

As for the cats who live in newspaper offices, in police stations, and in the unrestful society of fire companies, they acquire distinctive habits of their own, and appear strangely remote from placid dwellers by domestic hearths. The nocturnal habits of the journalist suit the "night-waking" pussy to perfection; but the din, the confusion, the vast littered spaces of the printing rooms would seem to make them the least desirable of earthly homes. Yet newspaper cats love these tumultuous surroundings, forget the serenity of gentler days, lose all aspirations towards sweetness and light, and abandon themselves unreservedly to the joys of scurry and excitement. Their kittens, roughly reared, tumble about under giant presses and hurrying feet, escaping destruction only by that marvellous faculty for self-preservation which bids defiance to danger.

"Had we not nine lives,
I wis I ne'er had seen again thy sausage shop, St. Ives."

The vulgar and deleterious habit of eating black beetles is begun so early, and continued so persistently, that the journalistic kitling, like Rappaccini's daughter, is inured to poisonous food. It grows up happy and healthy in an atmosphere apparently as uncongenial as that of the police station, where its little cousins are making a wide acquaintance with felony; or as that of the fire company's stables,

where another litter of innocents is learning the mystery of the alarm, and watching with fearful joy the mad rush of horses to their goal.

Household cats have so often given warning of fires that their services in this regard merit both recognition and gratitude. They are restless at night, and easily affrighted. The first puff of smoke, the first crackling of flames sends them mewling to master or mistress for explanation of this phenomenon. I knew a Cornish cat, crippled and singed, whose scars bore honourable witness to his bravery. His owner, the rector of a country parish, was aroused before daybreak by the piteous scratching and crying at his door. When it was opened, there stood poor Pussy, trembling, scorched, but determined, while the halls were black with smoke. This cat never fully recovered from the shock, but remained a nervous invalid all his life, which is too often the case when the fright has been very severe. M. Pierquin de Gembloux relates several instances in which cats were rendered more or less imbecile by sudden and overmastering terror. One little Angora fell down a well, and was saved from being drowned, only by a jutting stone to which she clung with desperation. After a while her cries attracted attention, and she was rescued; but the ordeal through which she had passed had so completely unnerved her that the poor thing

never recovered her mental balance, — always appearing to be in a state of pitiable apprehension.

Animals so delicately organized are necessarily sensitive to atmospheric conditions. An approaching storm starts them restlessly wandering from room to room. They have been known to exhibit signs of acute disquietude before cyclones and earthquakes. In 1783 two wise cats of Messina behaved so strangely, and showed such evidences of terror, that their master, infected by their fear, fled from his house in time to escape the first great shock, and the tumbling of his walls in ruins.

It is pleasant to relate these services to man on the part of little beasts who do not often pose as our benefactors, and who have been, in their day, accused of much ill-doing. Even now, when suspicions of witchcraft are allayed, and mothers no longer believe that cats suck the blood of their sleeping infants, the ancient and unconquerable prejudice is kept alive by sad stories of contagion, — of pussies who carry diphtheria and scarlet fever from house to house, with a malignity worthy of the Jew of Malta.

“As for myself, I walk abroad a-nights,
And kill sick people groaning under walls;
Sometimes I go about and poison wells.”

Every year or so an enterprising newspaper reporter stirs up a sleepy bacteriologist, and per-

suades him to say that cats sow broadcast the germs of deadly disease, and that they are beyond measure dangerous pets in the nursery, being subject to all the maladies that can be passed over to the little children who caress them. If well aroused, the scientific gentleman will even warm so far to his subject as to suggest that the entire feline population of New York or of San Francisco shall be exterminated as a drastic precautionary measure, stoutly maintaining that "the world could get along very well without cats." This is true, but if we once establish a "Society for Doing Without," — Mr. Barrie proposed it to our consideration long ago — we are not likely to leave much room for reporters or bacteriologists.

Utilitarianism is but a base foundation for esteem. The cat's true place is by our glowing hearths, not in cold-storage warehouses, nor in printing offices; her true mission is to delight the eye, and afford reserved and restful companionship, not to guard our belongings, nor look after our personal safety. As the old lazy cat of Florian's fable remarks to the lean, laborious one,

" Va, le secret de réussir,
C'est d'être adroit, non d'être utile."

Pussy's adroitness is equalled only by her delicacy and tact. Her cleanliness and her careful attention to her toilet show respect for herself and for us.

She is seldom intrusive, and never exuberant, but manifests at times a sweet and flattering desire to be with us, whether we are reading silently, oblivious of her presence, or have leisure to seduce her into play. Dickens's Williamina — first christened, in error, William — used to put out the candles with her paw if she thought her master too absorbed in his book, or too long unconscious of her patient waiting. Now and then this little fireside friend will even consent to accompany us out of doors; not with the overflowing delight of a restless dog, but with a graciousness of demeanour which reminds one of Mme. de Sévigné and her companions strolling through the leafy paths of Les Rochers. "A cat," says M. Champfleury, "does not invite us to a tramp; she does not appear to find the pleasure in active exercise which distinguishes the dog. She only rambles a little with some one for whom she has a fancy, on condition always that the distance be short, and the spot a quiet one. A student who, book in hand, treads meditatively the shady garden walks, is perhaps most to her taste. She will run before him for a few steps, roll herself lightly over the gravel, return to his side for an absent-minded caress, and again precede him down the path, leading him as far as she deems it well for him to go."

Curiosity is a trait as common in young cats as

in young children. It moderates in middle age, when habits of meditation have superseded the gayety and vigilance of kittenhood ; but that its existence should be denied and ridiculed by so acute an observer as the Abbé Galiani, proves the formidable strength of preconceived opinions. "Man alone," says the Abbé, "knows what it is to be curious. Animals have no share in this sensation. We can inspire them with fear, but never with curiosity."

It is not fear, however, which makes a kitten watch with breathless interest the unfastening of a parcel, and clutch at the paper and string until the contents are shown to her. It is not fear which sends her peeping into half-open drawers, or which rivets her attention when a box-lid chances to be lifted in her presence. If she be not curious, why does she jump on the sill, the minute a window is raised ; or creep to the door, to see who is going upstairs ; or inspect the multitudinous contents of a desk as gravely as if she were making an inventory ? Voltaire recognized curiosity as a dominant trait in all intelligent animals ; and Rousseau drew a close analogy between a curious kitten surveying a strange room, and a no less curious child making its first bewildering acquaintance with the world.

Gratitude is another sentiment which sceptics have denied to the cat, and which is certainly not a

paramount passion in her bosom, any more than in the bosoms of men. Yet just as there are traces of it in the human heart, and occasional instances so fine that our admiration proves their rarity ; so there are traces of it in all cathood, and now and then some charming and indubitable proof of its potency. Pussy does not, indeed, assume herself our servitor, because, to gratify our own refined tastes, we give her food and lodging. That is not her way of reading her motto, *Libertas sine Labore* ; but in her own fashion she acknowledges the claims of friendship, and feels that kindness merits recognition. Why else should she so constantly offer to share her spoils with unappreciative mortals, who have not even tact enough to pretend the satisfaction they do not feel ? M. Brasseur Wirtgen, a close and accurate observer, tells us that the two things which marred the calm contentment of his cat were his own studious habits, and his unfortunate distaste for slain vermin. If he read long, she would jump on his knee, and thrust her little head between the pages of his book, as though seeking the cause of his absorption ; and her solicitude for his welfare prompted her to drag huge rats, still in their death-throes, to his feet. “ She behaved as though I had been her son, and painfully endeavoured to provide me with a prey commensurate to my size. Large game was unfit for her kittens ;

but she appeared both hurt and mortified by my incomprehensible indifference to such delicious morsels."

Several similar instances have come within my knowledge. One is that of an English cat who was fed daily at the family dinner hour, receiving from his master's hand choice bits of fish and fowl. On a certain winter evening he was unaccountably absent from his post; but when the dinner was half served, he came rushing up the stairs, carrying two mice in his mouth. One he dropped upon his own platter, and then, before he could be stopped, he leaped upon the table, and deposited the second on his master's plate, — a graceful and pretty, however unwelcome attention, and one which plainly showed a well-bred desire to requite the hospitality he had received.

The same generous instinct animated a Boston cat of my acquaintance, to whom the fishmonger was wont, in his daily visit, to give some scraps of fish. One morning Amber brought a little dead mouse, and laid it at his friend's feet with a courteous gesture which said, "Permit me to make some return for your constant kindness." It is not possible to deny to an animal, capable of such charming liberality, that finer sentiment which bids us all acknowledge and repay a benefaction.

A more touching story is told of a poor old cat,

an outcast and Pariah, living by depredations, but no longer daring enough for successful robbery, who was rescued from his miserable estate by M. Desfontaines, the director of the *Jardin des Plantes*, and one of the kindest men who ever blessed the earth. This creature, so wild and hopeless, responded to M. Desfontaines's gentle advances. Within half an hour he was transformed from a wretched marauder into a happy and affectionate pussy, manifesting keen intelligence and quick sympathy, but lacking always that serene composure which is the most exquisite birthright of his race. He resembled, no doubt, the "vieux chat noir" of M. Prosper Mérimée, "parfaitement laid, mais plein d'esprit et de discrétion. Seulement il n'a eu que des gens vulgaires, et manque d'usage."

This is seldom the case. A cat born in the gutter or in the stables will, under favouring circumstances, be as politely contemptuous as though the blood of feline Howards ran in her veins. Perhaps the arrogant young kitten given by Prince Potemkin to Catherine the Great came of obscure parentage, and had brothers and sisters mousing modestly in the little shops of Saint Petersburg. Catherine was attached to this cat. She speaks of it in one of her letters as "gay, witty, and not obstinate;" — a curious description of an animal whose gayety is so swiftly subdued by decorum, whose wit is reserved

for cat circles into which the Empress had no entrée, and who, in its own gentle fashion, is the most unswervingly obstinate creature in the world.

“ For wiles may win thee, but no arts enslave,”

writes Graham Tomson in praise of *Le Chat Noir*, most honoured, if not most prized, of all the furry fraternity that basked about her hearth.

“ Half loving-kindliness, and half disdain,
Thou comest to my call, serenely suave,
With humming speech and gracious gesture grave,
In salutation courtly and urbane.
Yet must I humble me thy grace to gain,
For wiles may win thee, but no arts enslave,
And nowhere gladly thou abidest, save
Where naught disturbs the concord of thy reign.

“ Sphinx of my quiet hearth ! who deignst to dwell
Friend of my toil, companion of mine ease,
Thine is the lore of Ra and Rameses ;
That men forget dost thou remember well,
Beholden still in blinking reveries,
With sombre, sea-green gaze inscrutable.”

There has been a great deal of modern verse, as of modern prose, written about cats ; yet little, worthy of its subject, and little in English that can compare with the affectionate tributes of France. Shelley's schoolboy doggerel is unworthy of consideration, and Keats's sonnet had best be buried in oblivion. Jocularly sits ill upon the immortals. Matthew Arnold has indeed celebrated Atossa in some

matchless lines, already quoted; and Mr. Swinburne has chanted the praises of his cat with all the extravagance of the French poets, but without their admirable art which conveys to our minds the penetrating charm of feline loveliness. If we compare his verse with that of Baudelaire, or Verlaine, we see that the vehemence of his sentiment is untempered by that Gallic subtlety which suggests, rather than sets forth, the cat's seductiveness.

“Stately, kindly, lordly friend,
 Condescend
 Here to sit by me, and turn
 Glorious eyes that smile and burn,
 Golden eyes, love's lustrous meed,
 On the golden page I read.”

It is probable that the cat did nothing of the kind, — not that her race is indifferent to books, — Gautier's Pierrot, we know, adored them, — but because entire possession of the volume, and freedom to ruffle its leaves at will, are essential to Pussy's literary enjoyment. Her theory of companionship does not include community of tastes or interests. She is rather the spectator than the participator of our amusements. Mr. Swinburne, however, plainly thinks otherwise.

“Wild on woodland ways, your sires
 Flashed like fires;
 Fair as flame, and fierce and fleet
 As with wings, on wingless feet

Shone and sprang your mother, free
Bright and brave as wind or sea.

“Free and proud and glad as they,
Here to-day
Rests or roams their radiant child,
Vanquished not, but reconciled;
Free from curb of aught above,
Save the lovely curb of love.

“Dogs may fawn on all and some,
As they come :
You, a friend of loftier mind,
Answer friends alone in kind.
Just your foot upon my hand
Softly bids it understand.”

For arrogance of spirit this is unsurpassed, even in Saxon verse. Poets are never weary of comparing the dog and the cat, and censuring one or the other for not possessing its rival's traits; but contrast Mr. Swinburne's sublime assurance with the diffidence of M. Lemaître, who recognizes in *his* cat — the host of his quiet house — an exquisite mingling of irony and benignity, of attachment and contempt.

“Tu n'as jamais connu, philosophe, et vieux frère,
La fidélité sotté et bruyante du chien ;
Tu m'aimes cependant, et mon cœur le sent bien ;
Ton amour clairvoyant et peut-être éphémère
Me plaît ; et je salue en toi, calme penseur,
Deux exquisés vertues ; scepticisme et douceur.”

This is the Latin point of view, and sufficiently explains the love of a Frenchman for his cat. He

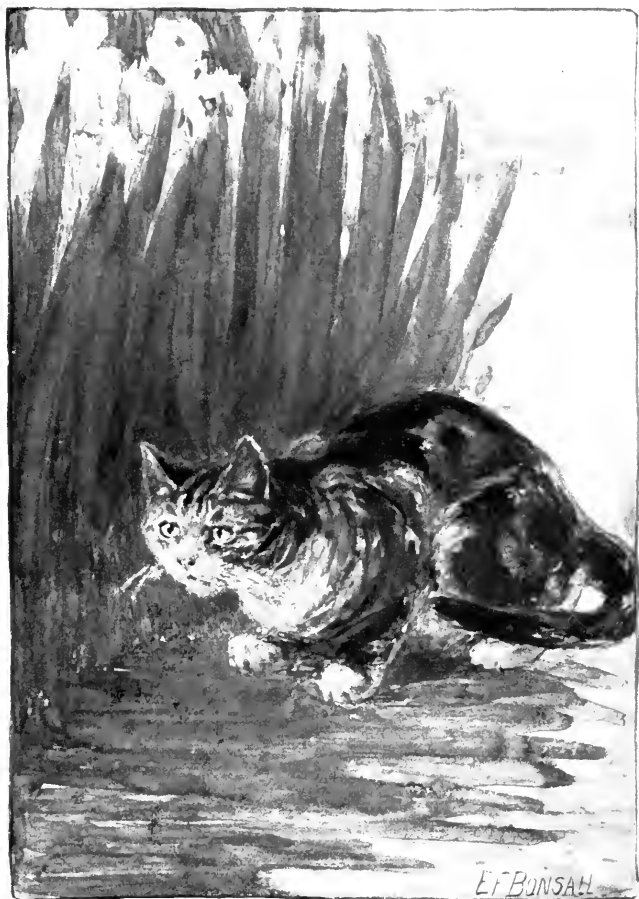
values most those precise qualities which outrage the sensibilities of the Saxon. He respects the spirit which meets him on equal ground, and he prizes the temperate and mutable affection which he must constantly labour to retain. When an Englishman fully recognizes the cattish nature, he is apt, unless he be as tolerant and as little of a despot as Mr. Arnold, to resent its cold serenity, its mortifying indifference, — to resent it with the frankness of Mr. Arthur Benson in his admirable verses upon

THE CAT.

“ On some grave business, soft and slow,
 Along the garden-paths you go,
 With bold and burning eyes :
 Or stand, with twitching tail, to mark
 What starts and rustles in the dark,
 Among the peonies.

“ The dusty cockchafer that springs
 Upon the dusk with whirring wings,
 The beetle, glossy-horned,
 The rabbit pattering through the fern,
 May frisk unheeded, by your stern
 Preoccupation scorned.

.
 “ You all day long, beside the fire,
 Retrace in dreams your dark desire,
 And mournfully complain
 In grave displeasure, if I raise
 Your languid form to pet or praise ;
 And so to sleep again.



“The gentler hound that near me lies,
Looks up with true and tender eyes,
 And waits my generous mirth ;
You do not woo me, but demand
A gift from my unwilling hand,
 A tribute to your worth.

“You loved me when the fire was warm,
But, now I stretch a fondling arm,
 You eye me and depart.
Cold eyes, sleek skin, and velvet paws,
You win my indolent applause,
 You do not win my heart !”

Here is a clear and candid exposition of the case. The cat, indeed, as Montaigne discovered, but without resentment, long ago, awaits no one's mirth. “We entertain each other with mutual follies, and if I have my time to begin or to refuse, she also has hers.” The essence of free social intercourse demands this mutual independence, this mutual background of reserve. A Nautch girl dances when she is bidden; an Englishwoman is privileged to dance or not, according to her fancy. I have often thought that the behaviour of a well-bred cat, when courted against her will, was singularly like the behaviour of a well-bred man or woman, forced by the exigencies of life to receive unwelcome attentions. She offers no rude resistance to the “fondling arm,” and even purrs a few languid remarks, equivalent to “Delightful evening.” “So

glad to see you here to-night." "Hope you were not very tired yesterday." After which she slips softly away to resume her interrupted meditations. To take offence at such polite withdrawal is the sheer arrogance of ownership, and it is in but a limited sense that we can be said to own a cat. "I have it of nature that I must seek my own profit," she says with Epictetus; and if the most generous of the Stoics claimed as much, why not the least enthusiastic of animals?

Nothing, however, could be more lifelike than the picture Mr. Benson draws of Pussy stealing through the dusk, preoccupied yet observant, and betraying to none the dubious purpose of her stroll. It is finer, because less wordy, than Mr. William Watson's "Study in Contrasts," which presents once more to our patient consideration the deep dissimilarity of cat and dog;—of the collie, blue-blooded, aristocratic, yet sadly lacking in distinction, and the Angora, who regards him with languid and indolent contempt. Beneath the dog's company manners, beautiful manners befitting any court, Mr. Watson detects a substratum of vulgar impetuosity. For all his airs and graces, for all his noble head and silky coat, he is at heart

"The bustling despot of the mountain flock,
And pastoral dog-of-all-work."

.

“And then his nature, how impressionable,
How quickly moved to Collie mirth or woe,
Elated or dejected at a word,
And how unlike your genuine Vere de Vere.”

But all this time, from an open window,

“A great Angora watched his Collieship,
And, throned in monumental calm, surveyed
His effervescence, volatility,
Clamour on slight occasions, fussiness,
Herself immobile, imperturbable.”

It is the unchanging and passionless East surveying through centuries the restless vagaries of the distracted West.

A great deal has been written about Oxford and Cambridge cats, who, of all their race in England, appear to command the deepest affection and respect. Ancient universities, like ancient cathedrals, afford an atmosphere pleasantly suited to Pussy's meditative habits. He drowzes all day in dim Italian churches, like some devout but sleepy old woman who loves the shelter of the holy walls, and who is lulled sweetly to rest by the monotonous and familiar chant. He is equally at home in college quadrangles and college halls. Anything that is studious, decorous, permanent, appeals to his splendid conservatism and unerring good taste. In proof of the high esteem in which he is held by those familiar with his scholastic life, I quote this

fine tribute to the memory of Tom of Corpus, a cat who died full of years and honours, widely known and deeply lamented.

“The Junior Fellow’s vows were said ;
 Among his co-mates and their Head
 His place was fairly set.
 Of welcome from friends old and new
 Full dues he had, and more than due ;
 What could be lacking yet ?

“One said, ‘The Senior Fellow’s vote !’
 The Senior Fellow, black of coat,
 Save where his front was white,
 Arose and sniffed the stranger’s shoes
 With critic nose, as ancients use
 To judge mankind aright.

“I — for ’t was I who tell the tale —
 Conscious of fortune’s trembling scale,
 Awaited the decree ;
 But Tom had judged : ‘He loves our race,’
 And, as to his ancestral place,
 He leapt upon my knee.

“Thenceforth in common-room and hall,
 A *verus socius* known to all,
 I came and went and sat,
 Far from cross fate or envy’s reach ;
 For none a title could impeach
 Accepted by a cat.

“While statutes changed, and freshmen came,
 His gait, his wisdom were the same,
 His age no more than mellow ;

Yet nothing mortal may defy
The march of *Anno Domini*,
Not e'en the Senior Fellow.

“ Beneath our linden shade he lies ;
Mere eld hath softly closed his eyes
 With late and honoured end.
He seems, while catless we confer,
To join with faint Elysian purr,
 A tutelary friend.”

We know what it is when Pussy's place is vacant, and her familiar little figure no longer prowls with padded footsteps around our desolate rooms. Why should we miss so sorely a creature who entered but sparingly into our lives, and gave us only a niggard portion of regard ? Perhaps because the deep disquiet of our souls finds something akin to rest in the mere contemplation of an egotism so finely adjusted to its ends.

“ You are life's true philosopher,
 To whom all moralists are one,”

sighs a poet in the “ Spectator,” addressing his cat with the wistful envy of a man who has been bored and battered by the strenuous ethics of the day.

“ You hold your race traditions fast,
 While others toil, you simply live,
And, based upon a stable past,
 Remain a sound conservative.

“You see the beauty of the world
Through eyes of unalloyed content,
And, in my study chair upcurled,
Move me to pensive wonderment.

“I wish I knew your trick of thought,
The perfect balance of your ways ;
They seem an inspiration, caught
From other laws in older days.”

“From the dawn of creation,” says Mr. Lang appreciatively, “the cat has known his place, and he has kept it, practically untamed and unspoiled by man. He has *retenué*. Of all animals, he alone attains to the Contemplative Life. He regards the wheel of existence from without, like the Buddha. There is no pretence of sympathy about the cat. He lives alone, aloft, sublime, in a wise passiveness. He is excessively proud, and, when he is made the subject of conversation, will cast one glance of scorn, and leave the room in which personalities are bandied. All expressions of emotion he scouts as frivolous and insincere, except, indeed, in the ambrosial night, when, free from the society of mankind, he pours forth his soul in strains of unpremeditated art. The paltry pay and paltry praise of humanity he despises, like Edgar Poe. He does not exhibit the pageant of his bleeding heart ; he does not howl when people die, nor explode in cries of delight when his master returns from a journey.

With quiet courtesy, he remains in his proper and comfortable place, only venturing into view when something he approves of, such as fish or game, makes its appearance. On the rights of property he is firm. If a strange cat enters his domain, he is up in claws to resist invasion. It was for these qualities, probably, that the cat was worshipped by the ancient Egyptians."

The last characteristic — an invincible determination to resist territorial encroachment — has made the cat the light-weight champion of the world. It was for this that Mr. Richard Garnett prized the heroic Marigold, who in many a bitter fray had held her wall, as Horatius held his bridge, defiant, dauntless, indomitable.

"She moved through the garden in glory, because
She had very long claws at the end of her paws.
Her back was arched, her tail was high,
A green fire glared in her vivid eye;
And all the Toms, though never so bold,
Quailed at the martial Marigold."

Perpetual vigilance keeps the cat in such excellent fighting order. Like a good athlete, she never relaxes the exercise which preserves her marvelous elasticity. Mr. Harrison Weir insists that her reprehensible habit of clawing wood — a young tree or a table leg being used indiscriminately — is not, as Mr. Darwin and other naturalists have supposed,

a method of sharpening her claws ; but a necessary process by which the muscles and tendons of her feet are stretched, so that they may work readily and strongly. "The retraction of the claws for lengthened periods," he says, "must tend to contract the tendons ; therefore cats fix the points of their claws in something soft, and bear downwards with the whole weight of the body, simply to stretch, and, by use, to strengthen the ligatures that pull the claws forward."

So, too, the cruel playing with the injured mouse is not mere sportiveness on Pussy's part. She disables her victim, and then lets it run, that she may leap upon it again and again, thereby keeping herself in perfect practice. Stiffness of limb, slowness of action, would soon mean for her no mouse and no dinner. She dare not lose the supple spring which secures her prey ; and the merciless game she plays is really a military manœuvre, taught her by unpitying nature, and absolutely necessary — like other military manœuvres — if the business of killing is to continue. Mrs. Wallace, in a pretty paper on some cats of Oxford, tells us of a gallant old Tom who did not believe in the arts of war, and whose method of attack upon the alert young robins was purely British in its ingenuousness. "Despising cover, he galloped slowly down the garden to the spot where the bird was feeding, and never

ceased to be surprised when its place was found empty."

"C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre."

Mr. Rule, who succeeded in crossing a domestic cat of the tortoise-shell variety with a young wild cat, found that the male kitten of this strangely assorted pair was beyond measure quarrelsome and fierce. Had he lived, he might have scaled heights of wickedness unknown generally to his race, and have rivalled that animal whom De Quincey respected as a veritable assassin, not a mere slayer of robins and rats. He died, however, in his lusty youth, and his sister was as gentle and playful as he had been sullen and violent. Both inherited the beauty of their mother, and the superb activity of their free-born sire.

"The human race," says an acute thinker, "may be divided into people who love cats and people who hate them; the neutrals being few in numbers, and, for intellectual and moral reasons, not worth considering." This is true, even in our day of feeble passions and lukewarm antagonisms. The old inheritance of fear, the old association with evil, still darken Pussy's pathway. That sick abhorrence which shook poor Ronsard's soul if a cat but crossed his path, is not unknown in the twentieth century; and there are many who — strange though it may appear — prefer their chimney cor-

ner empty of delight. We hear these persons constantly complain, as did Ronsard to Rémy Belleau, that if a cat be in the room with them, she singles them out to be the recipients of her attentions, rubbing herself against their feet, and showing an obstinate preference for their society.

“ Et toutefois ceste hideuse beste
Se vint coucher tout auprès de ma teste,
Cherchant le mol d'un plumeux oreiller
Où je soulois à gauche sommeiller :
Car volontiers à gauche je sommeille
Jusqu'au matin que le coq me réveille.”

This is one of the traits of the impenetrable cat nature to which we hold no key. The dog is guided by a kindly instinct to the man or woman whose heart is open to his advances. The cat often leaves the friend who courts her, to honour, or to harass, the unfortunate mortal who shudders at her unwelcome caresses. There is an impish perversity about the deed which recalls the snares of witchcraft. So, too, does her uncanny habit of looking with fixed gaze over one's shoulder at a dark corner of the room, and turning her head slightly from time to time, as her eyes follow the movements of the unseen object in the shadows. When I am alone of a winter's night, and oppressed by the vague fear of life and death which haunt the soul in moments of subjection, I find this steadfast stare

at a ghostly presence trying to the nerves. The brilliancy of the cat's eyes, the narrowing of the lids, the stern contraction of the brow, the deadly repose of the whole figure, enhance the shadowy spell by which she dominates that hour. Sir Walter Scott, sanest and least cowardly of men, knew whereof he spoke when he admitted that Hinse was a mystery.

Whence, too, comes that impelling voice which summons the cat to vagrancy; which calls her away from the warm fireside she loves, and from the hearts that love her, to meet an unread fate? Why is it that this animal, seemingly more attached than any other to her own hearthstone, should so often bid it an abrupt and inexplicable farewell? I knew of a cat who for eight long years was the enthroned idol of a luxurious home. One morning in early spring his mistress heard his voice raised in plaintive notes from a stunted peach tree that grew in the city garden. "I was but too sure what it meant," she said; "Sir Charles was bidding me good-by." She flung open the window, and looked out. There he sat, and his great yellow eyes were lifted mournfully to her face. Then he leaped down, and was never seen again.

Another cat spent five successive winters under a hospitable roof near New York; but always departed — none knew whither — about the middle

of April. No cajolery could persuade him to linger after his appointed time. He went, and the household mourned his absence, until the first bleak November days brought him back to resume his old place by the fire. Like Persephone, he seemed compelled to divide his year between two homes and two claimants. He might have served, as well as Demeter's daughter, to mark the relentless succession of the seasons.

"Every one is aware," says Mr. Lang, "that a perfectly comfortable, well-fed cat will occasionally come to his house and settle there, deserting a family by whom it is lamented, and to whom it could, if it chose, find its way back with ease. This conduct is a mystery which may lead us to infer that cats form a great secret society, and that they come and go in pursuance of some policy connected with education, or perhaps with witchcraft. We have known a cat to abandon his home for years. Once in six months he would return, and look about him with an air of some contempt. 'Such,' he seemed to say, 'were my humble beginnings.'"

The most curious instance of this strange trait that ever came under my immediate notice occurred a few years ago in Baltimore. A mother puss with three young kittens made her appearance one morning at the door of a very enlightened and cat-loving family. They were welcomed generously, not as

mendicants, but as honoured guests; slipped easily into the soft and pleasant grooves assigned to them, and seemed very soon as much at home as if they had been born and bred upon the spot. For nearly four months they remained, and the three kittens grew into three fine young cats. Then one day they all disappeared as unaccountably as they had come, and no one of them ever returned again.

These are not easy things to explain. We can more readily understand an instinct which the cat shares with the wild creatures of the woods, and which bids her die alone. She seldom affords material for the pitiful scenes which Gautier and Loti describe with so much art; and even Moumoutte Chinoise tried to escape her master's eye, when she felt the awful moment drawing near. There is something which commands our deepest respect in the dignity and delicacy of spirit which impel this animal, however loved and pampered during life, to face alone, and seeking help from none, the insult and the agony of dissolution.

Even the exaggerated affection felt for the cat by those who are sensitive to her charm, is not altogether legitimate. In old days such exclusive and ill-placed devotion lighted the witch's pyre. Now we only laugh at each new proof of Pussy's influence, or wonder at the mental attitude of a woman who can advertise in the London "Standard"

for live sparrows with which to feed her favourite. More absurd, but far less repulsive, is this really delightful notice which appeared some years ago in a Berlin newspaper:—

“Wanted, by a lady of rank, for adequate remuneration, a few well-behaved and respectably dressed children, to amuse a cat in delicate health two or three hours a day.”

One fears this to have been mistaken kindness. Cats, even when robust, have scant liking for the boisterous society of children, and are apt to exert their utmost ingenuity to escape it. Nor are they without adult sympathy in their prejudice. “Augustus detested above all things going to bed with little boys,” writes Mr. Kenneth Grahame, and who shall blame Augustus? The poor Berlin invalid, so strenuously entertained, might have sympathized—had he but known—with the court of Versailles, when it heard the formal announcement which precluded “*Athalie* :” “Mesdames and Messieurs, the King graciously requests you to be amused.”

A gentleman, living alone in one of our Southern cities, recently brought suit against his next-door neighbour for alienating the affections of his cat. It was set forth in the testimony that the plaintiff had—and desired—no other companionship save that of a beautiful Maltese pussy, who, being of a

loving and domestic nature, spent all her evenings contentedly by her master's side. This tranquil life had lasted several years when, in an unhappy hour, a widow rented the adjoining house. The cat made incursions over the wall, was received with flattering attentions, and began to spend her days under the gayer roof. These journeys mattered little at first, as the unsuspecting gentleman, who was away at his office from morning until night, was well pleased to have his darling looked after during his absence, and only demanded her prompt appearance at dinner time. Soon, however, Pussy refused to return in the evenings, and, when brought forcibly back, sulked and glowered in corners until she could again escape. The widow aided and abetted her in this unnatural conduct, firmly maintaining that a cat of intelligence had a right to choose her friends and her surroundings. Therefore the deserted plaintiff, wounded in his tenderest feelings, and unable — as in the good old days — to charge his neighbour with bewitching his pet, entered suit against her, and was liberally laughed at for his pains. It is not only in the "Arabian Nights," and in the merciless comedies of France, that the inconstancy of the female heart has moved the world to mirth.

Yet, jest as we may, we know very well that those men and women — few in numbers — who are en-

dowed with what Mr. Peacock called "the faculty of stayathomeitiveness," find their best ally in the cat. How many quiet and thoughtful hours have been shared by this little friend who never disturbs our musings, nor resents our preoccupation? It is not in superb catteries that she develops her most winning traits, but by the quiet fireside, however humble, where she rules alone. Her gentler aspects, the sweetness of her domesticity, are then abundantly revealed. Nor is it beauty which best enables her to win and hold hearts, but rather some fine charm of personality, too intangible to be analyzed. I knew a London cat of middle-class parentage, who wore an unassuming coat of brindled grey, and whom a fancier would have regarded with scorn. He was christened William Penn, in deference to his Quaker costume, and to the City of Brotherly Love, which it was never his fortune to see. He possessed a few accomplishments, but was far too reserved to flaunt them before strangers; and his manners were marked by simple good taste rather than by any flattering warmth of demonstration. His surroundings were artistic, and he had been accustomed from kittenhood to hear much brilliant conversation; yet there was no taint of Bohemianism in the unfailing vivacity which appeared to be his sovereign attraction. That cat was so dearly loved, so deeply mourned, that the shadow

cast by his tragic death lingered heavily for months over the household he had graced, and over the little circle of friends he had honoured with his confidence and affection. No one knew the secret of his charm ; he carried it to his grave, — his little pitiful grave in the heart of London ; but, while he lived, he added his share to the unconscious gayety of life.

There are many pretty stories about cats, and many graceful allusions to them scattered lightly through literature, and familiar to those whose wandering attention can always be fixed by so irresistible a spell. Gautier wrote the fantastic "Paradis des Chats ;" and Zola borrowed the title for a delightful story of a pampered pussy, who grew so tired of dulness and luxury that he ran away with a vagabond acquaintance for one long delicious day of liberty, at the close of which, jaded, spent, starved, and broken, he crept meekly back to bondage and his evening cutlet. Those of us who read in our youth that most dismal of novels, "Eugene Aram," will not easily forget the Corporal's cat, Jacobina, inasmuch as this truculent animal affords the only gleam of amusement vouchsafed us in the whole mournful tale. A somewhat similar sensation of relief is associated with the very charming cat who makes her transient appearance in the first chapters of "Robert Elsmere," and disappears forever when the atmosphere becomes surcharged with

theology. Mr. Froude, following the example of Hoffmann, has selected Pussy to be the interpreter of much philosophy, admirable of its kind, but alien to the feline heart. The cat's scheme of life is curiously complete. Centuries have gone into the moulding of it. She knew many years before the wise Marcus Aurelius that it was possible to have no opinion upon a subject, and to remain untroubled in her mind.

Letters and memoirs are especially rich in pleasant glimpses into Pussy's varying fortunes. We see her under so many aspects, and amid so many contrasted surroundings;—now dozing at Tennyson's feet, now "walking tiptoe" over Alfred de Musset's papers, now flitting through Heine's dreams. It is Heine who tells us that, when he was a child, his little friend and playfellow, Wilhelm, ran into a swift deep stream to rescue a cat, and was drowned,— "the cat, however, living a long time after."

In the life of Robert Stephen Hawker, the very clever and eccentric Vicar of Morwenstow, we find that he was usually followed to church by nine or ten cats, who entered the chancel with him and careered about during the service, affording what must have been a welcome distraction to the youthful members of the congregation. Mr. Hawker would pause every now and then, while preaching

or reading the prayers, to pat these small parishioners, and scratch them under their chins, or perhaps cuff them gently, if their vivacity prompted them to unseemly gambols. One envies the children of Morwenstow, who, alone perhaps of all the children in England, must have felt downright enjoyment in going to church.

More pleasant still, because more in keeping with the cat's natural instincts, which are domestic rather than devout, is this little picture drawn by Mr. William Rossetti from the recollections of his childhood, and told in the life of his brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

“In all my earlier years I used frequently to see my father come home in the dusk, rather fagged with his round of teaching; and, after dining, he would lie down flat on the hearth-rug, close by the fire, snoring vigorously. Beside him would stand up our old familiar tabby cat, poised on her haunches, and holding on by her fore-claws inserted into the fender-wires, warming her furry front. Her attitude (I have never seen any feline imitation of it) was peculiar, — somewhat in the shape of a capital Y. ‘The cat making the Y’ was my father’s phrase for this performance. She was the mother of a numerous progeny. One of her daughters — also long an inmate of our house — was a black and white cat named Zoë by my elder

sister Maria, who had a fancy for anything Greekish ; but Zoë never made a Y."

Always by the fireside, always basking in light and warmth, always in graceful harmony with her surroundings (it has been well said that no house is really furnished without books and cats and fair-haired little girls), always a pleasure to every well-regulated mind, Pussy fills her place in life with that rare perfection which is possible only to a creature delicately modelled, and begirt by inflexible limitations. We are soothed by her repose ; she is unfretted by our restlessness. A fine invisible barrier lies between us. She is the Sphinx of our hearthstone, and there is no message we can read in the tranquil scrutiny of her cold eyes.

Once, long ago, a little grey cat sat on my desk while I wrote, swept her tail across my copy, or patted with friendly paw my pen as it travelled over the paper. Even now I put out my hand softly to caress the impalpable air, for her spirit still lingers in the old accustomed spot. I see her sitting erect and motionless in the superb attitude of her Egyptian forefathers, her serious eyes heavy with thought, her lids drooping a little over the golden depths below. After a time they close, and her pretty head nods drowsily ; but, like a perverse child, she resists the impelling power, straightens

herself, and flings a glance at me which says, "You see how wide awake I am." Then very, very slowly, sleep touches her with soft, persuasive finger. She sinks down, down; the small proud head is lowered; the gleaming eyes are shut; a half-articulate purr grows fainter and fainter until it melts imperceptibly into the soft and regular breathing which betrays her slumber. I stop my work and look at her, or rather I look at her ghost, the inspiration of this poor book, written to do her honour. It is finished now, and Agrippina sleeps. I lay it gently down before the shadowy presence. It is her password to Elysium. It is my offering to her, and hers to the Immortals, that they may give her place. She has waited for it seven years. Little grey phantom, haunt me no longer with reproachful eyes. I have kept my word. I have done my best. And the book belongs to you.



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