



Henriette Ronner.

THE CATS OF HENRIETTE RONNER.

WITH PICTURES FROM PAINTINGS BY HENRIETTE RONNER.

I.

I WISH that the disposition were more general to take cats seriously. Ordinarily 't is touch and go that they be not kicked and s'catted offhand to perdition; and the very best that usually can be hoped for them is a half-contemptuous neglect, for the reason—none too cogent even when *Shylock* gave it, and now all frayed and tattered by ceaseless inconsiderate use through three centuries—that they are harmless and necessary. Neither of these points of view, the destructive or the tolerative, is that of the philosopher; and both are far removed from the scheme of benevolent goodness which created on this earth an amicable society of beasts and men.

In truth, for the clue to the existing mis-

understanding and unappreciation of cat-nature by man-nature we must go all the way back to that dismal Apple; to that unlucky wrong twist, taken almost at the start in the journey, which—turning the whole project of human happiness topsyturvy, and fairly out of the windows—begot, among other manifold miseries, that dullness on the side of humanity which ever since has set men and beasts so hopelessly at odds.

It would be presumption on my part to criticize too closely the conduct of the elders of my own house; and even thus to rake up afresh a family scandal (that fortunately has come to be a little overlooked and palliated in the lapse of time) may be regarded in certain stickling quarters as traversing the canons of good taste. But I protest that in bringing



BY PERMISSION OF WILLIAM SCHULS.

AN INTRUDER.

ENGRAVED BY S. DAVIS.

again to the surface for a moment those lamentable doings in the Garden of Eden my sole purpose is to discover the essential base of my argument; and I vow upon my family honor that toward my unfortunate progenitors (who so badly smirched it) I have only the kindest feelings in my heart. The whole trouble came, doubtless, because they were as ill-fitted to deal successfully with the subtleties of ophidian casuistry as (Heaven knows!) I am myself.

But while I am willing thus handsomely to condone their pomological indiscretion, I

now to plead for the reinstatement of a close friendship between cats and men.

'T is the men who have been the losers in every way by this change in the plan of animated nature; and, to my mind, most of all in the loss of intimate cat companionship. Not, be it understood, that I would depreciate one single beast—no, not even the hippopotamus—in order to give cats a better standing; for all of them, in their severally appointed places, have those fit good qualities where-with they have been endowed by their Creator, and narrow must be the human heart that would cast out of it the very least of them all. But to some natures—of which, I confess, mine own is one—the supereminence of the cat over every other animal, save man alone, is so obtrusive a certainty that there simply is no denying it—no more than the dominance of the sun at mid-day over all the dazzle-hidden stars. And therefore it is—even as we might lament some cosmic cataclysm which at a stroke deprived us of more than half our sunlight—that I mourn the loss of those tenderly close relations which existed between the human and the feline families through that exquisite period of primitive happiness ere man was conceived in sorrow or kittens came; which very statement of the evil of the case, however, reminds me instantly of its palliative—the reflection that paradise kittenless would have been no paradise for me!

II.

It will be a long step toward winning back again the Golden Age,—whereof the revival as a whole cannot but be a slow process, and like to be arrived at here and there in the world a bit at a time,—when the cats shall come to their own again by restoration to their rightful place as the honored intimates of men. And so it is that whoever helps in hastening the advent of this halcyon philo-feline era, whereof the outcome must be a substantial increase of human happiness, deserves the gratitude of the world at large.

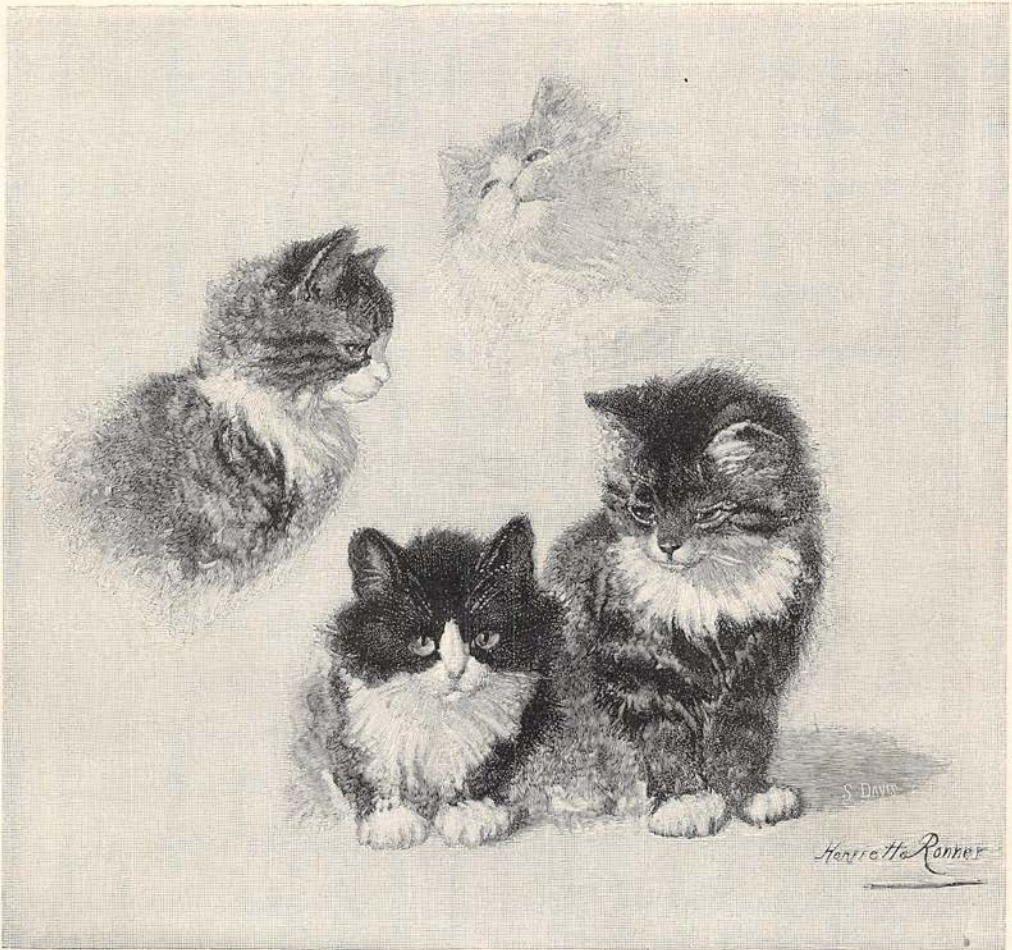
For which reasons the world must be grateful to Madame Henriette Ronner, by whose brush cats so nobly have been exalted; and especially must all honest cat-lovers feel for her a warm affection, because she so faithfully and appreciatively has committed to the enduring custody of canvas the gracious little cat bodies which for periods all too brief—despite the nine lives animating them—are the habitation of the strange little cat souls. Indeed, so searchingly tender are many of these pictures in their exposition of the more delicately beautiful phases of cat character, that not even the most violent of feliphobes can behold them



ENGRAVED BY A. R. MULLER.

"INNOCENCE." OWNED BY HAROLD AND DIDRIK DE BILDT.

am not at all disposed to belittle it, nor am I in the least degree oblivious of its miserable consequences. Of a certainty, had my ancestors exhibited upon that unfortunate occasion the strength of mind that evidently was expected of them, the Serpent would have been whisked sharply to the right about in utter discomfiture; and in departing he would have taken with him—possibly to some other planet, to repeat his experiment; certainly out of this one—the whole arsenal of evils and sorrows with which from that sad day onward he has harried and tortured mankind. Behind him he would have left untarnished the Golden Age—and instead of a mere traditionary survival of a time when men and beasts spoke the same language (or, perhaps, possessed a polite acquaintance with each other's dialects), and lived together on terms of the most friendly fellowship, these amicable relations between all the members of the animal kingdom would be flourishing at the present writing—with the corollary that there would be no need



A STUDY IN WATER COLOR.

ENGRAVED BY S. DAVIS.

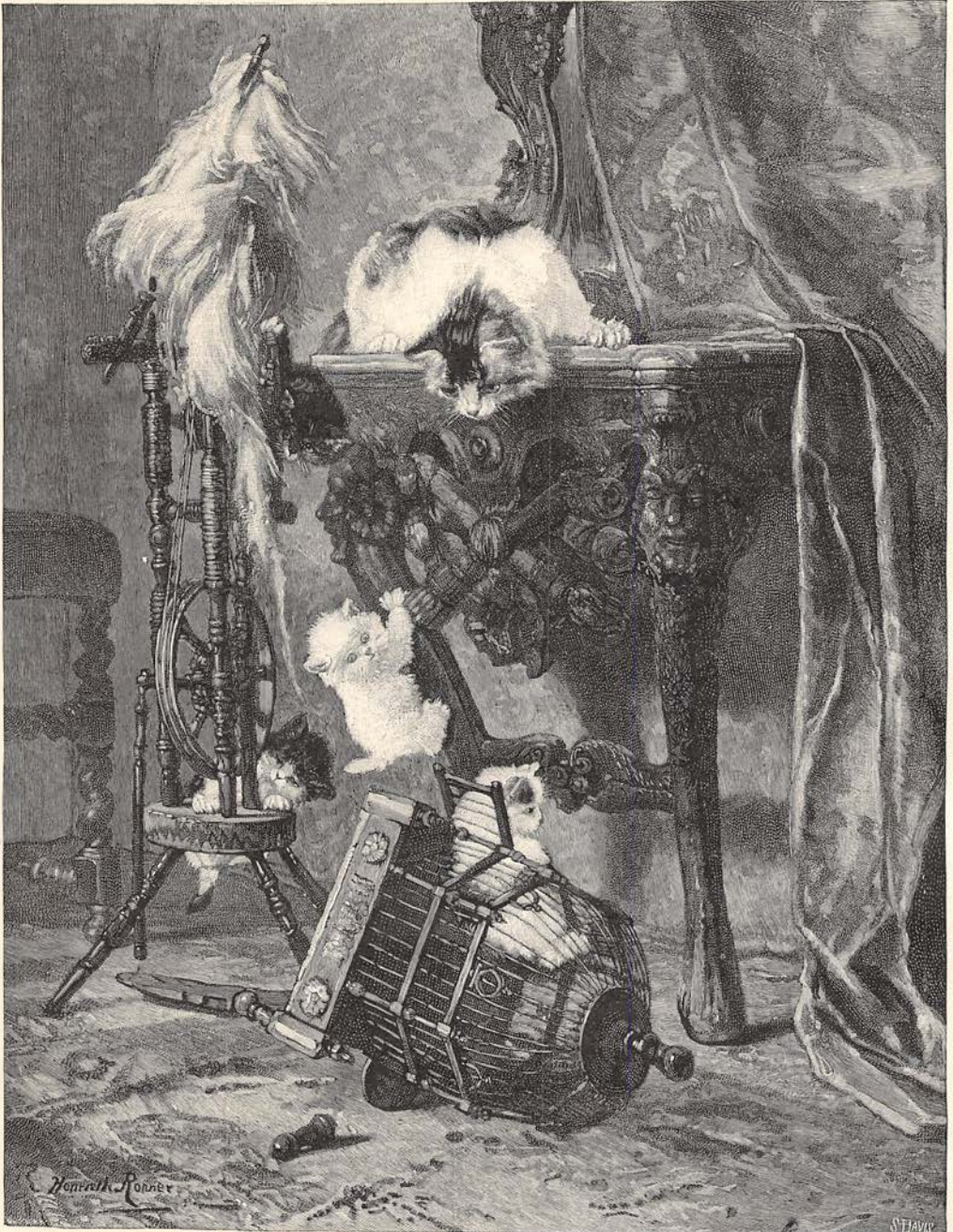
without some little stirring of the gentler emotions in the ossic substance he is pleased to call his heart; and as for true cat-lovers—at sight of such a face, for example, as Banjo's, so warm a gladness must penetrate thrillingly every fiber of their beings that 't is a turn of chance if they be not moved to tears!

Close upon five-and-twenty years of a good lifetime has Madame Ronner given almost exclusively to the study of cats and to the painting of them; and now, at two-and-seventy,—still quick with youthful fire and youthful energy,—she is the acknowledged empress, even as Monsieur Lambert is the acknowledged emperor, of the cat division of the world of art.

Animals she has painted from the very beginning, and her first great success—which she followed up steadily for more than a dozen years—was won in the painting of dogs. Of course there is no harm in painting dogs; but the fact must be admitted that, while good enough creatures in their way, they distinctly

are destitute of those subtly refined qualities by which cat-nature so conspicuously is ennobled. Of the commonplace virtues their equipment, I admit willingly, is sufficient to entitle them to a fair share of human esteem; yet must I add the passing comment that the chief of these virtues, the fidelity about which the dog-lovers are always making such a to-do, is a quality so indiscriminately manifested that I am disposed to regard its origin as automatic rather than reasoning. It is for the dog's own credit that I take this view. The only alternative to it—when we consider the deplorable specimens of humanity to whom he devotedly attaches himself—is that the dog is an animal of the most execrable taste.

However, without regard to the dog's moral qualities, it was by her pictures of dogs that Madame Ronner first became famous; but before this success was won, or even a standing-place in her profession, she served a hard apprenticeship that lasted through many years.



A TURBULENT FAMILY.

ENGRAVED BY S. DAVIS.

III.

MADAME RONNER comes of Holland stock, and of an artist family. Her grandfather was Nicolaas Frederik Knip, a flower-painter of some celebrity, who flourished in the last quarter of the last century; her father was Josephus Augustus Knip, whose landscapes were

well thought of by several kings, as well as by other prominent persons of his time, and still are to be found here and there in royal galleries; and her aunt, for whom she was named, was Henriette Geertruide Knip, whose flower-pictures won medals in Paris and in Amsterdam, when the present century was young.

In Henriette the younger, the family talent, which thus had been budding through two generations, bloomed forth into full flower. Before she was six years old her artistic quality and its bent were declared in studies of animals from life—quaint yet vivacious drawings, still preserved, giving excellent promise of the masterful work that was to come in the fullness of time. Her development was more personal than in the case of most artists, because, practically, she was self-taught. Almost at the moment when her serious study began, her father—suffering the cruellest fate that can come to a painter—was stricken blind. This was in the year 1832, when she was only eleven years old. Yet her teaching, so far as teaching was given her, came from her blind father. Every day, from early in the morning until dusk, she worked in his studio, save that each mid-day he compelled her to rest for two hours in a darkened room—for dread lest by a strain upon her eyes too constant she also might go blind.

Under these conditions, instruction of the ordinary sort was impossible. In such of her perplexities as could be stated and resolved in speech, she had his help; but from the most important part of an art education—those touches, corrective of faulty drawing, which in a single flash explain away difficulties and supply substantial knowledge—she wholly was cut off. For her father did not permit the corrections which he was incapable of making to be made by others; giving as his reason for denying her such necessary assistance that she would conquer individuality of style by working out her artistic salvation alone. Consciously, or unconsciously, underlying this reasoning, I cannot but fancy, was a jealous fear lest she should owe to others the help which she could not owe to him because of his infirmity. There is a most pathetic note in it all: the blind artist striving to give expression to form in words; the child contending against a whole army of unnecessary difficulties because of his jealous love of her—and through her enforced hours of mid-day darkness dreaming of a gladly triumphant future as only poets and painters know how to dream.

Her father's desire was that she should be a portrait-painter; mainly, it would seem, because along that line of art—almost from its beginning—some sort of a humble living could be picked up; and they were very poor. But, fortunately, her disposition toward animal painting was too strong to be overborne; and because of her resolute will in this matter the world greatly has gained. Artists there are in plenty everywhere who, after a fashion, can paint all necessary portraits of mere human

beings; but the artists of all the ages of the world who have been capable of painting cat portraits supremely well (at least so far as we know from work which now survives) may be counted off on the fingers of a four-fingered man: the Swiss, Gottfried Mind; the Frenchman, Louis Eugène Lambert; the Japanese, Hokusai; and the Hollander, Henriette Ronner. Therefore a pang of anguish must pierce the heart of every lover of cats at the mere thought of so dire a mischance as the nullibiety—the nowhere-ness—of all that the last named of these has painted of cat life. Blessedly, the mischance was averted. Resisting her father's portrait-painting suggestions, the little Jufrow Knip held loyally to the path in art which she had chosen for herself—and so, in due course, very appreciably has brightened the gaiety of nations, and permanently (to continue the paraphrase) has enriched the public stock of harmless pleasures pertaining to mankind.

IV.

By a happy accident—yet an accident in which, it would seem, there was a tincture of fatality—her very first exhibition-picture was a picture of a cat. They were living in Düsseldorf, she and her father, when her "Cat in a Window" was painted, and she was barely sixteen years old. That the work of so young an artist should have passed a jury in that art-loving little capital was in itself a victory; and the victory was emphasized in a substantial manner by the fact that the picture promptly was sold. This early small success—which, after all, was the greatest success of her life: for what can compare with the elation that comes with the sale of one's first picture or first book?—fixed her in her resolve to be a painter of animals, and gave her strength for the fight that for a dozen years was to be continued before she conquered for herself a secure position in her art.

Yet almost immediately her local reputation was established, and from the time that she was eighteen years old she earned by the sale of her pictures a living for her father and herself. She worked with a man's strength, and with a woman's persistence. Indeed, only very resolute energy could have brought her successfully through that trying period of her life. Under the curse of his blindness her father was painfully restless—tiring quickly of each fresh town or city to which he betook himself in the hope of forgetting a little his sorrow in a new environment, and so keeping her continually upon the wing. Thus, to the heavy responsibility of caring for him in his infirm state, and of providing for their joint support, were added

the grave disadvantages of being compelled to paint only as the chance came to set up her easel, and of losing all the restful comforts of a home. More unfortunate conditions for serious art work than were these scarcely could have been devised; yet her will-power conquered them, and her painting showed a steady improvement from year to year.

This period of her life ended in the year 1847, when—in the village of Berlikum, in North Brabant—her father died. And in this same village, at this same time, another and happier period of her life was begun by her meeting with Fieco Ronner—to whom she was married in Amsterdam three years later on, when her wanderings ended. With her husband she established herself in Brussels, and from that time onward the Belgian capital has been her home.

With this happy change there came no lessening of the severity of her labor. In marrying, these young people had but united their separate poverties in a joint-stock company, whereof the paid-in capital was hope and love—which, in a way, of course, was wealth illimitable; yet was it not a wealth interchangeable for current coin. The substantial improvement in the artist's condition was her ability to lay out her work on lines of permanence—free of all dread of a sudden striking of tents and shifting of camp. Of this she made the most, rising regularly at five every morning, and painting through every moment of the day that could be saved from her duties to her children,—as these came to her,—and from her other household cares.

During the fifteen years following her marriage (1850-65) her specialty was the painting of dogs; not dogs of high degree,—though of these she now and then painted portraits,—but the plebeian working dogs, which then were, and to a less extent still are, the ordinary draft-animals of the street tradesfolk of the Low Country towns. Her work in this line culminated, though it by no means ended, in the year 1860, when she exhibited her celebrated "Friend of Man." The principal figure on this large canvas (8 feet by 6 feet) is a dying dog,—still harnessed to a cart partly filled with sand,—whose glazing eyes are turned with a look of affection toward his weeping master, an old sand-seller. Completing the group are two other dogs, who seem to understand, in sympathetic dog-fashion, the sorrow that has come to pass. It is a very touching story, and one appealing strongly to the popular heart. Technically the picture is above criticism. From the moment that it was exhibited Madame Ronner's fame was established enduringly, and her fortune was made.

v.

It was at the very time that she scored this great success in dog-painting, and while orders for her *attelages* and for dog portraits were pouring in upon her, that she was possessed by her later and higher inspiration, and her cat-painting began. What seemed to be a mere turn of chance brought about this shifting of her flag—the coming to dwell in her home of a fascinating creature just blooming out from kittenhood into young cathood. But for my own part—the matter being one of such importance, and my personal tastes tending always toward fatalism—I prefer to believe that the coming into Madame Ronner's home of this inspiring kitten-cat was due to the workings of a grave Destiny. Unquestionably with the advent of that cat the whole current of her life was changed.

But such a change, of course, could not be instantaneous. For several years following the exhibition of her "Friend of Man" the orders which came to her for dog pictures were so profitable and so peremptory that they could not be refused. Gradually, however, as opportunity offered, and following always the leadings of her own desires, she raised herself from the dog level into the upper regions of grace and beauty where normally the cat is found; and from about the year 1870 onward she gave to cat-painting practically the whole of her time. It was an unfortunate exception to this rule that caused her to be represented at the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 at Philadelphia by a brace of setters quartering a cover, and by a hare pursued by hounds—good though both of these pictures were; and there is all the more reason, therefore, for finding pleasure in the fact that "Coquetry," "Mischief," and "In Confidence," are the three wholly cat-like and entirely characteristic subjects which she has painted for, and now has on exhibition at, the Chicago Fair.

That her cats have brought her fame, and fortune also, is the very least return that they could make in common gratitude for all that she has done for them, inasmuch as merely to look upon such pictures as "Innocence" and "Banjo and his Brother" is a whole sermon in cat-loving and cat-love. Medals and honorable mentions, and elections to academies, have come to her from all over Europe; the distinction, rare for a woman, of the Cross of the Order of Leopold has been conferred upon her by the King of the Belgians; all the important art-galleries have made a point of acquiring specimens of her work; and at least a half-dozen kings and princes, and such, have bought her cat-pieces for every single royal personage who bought her

aunt Henriette's flower-pieces a long lifetime ago.

Better than her honors is the happiness that has come to her in congenial and successful hard work. Idleness would be the most severe toil to which Madame Ronner could be condemned; and her life, of her own desire, still is disposed on lines of energy. But the note of luxury enters it in her fortunate freedom to work much or little,—as her feeling of the moment may determine,—and to do her work absolutely in her own way. In point of fact she still continues to be a very regular and a very earnest worker: but her working time has been cut down from the whole of each day's daylight to three morning hours.

Tending yet more to strike a balance of comfort with the hardships of her early years is the home in which she carries on so briskly the work of her young old age—the charming house in its own grounds in the outskirts of Brussels on the Charleroi Road. Here, a widow, she dwells with her son; and holding honored positions in this happy household are "Jem" and "Moumouth,"—the present prince and princess of the long line of feline royalty that has been domiciled beneath her roof since the fortunate coming of the fatalistic kitten-cat three-and-thirty years ago.

VI.

GOTTFRIED MIND was styled the Cat Raphael; and, with submission, I hold that Madame Ronner with equal justice may be styled the Cat Velasquez—so broad and bold is her method, so lifelike are her pictures and so strong.

The unavoidable comparison of her work with that of her great contemporary, Lambert, must always result, I think, in her favor. Of the two artists Lambert has the more finish; but Madame Ronner has the more vitality—and especially has she the greater power of bringing out the subtle force and grace of cat character. To my mind, her most delightful pictures are those least literary—her direct transcripts of cat individuality free of all such adventitious elements of interest as rifled bird-cages and ill-tempered cockatoos. After all, what the genuine cat-lover wants is not cat-farce nor cat-tragedy, but simply the blessed cat itself—with all its lithe beauty of body and strangely appealing earnestness of soul. That is what Madame Ronner gives us. Her best pictures are those which frankly rest their claims to admiration on the fact that they bring the personality of individual lovable cats directly home to our hearts.

That she has succeeded in this difficult line of work—wherein some of the very greatest of

painters, including even Rembrandt, have failed dismally—no doubt is due in part to an extraordinary technical facility which enables her to seize upon and to record accurately the almost kaleidoscopic changes of the little cat forms. Her successful working in this flashing way is the result, also, of her method of attacking her subjects in the mass instead of in detail. The figure to be painted is blocked-in with great celerity in light and shade; then more deliberately, but still with a very unusual nimbleness, the drawing is supplied. In any line of art the adoption—that is, of course, the successful adoption—of this bold method presupposes a very thorough knowledge of drawing, and a most sensitive appreciation of form; but when applied to cat-painting the reserve force of knowledge and observation must be still greater, because of the difficulty of indicating accurately muscular action beneath the coat of fur. But back of her technical facility and her vigorous method, the substantial foundation of this artist's genius is her infinite patience in studying her cats constantly with the most painstaking care. Primarily, her power to express rests on her laboriously earned power to understand.

The practical difficulty of keeping her models even approximately in pose while thus studying them, was one that seriously troubled Madame Ronner until she hit upon the plan of inclosing them in a cage made of wire and glass. Ordinary window-glass was used at first in this structure, but plate-glass was substituted after a cat of tempestuous nature had made so explosive a wreck of the thinner substance as to put the artist in serious danger from the flying fragments. It is comfortably cushioned, this cage, and also is provided with a hanging bob that invites the younger and lighter-hearted of the temporary prisoners to engage in lively play—with the resulting possibility of studying the agreeable eccentricities of kitten action under favorable conditions and at short range.

As a matter of course the artist is on very friendly terms with her models. Her genuine admiration for their beauty, out of which came in the beginning her desire to paint them, could only, in the nature of things, increase as her acquaintance with them expanded into affection and esteem. Save for their periods of imprisonment—a captivity of so genial a sort that even Yorick, modifying his extreme views, would admit that here was a slavery in which there was no bitterness—these fortunate cats lead lives of ideal happiness: with the added gust of knowing that constantly their mistress is sending forth their portraits to be admired and even revered of all mankind. 'T is a life fit to turn the head completely of an animal of coarser fiber and weaker intelligence—as the horse or dog; and even the ass, though

a being blessed equally with modesty and worth, might be unduly elated by an adulative affection so extreme. But the cat, possessing always the calm dignity of a lofty nature, uniformly can be counted upon to rise superior to every provocation of a weak self-complacency; there being, indeed, in the whole range of animated nature — above, at least, the order of the mollusca — no creature less susceptible to the flattery of man.

What these much-to-be-felicitated cats assuredly are learning, however, is a friendly faith in humanity; and what Madame Ronner assuredly is teaching — both in her tender dealings with them, and by her sympathetic painting of them — is the doctrine which dropped out of fashion when Arcady was lost: that all creatures animate should cherish toward each other a perfect love.

VII.

AT the root of every creed that ever was — unless it may be those of some barbarous peoples whose hazy bodings cannot be called creeds at all — lies the hope that man's fallen nature may be so raised again, and that the severing lines between the lives of all the creatures dwelling on this earth together may

be so blotted out, that universal friendliness shall come back to us and with it the vanished warmth and radiance of the Golden Age. To the realization of this ideal are devoted the best energies of humanity; not always directly; not always even quite consciously — yet always surely: since all that makes for tenderness and kindness in the world marks an appreciable advance toward the compassing of this happy end.

Few of us can hope to accomplish in the good work even the thousandth part of what has been accomplished by Madame Ronner — whose artistic genius and whose love for her gentle theme has enabled her, while so faithfully reproducing the little cat bodies, to bring very close to human fellowship the little cat souls. But it is a happy fact that even the least of us — drawing closer, as did the blessed Saint Francis of Assisi, to our brethren the beasts and the fishes and the birds — may in some measure forestall the millennium in our own lives. And also is it true, that in so doing we may at the same time hasten by a fractional part the revival universal of the gracious epocha when man and the so-called lower orders of animals once more shall be on terms of cordial fellowship; when, most joyous of all the joyous sights of that reunion, Homo and Felis shall stand friendly together, hand clasping paw.

Thomas A. Janvier.

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED.



IN answer to a question asked not long ago, Mr. Olmsted said: "The most interesting general fact of my life seems to me to be that it was not as a gardener, a florist, a botanist, or one in any way specially interested in plants and flowers, or specially susceptible to their beauty, that I was drawn to my work. The root of all my work has been an early respect for and enjoyment of scenery, and extraordinary opportunities for cultivating susceptibility to its power. I mean not so much grand or sensational scenery as scenery of a more domestic order—scenery which is to be looked upon contemplatively, and is productive of musing moods." It will be well to keep these words in mind in following the thread of a life which has been so rich in the ability to create landscape beauty and so useful in the devotion of this ability to the service of our people.

Frederick Law Olmsted was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on April 27, 1822. He came of the best possible stock — of an English

middle-class family, first settled at Plymouth, which had been among those to cross the wilderness and establish a new colony by the Connecticut River. There were deacons, of course, and other quiet home-keeping citizens in all its generations; but an adventurous strain was not lacking in the Olmsted blood. Our artist's greatuncles were seamen, one dying on a British prison-ship, another living through strange privateering experiences, and another, a very successful shipmaster in the China trade, ending his life as a rich and cultivated citizen of Hartford. His grandfather was likewise a shipmaster, but a less successful one. His father, after receiving little more than a common-school education, was in early life a "dry-goods" merchant in Hartford. A shy and reserved man, we are told, and not a scholar, he was yet a great reader, and a man of distinctively rural tastes, having a small farm near the town, in which he took constant interest, riding and driving a great deal, and often taking his little boy with him on a pillow on his saddle-bow.

Mr. Olmsted's mother — Charlotte Hull, a relative of Commodore Hull — had died when