

BY JULIAN RALPH.

OUR suspicions were first aroused by the disappearance of a whole beefsteak. Before that we did not know we were entertaining any rats in our cellar. When we made the discovery, we were at a loss to know how to act; but one day there came to the house a poor old woman who lives mysteriously by offering needles, and thread, and pencils, and candy of sizes and kinds that nobody likes and nobody buys. At our house she gets a cup of tea and ten cents, and, to ease her conscience, she leaves a peppermint stick for the little ones. The kitchen-girl told her of the loss of the steak.

"Well," said the mysterious old woman, "I would write a letter to the rats and they will go away. That is what we used to do when I lived at home in Germany."

Fancy the surprise of the kitchen-maid! She thought the old woman had lost her mind.

The rats became an intolerable nuisance, and the news of what the old woman had recommended was brought to me. The children were anxious to have the experiment tried.

"It can do no harm," I said, and at once drew up the following letter:

TO THE BOSS RAT: Get out of our cellar at once. We hired this house for ourselves, and you have no business to make yourselves at home, living here and stealing our provisions. If you do not

heed this warning we will keep a terrier and make it very lively for you. Yours angrily, THE PEOPLE OF THIS HOUSE.

I quite prided myself on this missive. I thought it was at once logical in its argument, firm in tone, and very generous, inasmuch as the rats could see that we might have hired a terrier first and written the letter afterward. I at first put the letter in an envelope; but we all agreed afterward that even if rats could read they might not know anything about envelopes, and so I tore the cover off and laid the letter on the cellar floor with its written side up.

We then waited to see what effect it would have. Alas! the rats behaved worse than ever and robbed us of everything that suited their tastes. Then the poor old German woman came again on her rounds, and the children saw her and informed her of the failure.

"Read the letter to me," said she.

It was read to her.

"Oh, dear, dear, dear!" she exclaimed. "What an impudent letter to send to the rats! It is a mercy they have n't attacked some of the people in the house and bitten them in their beds. I could not sleep a wink in a house where such a letter had been sent to the rats."

She spoke very gravely and with evident alarm.

I inquired very particularly about her manner afterward and was told that it seemed far from a mere pretence of being vexed.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "Rats are *kings*, in their way. At least they are in Germany. They must be treated very politely. Tell your parents to write another letter at once and let it be soft and gentle and very respectful. Call them, 'Dear rats' or 'Dear friends,' and find no fault with what they do — only be sure to recommend some other place for them to go to, for it is a rule that rats will never leave a home unless they are told of a better place close by, to which they can go. Oh, dear, dear, dear! — I wonder you are not afraid to stay in the house after such a letter."

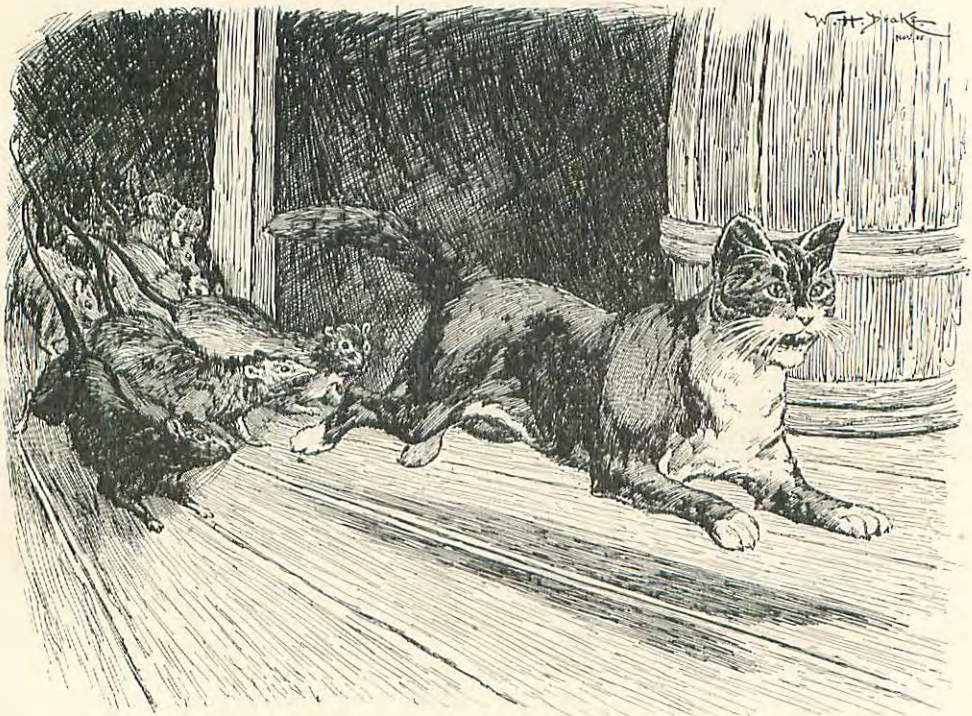
When I reached home I thought, as before, that there could be no harm in doing as the old woman said; and I confess I felt guilty of some stupidity in not having known, as every one ought to know, that politeness is always better than rudeness. There is a wealth of wisdom in the homely saying, "More flies are caught with syrup than with vinegar." It costs nothing to be kind and courteous, and as

DEAR RATS: We have discovered signs of your presence in our cellar. Perhaps you mean to honor us and pay us a compliment in coming to this particular cellar in a city where there are a hundred thousand such resorts. It may be news to you that there lives not far away a French family, much given to rich gravies, sweetmeats, delightful pastries, rare and high-scented imported cheese, and various other luxuries of which we know you to be fond. If you should go there, you would fare better than in our cellar. Of course, we should miss you, — but we feel certain we could bear it.

Believing, from what we see of your activity and appetites, that you are all very well and happy and that you have been benefited by our having the plumbing attended to the other day, we beg the right to sign ourselves,
Yours politely,

THE PEOPLE OF THIS HOUSE.

That touch about the plumbing was my own; but the phrase, "yours politely," was dictated by the children, who assured me that the word "polite" must be somewhere in the letter, in some form or other. It really took me a long while to make up my mind where to tell the rats to go, and I felt no little ashamed when at last the thought of the rich gravies and pastries led me to recommend my neighbors, the French folks. To be sure, I do not know them, and no one will ever tell them what I did; but I must confess I never would have been guilty of such an unneighborly act had I



"OUR TOM CAT WAS SENT INTO THE CELLAR TO DRIVE THEM OUT."

we know that more can be done among men and women by gentleness than by anger, why might not the same be true with regard to rats? Thus I reflected, and therefore I wrote this letter:

really believed the rats would have paid any attention to the letter.

They did not. They grew more and more at home, and even became so noisy that the ladies

more than once thought that burglars had broken in downstairs. "Master Fitz," our Tom-cat, was sent into the cellar to drive them out; but after the first encounter he bounded back into the kitchen, bleeding on one cheek and one leg; and if ever a cat said anything, he plainly spoke, and very indignantly, too. "I am a tremendous mouser," was what he meant to convey, "but when it comes to eating up rats that are bigger than I am, I must beg to be excused!"

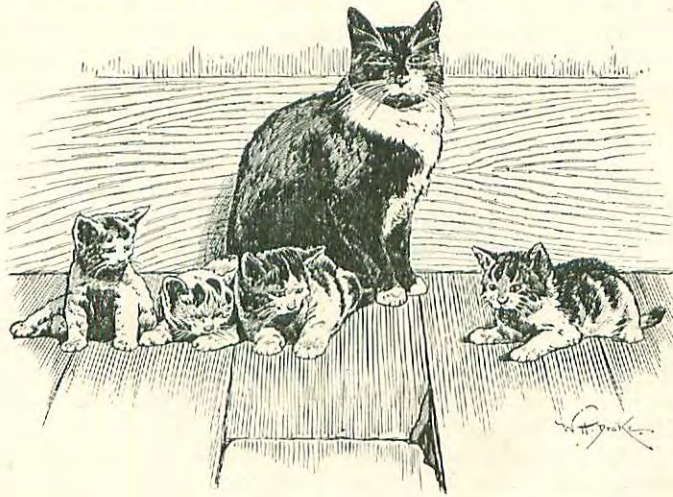
We all waited for the old woman, and when she came the children eagerly informed her of the

failure of even the most polite letter-writing where rats are concerned.

She is a shrewd old woman. She did not like to admit she was wrong, so she said she was sure that if we had n't written that very rude first letter the rats would have gone.

"I know they would if they were German rats," she said; "but I never wrote to American rats, and perhaps they are different."

The four-footed robbers are still at home in our cellar, and not even the children believe it worth while to write to them again.



A SLEEPY LITTLE SCHOOL.

BY MALCOLM DOUGLAS.

A FUNNY old professor kept a school for little boys,
And he 'd romp with them in play-time, and he would n't mind their noise;
While in his little school-room, with its head against the wall,
Was a bed of such proportions it was big enough for all.

"It 's for tired little pupils," he explained, "for you will find
How very wrong indeed it is to force a budding mind;
Whenever one grows sleepy and he can't hold up his head,
I make him lay his primer down and send him off to bed!"

"And sometimes it will happen on a warm and pleasant day,
When the little birds upon the trees go tooral-looral-lay,
When wide-awake and studious it 's difficult to keep,
One by one they 'll get a-nodding till the whole class is asleep!"

"Then before they 're all in dreamland and their funny snores begin,
I close the shutters softly so the sunlight can't come in;
After which I put the school-books in their order on the shelf,
And, with nothing else to do, I take a little nap myself!"