

Cats.

By J. MACLAREN COBBAN.

TO a splendid volume published recently in Paris, entitled "Dogs and Cats," with many fine illustrations by Eugene Lambert, Alexander Dumas (the younger) contributed a delightful introduction. In that he casually remarks as follows:—

"Yes, I love cats. How many times has it been said to me, 'What! You love cats?'"

"Yes!"

"You do not love dogs better?"

"No! I love cats better!"

"It is extraordinary!"

That sets forth with dramatic simplicity the wonder with which most people hear expressed a fondness for cats. It is not that most people dislike cats; that can scarcely be, for it is estimated that the household cat outnumbered the household dog in London alone in something like the proportion of four to one; but that they are indifferent to them, or can't be bothered with them: and the reason of that, no doubt, is very much because the cat does not lay itself out to win attention and affection as the dog does. The nature of the dog is open and simple; he is demonstrative, obsequious, and fawning, while the nature of the cat is secret and complex: he (or she) is quiet, independent, and reserved. It is easy to gain the affection of a dog, and difficult to lose it; he will even lick the hand that beats him, and grovel to the human brute that spitefully uses him. On the other hand, it is difficult to win the affection of a cat, and easy to lose it; the cat avoids the hand that beats it, and becomes shy, solitary, and terrified under ill-usage. It is not necessary to depreciate the dog and his admirable qualities in order to show that it is unfair to object to the cat because he is not as the dog. "The dog is frank, friendly, and faithful," say the exclusive lovers of the dog. Very well; we admit it. "The cat is sly, wild, thievish, and treacherous," continue the dog-lovers. That we deny; and one purpose of this paper is to show that those who will take the trouble to care for the cat and to understand it, will find it to be none of the things it is accused of being,

and will, moreover, discover that there is a charm about it which is all its own.

And, first of all, it is necessary to point out that there are cats and cats. The common, ownerless cats of the farm and the country, of the back-garden and the tiles of town, the persecuted poacher, and the perturber of our midnight hours, no better represents the well-bred puss or *basht* of the hearthrug than the pariah cur of Eastern cities represents the domestic dog. There are breeds of cats as there are of dogs. Many of these breeds are as beautiful and valuable in their way as the finest breeds of dogs. But those who take to cat-fancying must remember that—as in any animal-fancying—beauty and intelligence can only become markedly developed by taking pains. If you expect a cat to be a fine animal, you must treat it with care and kindness; it must be fed regularly and sufficiently, and it must not be shut out of nights. There is a popular opinion, which is hard to kill, that the common domestic cat, at least, is an inveterate night-prowler—that he prefers being out of nights. It used to be said, similarly, that the negro liked being a slave. If the average cat has



for generations been turned out of doors at bedtime—if it has been admitted within doors at all—his wakefulness at night must necessarily have become an inherited habit. But let him be kindly treated, and regularly and properly fed, and he will soon abandon his nocturnal wandering. He may desire to take a constitutional after supper, but he will return to go to bed respectably if he be not persistently excluded. Cats, however, have individuality, and even in this small matter there are some curious and perverse exceptions. I have a fine tabby who has a sentimental passion for being out of doors on a moonlight night. He has no disposition for concerts or flirta-

up the holes and bandaged the wounds, till his head looked as big as a cocoanut. Scarcely was this assuagement of his woes accomplished when "Sir Samuel" set off "on the loose" again, and remained from home for ten days. At the end of that time, to the astonishment and admiration of all, he returned with his bandages complete, and his wounds healed!

Until recent years the cat in this country was valued generally—when he was cared for at all—merely as a creature supplied by Providence for the destruction of rats and mice, and even of cockroaches. But in the ancient world, and notably in Egypt (whence, it is said, the domestic cat originally came), the cat was much regarded for its beauty, and its serene and sphinx-like quiet. It entered into various religious and mythological symbols in both Egypt and Rome. This lofty and worshipful regard of the cat in the ancient world sank gradually to the merely utilitarian view which was mostly in vogue in the modern world, until the wider diffusion of kindness towards all animals, and the more intelligent appreciation of their natures, raised the cat again, not in superstitious esteem, but in fond consideration as a household pet. There would seem to be a common notion that the more a cat is petted and cared for, the less useful it becomes as a hunter of mice and such "small deer." No notion could have less foundation in fact. Indeed, the truth rather is that the better fed a cat is, the better is he (or she) as a mouser. Careful observation goes to show that the cat's native inclination is to hunt the mouse or the rat, not for food, but for "sport," and a cat that is well cared for is more likely to be successful as a sportsman



"GAZES UPON THE MOON."

tions; he merely sits solitary upon a low parapet, in the shadow of an evergreen, and gazes from the depth of his large, liquid eyes upon the moon. And the Rev. Harry Jones (in his "Holiday Papers") tells of a cat of his whom he named "Sir Samuel Baker," because of his incorrigible fondness for miscellaneous travel and adventure by night as well as by day. "Sir Samuel" one day—his master then had a living in the East-end of London—returned from the war-path in a grievous plight, with two holes in his pate. He had, it appeared, been stoned by rough boys and left for dead. His reverend master received him kindly, and, to revive his sinking life, gave him a "stiff glass" of brandy and water, and plugged

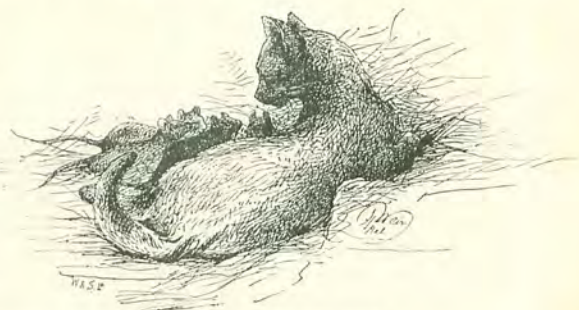


"SIR SAMUEL."

than a hustled and hungry grimalkin, first, because it is more alert, and second, because it is cleaner; a hungry and unhappy cat does not keep his coat clean, and the keen-nosed mouse can, therefore, easily sniff out his whereabouts. Now and again, however, one hears of a well-fed cat that is fond of eating mice, but he is usually an old fellow—(like the "Mincing-lane cat" of the Rev. J. G. Wood, the naturalist)—who in the course of a long career has acquired a taste for game. Mr. Wood's story is curious, as illustrating, not only the cat's taste, but also the cat's sense—a sense in this instance closely akin to reason. A cunning old black Tom, who had for years been maintained in a set of wine cellars, took into partnership a spry young fellow. There would seem to have been a solemn league and covenant entered into between them. Tom Senior had suffered much in his inexperienced youth from collision with feet and wine cases in the devious passages of the cellar, and he taught Tom Junior the dodges of his maturity by which he avoided them. Moreover, Tom Senior, who had an epicurean taste for mice, and who had through the inactivity of age and the badness of his teeth for some time

Senior sat aloof and looked on while Junior consumed both shares of cat's-meat.

It should be remembered also that not all cats have the instinct for mousing. A cat has been seen to stare in surprise when a mouse has boldly shot from its hole and whisked across her path; many a cat when deprived of her kittens has been known to act as foster-mother to young mice or rats; and not even the pangs of hunger will make a mouser of a cat that has not



"A FOSTER-MOTHER."

inherited the instinct of that form of sport—an instinct that seems to run in families—(like a taste for fox-hunting in human beings) rather than in particular breeds of cats.

The true lover of cats, however, does not keep them or care for them because of their

utility, but because of their beauty or rarity, their companionship or their intelligence. From their earliest days of infancy cats of all varieties are deeply interesting. The young of all animals are engaging, but kittens, when they first start off open-eyed and free-limbed, are especially amusing and delightful. The kitten, by contrast with other infants,



"TOM SENIOR AND TOM JUNIOR."

seldom caught a mouse, clearly made a bargain with Tom Junior:—"If you, who are young and active, will catch mice for me, you shall have all the cat's-meat to yourself." At any rate, it was regularly observed that Junior steadily brought the mice he caught to Senior, who ate them, and that

is so graceful, so daring, so spontaneous, and withal so neat in its movement, that it has quite justly been taken as the perfect type and exemplar of gay, irresponsible, and bewitching childhood. To see a wide-eyed little downy creature dance up sideways on all fours at its fellow-kittens, at a



big dog, or even at a solemn human being with the cares of a lifetime on his brow, and invite it (or him) to "come on" and play, is surely one of the most charming visions of careless life and health. The kitten, moreover, needs neither creature nor cork to amuse itself with; its passion for play is so great that it can be amused with absolutely nothing at all. A very observant and sensible school-boy once described (in an essay) this kittenish peculiarity thus:—"A kitten is an animal that is remarkable for rushing like mad at nothing whatever, and generally stopping before it gets there." Some people may think it is foolish and undignified to take pleasure in, and to laugh for a while at, the gambols of a mere kitten, but those who laugh and are unashamed have one or two great names to sustain them in countenance. Cardinal Richelieu, it is said, always kept a number of kittens in his cabinet, and in the intervals of rest from his work he would divert himself by watching their pranks. Another Cardinal and statesman, our own Cardinal Wolsey, was similarly fond of kittens. The poet Southey has somewhere said that no household is complete without a baby rising six months, and a kitten rising six weeks. And it is well known that the graceful and fascinating actress who is as much identified with the Lyceum Theatre as Mr. Henry Irving, is surrounded in her home by a whole tribe of cats and kittens, in whose society she takes much delight.

In entire contrast with the incessant and irresponsible frolicsomeness of the kitten is the staid demeanour and severe intelligence of the full-grown cat. No companionship can be more agreeable or less distracting to a sedentary worker—a writer, a tailor, or a shoemaker—than a handsome, healthy cat. My first cat was one of the most beautiful

of her kind: she was of the variety which the people of Norfolk and of Lancashire used to call "Calimanco." I called her (after one of Balzac's heroines) *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, "the girl with the golden eyes." She would wake me at the proper time in

the morning by rattling at the handle of the door and mewing. She knew the hour of every meal, and would summon me from my study to come and eat. And while I was at work she would sit on the end of my writing-table and watch me, or gaze into the street and consider passing horses, dogs, and butchers' boys. She was especially fond of sitting on a newspaper, or on a new open book—for all the world as if she were a remorseless reviewer—which gave her the appearance of possessing something like literary tastes. Occasionally she would object to my assiduity in composition: she would walk across the table (taking care not to tread on manuscript), gently nibble the stalk of my pen, and rub her cheek against mine. Her favourite seat when she could get it was my leg, on which she would crouch full length with her chin on my knee. If I insisted on removing her from that perch she would sit in offended dignity on the floor, deaf to all the blandishments and endearing terms I might lavish upon her; and if I sought to stroke and caress her under these circumstances she would walk away. She was a born coquette. Though small, she was very beautiful both in shape and in colour, and I think she knew it. At any rate, the males of the neighbourhood knew it, and they would beseech her in the humblest manner to bestow on them a gracious look or mew. I have seen her hold a levee in the garden of ten or a dozen love-lorn swains. She would pass daintily and coquettishly before them, or listlessly sit facing them, looking round as if merely to admire the view. Then, as if weary of it, she would stretch herself and step slowly away with a disdainful wave of her tail, while a plaintive and appealing *waw* was wrung from the tortured heart of one or another of the scorned lovers. If one, under those circumstances, daring all, ventured to



"A LEVEE."

approach her, she would sit up like a squirrel, and with both fore-paws box his ears, while he sat rebuked and ashamed. As she grew older, and had children, she lost something of her beauty, but she ever had a gentle, tender, and courageous heart. She was fond of basking with her kittens on a certain sunny balcony. One day I saw her thus lie, nursing her favourite son, when a poor, draggled, wayfaring puss appeared, and looked on with sympathy and approval. The look plainly said, "What a lovely child you have, madam! Oh, if I might only embrace it!" The proud mother, with a kindly "w-r-r!" encouraged the strange female to approach; and she crept near to lick the kitten. She had, however, no sooner touched him with her tongue, than he sat up and spat at her. The strange cat drew back, humbled with the repulse; but "La Fille" turned and boxed her offspring's ears for his incivility. That same son was white, with large blue eyes; he grew to be a gigantic fellow, and was named "Don Pierrot." Moreover, he had a loud, ringing voice, which was all the louder that, being deaf—like almost all white cats—he never knew the pitch he used. In spite of his size, and his great voice, he had the heart of a mouse—he was a gelding—and fled from the meanest thing that ran upon legs. I have seen him, when dozing in the sun with one eye half-open, start up in horror at the approach of the insect (somewhat like a black-beetle) which children call "coach and horses." The insect paused upon "Don Pierrot's" movement, when the white Don curiously ventured to touch him with a paw. Upon that the insect reared its tail, according to its

habit, and rushed towards him as with headstrong ferocity; "Don Pierrot" withdrew a step in amazement at the little black demon's audacity, and as it continued to advance, he lifted away one foot after the other, till, coming to the conclusion that the little black demon was determined to kill him, possess him, and eat him up, he fled wildly from the spot, and hid himself for the day. He was much persecuted by the tom-cats of the neighbourhood, and by vagrant dogs—all the more painfully persecuted that, because of his deafness, he seldom knew of their approach till they were upon him. But when they were upon him, he raised such a great and bitter cry—which resembled nothing so much as "Mother!"—that his assailant held back, and before there was time for a repetition of the attack, the little "mother" was out, with a tail as big as a fox's, clouting and scratching tom-cat or dog.

I could tell more of "La Fille" and of other cats I have intimately known, but it will be doubtless more agreeable if I tell of notable cats whom others have known, and loved, and praised. Of such none is more remarkable than "Pret," the cat of a lady with whom the Rev. J. G. Wood had a correspondence. "Pret" was of a fine breed. She had been brought when a kitten from France. She had a long tail and a soft chinchilla fur. "Pret's" mistress fell ill of a nervous fever, and "Pret," though little more than a kitten, found her way to the sick-room and refused to leave it. She established herself as head nurse. If the human attendant slackened in her watch "Pret" did not; day or night she knew, to within five minutes, the pro-

per times for physic or nutriment, and if the nurse still slept "Pret" would mew, and, failing to wake her in that way, would give her a gentle bite on the nose. A



"LIFTING THE LATCH."

notable point is that there was no striking clock in the house, so that "Pret" could not have been aided so in her remarkable reckoning of time.

"Pret," like many another cat, preferred birds to mice in the way of sport, and of all birds she especially hunted sparrows, being apparently irritated by their incessant chirp. What is well-nigh incredible, however, even to those who have the greatest belief in the intelligence of cats, "Pret" (so says "Pret's" mistress) used to sit under a bush and decoy the sparrows within striking distance by imitating their chirp! The more reasonable explanation is that "Pret" had that eager manner much pronounced which almost all cats have in lying in wait for birds; they twitter or chatter their teeth and emit a little sound which, emphasised, might easily be taken for the chirp of a bird.

There are countless stories of the intelligence and artfulness of the cat, but it is possible here to

recount only one or two of the most remarkable. It must be a very oppressed and stupid cat that cannot lift a latch, where latches can be lifted. But he is a clever cat who, failing the latch, has wit enough to pull the bell. One of the best stories of a cat and a bell is that told concerning a Carthusian monastery in Paris. The monks possessed and petted a fine cat of the Angora breed. This astute animal discovered that, when a certain bell rang, the cook left the kitchen to answer it, leaving the monks' dinners, portioned out in plates, on the kitchen table. Therefore, he devised a plan (it is impossible to avoid saying "devised") by which he could often secure a portion without the cook's knowledge. He rang the bell, the handle of which hung outside the kitchen window, and then, when the cook had disappeared in answer to the summons, he leaped through the window and out again with his stolen food.

It was some time before pussy's trick was discovered, while several innocent persons were suspected of the repeated thefts; and when it was discovered, the monks, instead of punishing him, let him continue his nefarious career and charged visitors a small fee to see the trick performed—a condoning of crime which cannot have improved that cat's morals. Some writers assert that cats of thievish propensity can readily be told by the length of their nose and their fashion of seizing greedily what food is offered them, but there is little to bear that theory out. The most delicate, gently nurtured cats will sometimes steal—cats that would



"A FONDNESS FOR EGGS."

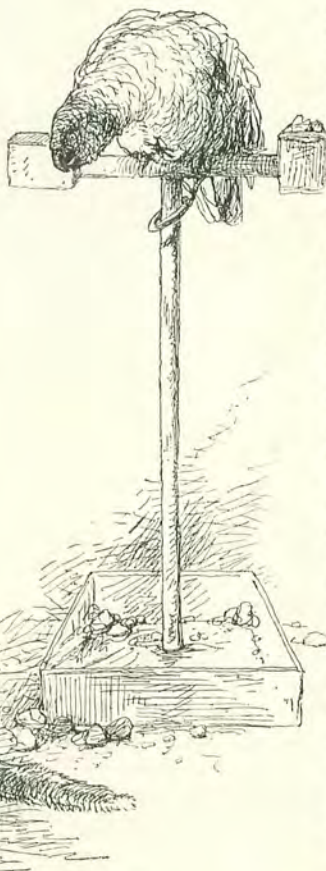
take a morsel from the fingers with the finest politeness. Such a cat I have known, whose one weakness was a fondness for eggs. To get an egg she would adopt various ruses, a common one being to push aside with her paw the lid of the dish in which eggs are kept, lift an egg out with both paws, as a squirrel takes a nut, and drop it on the floor, whence she would lick it at her leisure. The sole prevention against a general inclination to thieve is to give the cat sufficient food.

But of all cat stories I know, the best is one told by Théophile Gautier, who has written concerning cats with an understanding and a feeling unsurpassed. He kept many cats, a chief favourite among which was "Madame Théophile," a "red" cat, with a white breast, a pink nose, and blue eyes. "She slept," says he, "at the foot of my bed; she sat on the arm of my chair while I wrote; she came down into the garden and gravely walked about with me; she was present at all my meals, and frequently intercepted a choice morsel on its way from my plate to my mouth. One day, a friend who was going away for a short time, brought me his parrot to be taken care of during his absence. The bird, finding itself in a strange place,

climbed up to the top of its perch by the aid of its beak, and rolled its eyes (as yellow as the nails in my arm-chair) in a rather frightened manner, moving also the white membranes that formed its eyelids. 'Madame Théophile' had never seen a parrot before, and she regarded the creature with manifest surprise. While remaining as motionless as a cat-mummy from Egypt in its swathing-bands, she fixed her eyes upon the bird with a look of profound meditation, summoning up all the notions of natural history that she had picked up in the yard, in the garden, and on the roof. The shadow of her thoughts passed over her changing eyes, and one could plainly

read in them the conclusion to which her scrutiny led:—'Certainly this is a green chicken.' This result attained, the next proceeding of 'Madame Théophile' was to jump off the table from which she had made her observations, and lay herself flat

on the floor in a corner of the room, exactly in the attitude of a panther watching the gazelles as they come down to drink at a lake. The parrot followed the movements of the cat with feverish anxiety; it ruffled its feathers, rattled its chain, lifted one of its feet and shook the claws, and rubbed its beak against the edge of its trough. Instinct told it that the cat was an enemy, and meant mischief. The cat's eyes were now fixed upon the bird with fascinating intensity, and they said in perfectly intelligible language, which the poor parrot distinctly understood:—'This



"THIS IS A GREEN CHICKEN."

chicken should be good to eat, although it is green.' We watched the scene with great interest, ready to interfere at need. 'Madame Théophile' was creeping nearer and nearer, almost imperceptibly; her pink nose quivered, her eyes were half closed, her contractile claws moved in and out of their velvet sheaths, slight thrills of pleasure ran along her back-bone at the idea of the meal she was about to make. Such novel and exotic food excited her appetite. In an instant her back took the shape of a bent bow, and with a vigorous and elastic bound she sprang upon the perch.

"The parrot, seeing its danger, said in a

bass voice, as grave and deep as M. Prudhomme's own:— 'Have you breakfasted, Jacko?'

"This utterance so terrified the cat that she sprang backwards. The blare of a trumpet, the crash and smash of a pile of plates flung to the ground, a pistol-shot fired off at her ear, could not have frightened her more thoroughly. All her ornithological ideas were overthrown.

"And on what?" continued the parrot. 'On sirloin?'

"Then might we, the spectators, read in the face of Madame Théophile:— 'This is not a bird; it is a gentleman: it talks!'

"The cat cast a glance at me which was full of questioning, but, as my response was not satisfactory, she promptly hid herself under the bed, and from that refuge she could not be induced to stir during the whole of the day."

There is no doubt that the cat is, in our day, more petted, and praised, and bred, and *showed* than ever it was before. To describe all the classified breeds and varieties, with

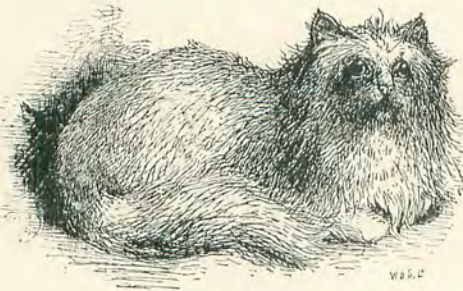


"HAVE YOU BREAKFASTED, JACKO?"

long-haired cats there are the Angora, the Persian, the Russian, and what not; and of short-haired, more than I can here enumerate. Some people prefer a cat the rarer or the more curious it is, —abnormal and exotic varieties, like the Manx cat and the Japanese cat, which are tailless; the Chinese cat, which has lop ears; and the Royal Cat of Siam, which is a singular-looking creature, usually chocolate and white, or dun and white in colour, and very short of fur, especially on the legs

and tail. But the true lover of cats must say of cats as the soldier said of ale, "All kinds are good, though most kinds are better than others."

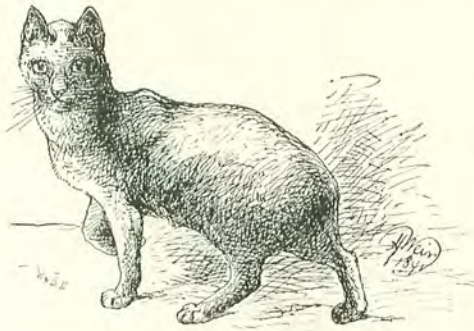
Enough has been said, I think, to show that the cat is worth attention and cultivation, not only because of its beauty and intelligence, but also for its pecuniary value. The cat has long been misunderstood and misrepresented. It has been accused of untameable ferocity, because when driven to the extreme of nervous dread, it has bitten and scratched; it has been accused of cunningly murdering babies in their cradles, because it has innocently tucked itself away with the baby in its fondness for warmth; and it has been accused of lack of attachment, though quite as credible stories are told of the cat's faithfulness and fondness as of the dog's: cats as well as dogs have been known to pine and sicken and die after the loss of a beloved friend or master. It is no less agreeable to be able to write that human beings have also shown themselves ready to die to save their cats. Champfleury tells a story of a sailor-boy who would not leave a sinking ship without his cats. The ship was run into by another, and so much damage was done that the crew had to leave her in all haste. They were safe on board a passing vessel before the captain, looking round among his com-



ANGORA CAT.

their special points and markings, is impossible here; those who desire to know these things in careful and exact detail should consult Harrison Weir's book on cats. Of

pany, exclaimed, "Where is Michel, the apprentice?" Michel was not to be found, and no one remembered his leaving the doomed ship. Michel had, indeed, been left behind. He had run to fetch from below the two ship's cats, which he was in the habit of feeding, and on returning on deck he had found his comrades gone. At first he wept, but soon he dried his eyes, lighted a lantern and hung it up, and then ran to the pump. All the night long, pumping and ringing the ship's bell, he fought against destruction.

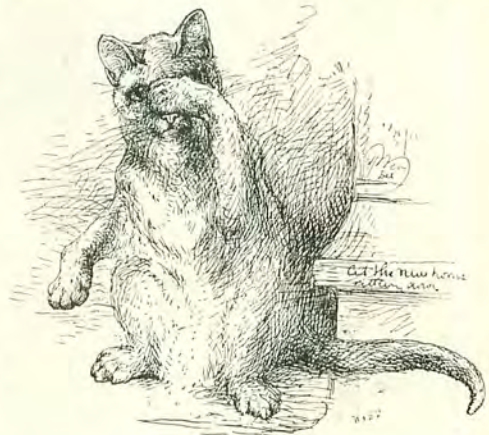


MANX CAT.

Day came, and wore on. One, two ships he sighted, but he could not attract their attention. He shared his food with the cats, and pumped to keep himself and them afloat. Thus three days passed, and Michel was at the last extremity of fatigue and despair, when a brig sighted him, and bore down to his relief. Even when a boat came, however, to take him off, he refused to leave the wreck without the cats for which he had endured so much. And soon he was landed in his native port, carrying his two cats in his arms in triumph, amid the cheers of a crowd who had heard the story. Cats, moreover, protect property frequently as well as dogs. There are authentic stories told of cats flying at burglars, and aiding in the detection of murderers; and I myself had a cat that used to run to the door upon the appearance of a beggar, a tramp, or other disreputable-seeming person, muttering and growling like a dog. But of all the false accusations brought against the cat none is more flagrantly false than that its only attachment is to a place or to the bare walls of its home. So little is that true, that many stories might be told of the weary and wonderful pilgrimages cats have gone to find their owners. A family in Scotland, for instance, removed across a frith, or long arm of the sea. The cat was somehow forgotten, but in a few days she appeared at the new house, foot-sore and thin. How had she found her way there? The family had crossed in a boat, and the way by land was sixty miles round, over rocks and mountains! Many have shown by abundant instances that the cat is at-

tached to persons, but I think it has never before been pointed out that even those cats who are taken little notice of by their owners, and who therefore show little affection for them, are attached not really to the mere house in which they have been used to dwell, but to the familiar furniture of the house. Cats have a strong and cossetting sense of smell, and it is well known in every house that they have their favourite chairs or sofa corners; not only so, but, if they have had the run of the

house, they can tell over by scent every article of furniture which the house contains. A furniture-remover has told me that with some household goods which he has kept in warehouse for some years he brought away a white Persian. She has never forsaken her familiar furniture; she has always slept among it; and has brought up several families about it. I have proved that to my own satisfaction oftener than once in removing from one house to another, and I believe all furniture-removers are convinced of its truth. When a removal is arranged for, let pussy



"COMPLETE CONTENTMENT."

be secured in a box or basket early, because being such a nervous creature she may flee and hide out of reach, in terror of

the bustle and clatter of the workmen. When the packing is over, either let her loose among the furniture in the van or put her into the van in her box or basket. But do not let her loose in the new house until some familiar article of furniture has been carried in. A chair which she has been in the habit of sitting on will be sufficient. She will probably at first run in terror round the strange room, sniffing at every corner ; then she will go to the chair, with a delicate sniff recognise it, and finally leap upon it and begin to lick herself in complete contentment.

Long ages of neglect, ill-treatment, and absolute cruelty have passed, and "the harmless, necessary cat" is rapidly gaining in favour. There are still many strong prejudices, however, against admitting the cat to such familiar acquaintance and friendship as the dog enjoys. It comes pretty much to this, that you either love the cat or you do not love it. If you love it, the probability is that you incomparably prefer it to the dog.

The cat, you have found, is less fussy, less boisterous than the dog ; it does not trot in and out of doors with muddy feet ; it does not leap upon you and deafen you with its barking to show its affection ; and it does not insist upon startling strangers or upsetting babies and handmaidens by thrusting a cold, wet nose of welcome into the hand, like John Peerybingle's dog in "The Cricket on the Hearth." Compared with the dog, the cat is one of Nature's own aristocrats ; and it is possible that the true implication of the proverb, "A cat may look at a king," is that the cat is of the king's serene and lofty quality. The noblest dog will sometimes put off his dignity, and play the common, vulgar fool ; the cat never. And while the dog is yowling himself hoarse about nothing in particular, the cat sits impassive as Old Age or Fate, and lets the world slide ; a reminder of god-like indifference to a generation anxiously "going to and fro on the earth," restless as Satan.

