



VII.

LUMPINESS," the brown Egyptian went on, "yes, lumpiness merely. We didn't think so much of lumpiness in my old time, in Memphis. So long as

they were cats——"

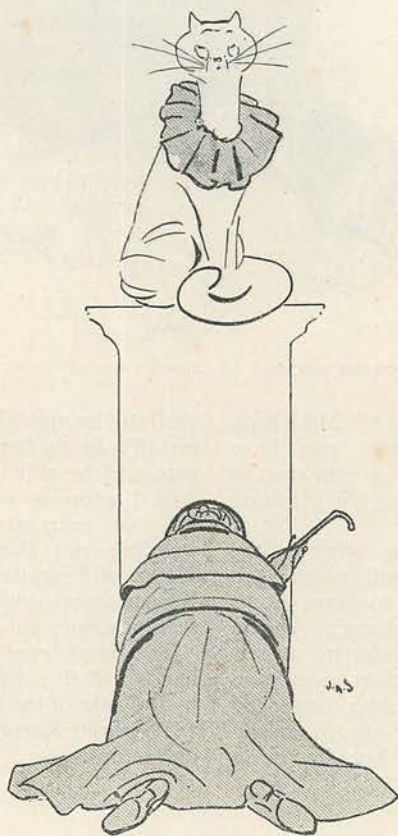
"Cats!" I exclaimed. "Don't you mean rabbits?"

"So long as they were cats," he repeated, with awful emphasis, a great glare of the eyes, and a furious bubbling of the coffee-pot on his head; "so long as they were cats, they were sacred and we worshipped them; and when they died we embalmed them, and very handsome mummies they made."

In any case, I could never have ventured to contradict this terrible person, and I had already witnessed too many apparent transformations and too many gymnastics of my senses to feel any real confidence in my own eyesight. But certainly I *did* think we had been talking of rabbits and pigeons, and that we were surrounded by them. I turned and looked again, and where I had fancied I saw pigeons,

I saw——what? Birds, certainly, but *not* pigeons. Owls. Yes, certainly they were owls. I turned towards the quadrupeds. Surely they *had* been rabbits, but now——well, they were furry and soft and clean, certainly, but they were cats. Really, my

eyes were getting very deceptive; I resolved to see an optician that very afternoon, if my dear wife Maria would allow me. *Not* rabbits and pigeons after all, there, but cats and owls; cats and owls. I turned to make quite sure about the owls, and——behold, I was wrong again! The eyes were very like, indeed, and the faces were round and grey. But these were cats too! All cats. Certainly there are points of resemblance between owls and cats—they both come out at night and they both catch mice, for instance. Probably that is why I made a mistake. For a little while I almost trembled to look at the cats again, for fear I should find them tigers. But, no!—when I did venture, they were cats still. It seemed quite plain that hitherto I had been under a series of most wonderful delusions. There had been no poultry, no dogs,



CAT-WORSHIP—MODERN.



"WE DO FETCH THE LADIES!"

no parrots, no pigeons, and no rabbits; it was a cat show, and nothing else.

"Of course," said my Egyptian friend, with that startling way of his of answering my thoughts, as though they were words—"of course it's a cat show. Anybody can see that. There is something wrong with you, and I trust it isn't drink." (He was a most insulting person.) "What interest do you suppose I should take in any show but a cat show? I'm an ancient Egyptian, and I worship cats, as all ancient Egyptians did. It's gratifying to me to find my old religion still practised—and practised increasingly, too. Look at the ladies! Worshipping all the time. And as for religious controversy, well, you *have* heard of the lady fanciers' associations, haven't you? But there, never mind. The cats know all about the worship, of course. Nothing so self-conscious as a cat. Observe the bows they wear, and the abominable side they put on."



THE BOW OF THE SHOW.

Indeed, those about me seemed the most supercilious cats I had ever seen in my life.

"All sorts of cats here, of course," the brown man went on. "Long-haired cats, short-haired cats, no-tailed cats, cat-o'-nine tails, cat-o'-nine lives, and catalogues of the show. White cats, black cats, tabby cats, grey cats, smoky cats, tortoiseshell cats, cream cats, orange cats, blue cats—"

"Orange and blue?" I asked, in some doubt. "Aren't they unusual colours?"

"Not at all," the mysterious brown man replied. "Blue is much prized as a colour. See what a lot are prized here. If—ah, *if* you could only breed a *very* blue cat—ultra-marine, for instance—you'd make your fortune in prizes. You could almost do without other points—though a good solid gumboil on both sides is always very valuable."

I have opinions of my own on the value of gumboils. I have had difficulty enough in getting rid of some of mine on any terms; and as for getting a *price* for them—

"Price for them?" Again the brown guide interrupted my thoughts. "I should think so, and prizes for them, too. Look at any

prize cat's cheeks—big and puffy always. It's hopeless to expect to win a prize with flat cheeks. Mumps *might* do, perhaps, but gumboil brings out the real classy shape. Of course, there's always the danger of one gumboil growing bigger than the other, or of one collapsing before the show is over. But by that time the prizes have been awarded, of course. A good bump on the forehead is a very valuable disfigurement, too, and it is quite easily produced with a bludgeon. Of course, these things *can* be bred up to, but gumboils and life-preservers are a deal



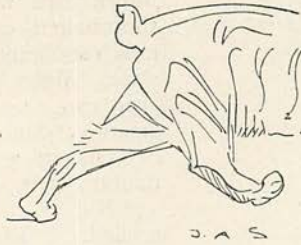
DESIRABLE GUMBOIL.



THE MANX.

quicker. Stand your cat in a double draught and whack him between the eyes, and next day he will be ready for showing. In the same way any ordinary cat can be naturalized to the Isle of Man by amputating its tail."

I had been watching a row of Manx cats while the brown Egyptian was talking. I observed that they all persistently *sat*. This I at first took to be because they felt naturally ashamed of their unhappy taillessness and wished to conceal it. But presently one grew



tired, and could sit no longer, but rose and took a walk round. Then I perceived that Manx cats are not altogether and hopelessly tailless, like mere human beings; there is a sort of stump, a fluffy rudiment, that really is a tail of a kind. So that I felt doubtful after all whether Manx cats were proud or ashamed of their peculiarity: whether they sat to conceal their short allowance of tail, or whether they sat to make people believe that they really had no tails whatsoever.

"Neither, neither," observed that alarmingly thought-reading guide of mine. "They like admiration, that's all. They want the people to stare at them. People who have never seen Manx cats before stare at them



A BELLE OF HIGH BIRTH.



TO MAKE A SIAMESE.

longest when they sit, waiting for them to rise, because they want to see whether they really have no tails at all. In a few more generations, by persistent sitting, they will have worn off their tails finally, and be really and truly tailless. These and the Siamese cats make up most of the foreign varieties. To make a Siamese cat isn't difficult. You take an ordinary specimen of the common white cat of your native tiles, pick him up by the loose skin of his back, and dip him—or rather dip his tips—in a pail of black dye. He comes out a perfect Siamese—head, feet, and tail correctly marked. It's the quickest process of naturalization known to international law.

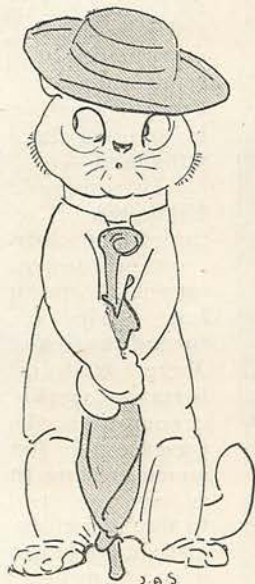


IN THE WORKING MAN'S CLASS.

Persians don't need naturalizing—they are an English variety now. They call them simply 'long-haired.' Persian cats being English, it is quite easy to understand why Manx cats are called foreign, isn't it?"

He looked so fierce and so very reddy-brown (to say nothing of his boiling coffee-pot hat), that it seemed best to agree with him in everything; so I said that nothing could be simpler.

"Long-haired cats, short-haired cats, foreign cats," the brown man went on, musingly, ticking off each variety on his fingers; "'chinchilla' cats, tortoiseshell cats, tabby cats, grey cats, white cats, black cats, blue cats, orange



A QUIET SPECIMEN.

cats, tip-cats—call the Siamese tip-cats, I should think—and what else? Why, working men's cats. Know the variety? I know what you are thinking. No such

variety? But there *is*. You'll find it a separate class in all the show catalogues, and when you look down at the names of the exhibitors you'll see that most of the working men are women. As for the cats, they're a good solid sort, most of them with no nonsense about them. There's none of that stand-offishness among them that you may observe in other classes. Most of the others look altogether above mice; and as for climbing over tiles, or bolting through a kitchen window with a sole—why, you can't think of any such thing in their presence. But the typical cat of the Working Man breed—mouse-hunting is his obvious trade, the tiles are his native heath, and not merely a sole, but the humblest bloater could never lie undisturbed for one minute in his presence, unless strictly guarded. I don't know, and I



SCARCELY A QUEEN.

have often wondered, what the female exhibits among the working man cats are called. In the other classes they are called 'Queens,' and the name is inappropriate enough in many cases. I think I shall suggest 'the Missuses' as a good, useful name for the females in the working man class."

At this moment a very large lady—all the visitors seemed to be ladies, except a few curates—whom I had never seen before in my life, suddenly seized my arm: "Oh, do come and see the darling!" she cried. "Oh, the love! the ducky!" And she hauled me away by superior force.

It was really a very terrible position. To be hauled publicly about the Crystal Palace by so very large a lady, shouting these terms of endearment in so very large a voice, was an awful calamity for a man of my retiring disposition. If there were anybody there who knew me! If by any chance Maria—but I began to faint right away when I thought of it. I looked about desperately in hope of help from the brown Egyptian. But he was far away across the transept, altogether indifferent to me, pouring out a cup of coffee for himself, from his hat. And still that terrible, large lady dragged me with her, bawling as she went: "Oh, the love, the heavenly dove! The dear ickle pittikins!" I could see no policeman to whom to appeal; no help of any sort was in sight. With a desperation born of terror I cried, in as indignant a voice as I could assume, "Unhand me, madam! I am a man of peace, but when roused my anger is terrible! I will *not* be called a heavenly dove and an ickle pittikins (a term I blush to hear you use) by a perfectly strange lady in a public place! I——"

But here we stopped before a cage containing a kitten, and the large lady immediately began her scandalous terms of endearment all over again, pouring



A CHERUB.

she kept a tight hold of my arm. "Look at the cherub!" she said. "Only look at it!" and at each alternate word she jerked my arm with painful force.

"Apart from the question of the propriety of applying the term 'cherub' to a quadruped with a tail, madam," I began, in as dignified a tone as I could manage, "I should like to

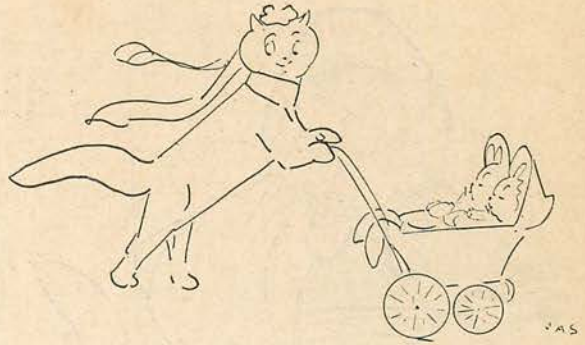
remind you that the stitches of my coat-sleeve are rapidly giving way, and the forcible disruption of a gentleman's coat by a lady to whom he has not been introduced——"

"Introduced? Fiddlestick!" returned the lady, contemptuously, turning to me at last. "What are introductions? Mere artificial forms — earthly ceremonies. In presence of this sacred creature (it is my own, and to the eternal disgrace of the judges it has won no prize) — in presence of this hallowed pittikins, you can talk of introductions, and coat-sleeves, and such worldly



HER FIRST JUVENILE PARTY.

vanities! In the presence of cats, sir, we are but as worms, and must worms talk of coat-sleeves and introductions? And yet, and yet," she went on, her voice mollifying somewhat, "the world, the wicked world, is indifferent, even irreverent, to cats. There are even vulgar, sinful persons, I am told, who send them forth to risk their lives in catching mice! Terrible, isn't it? And the



HER OWN NURSEMAID.

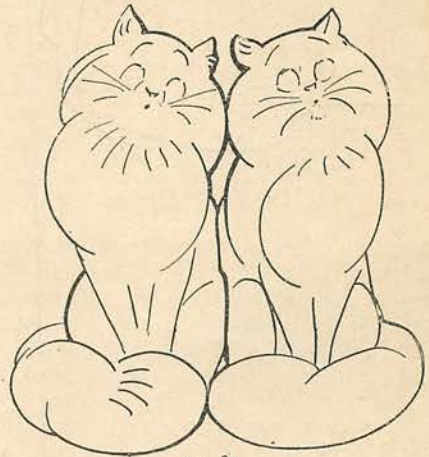
and properly worshipped cats here, the apparition of a mouse would create the wildest possible alarm. They would climb up on



OW! A MOUSE!

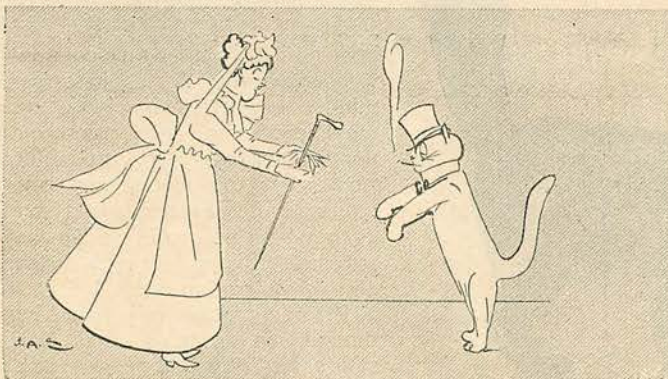
poor creatures get so inured to the danger, that I am positively assured that they show no terror!

"Now, among all these properly bred, properly treated, properly coddled, properly fed,



HEAVENLY TWINS.

chairs in a proper and dignified way, and wrap their tails tightly round them. Again, there are, it is said, persons of so depraved and wicked a negligence, that they allow their cats to wait on themselves, wash themselves, and feed themselves! You may not believe it—I can hardly believe it myself. Of course, the cats here are not treated like this. Every lady fancier keeps a cat-maid (there ought properly to be two at least) and a nursemaid for the kittens. Nobody with any really reverent feeling for cats would allow them to do their own nursing.



THE CAT-MAID.



"CALL THAT A PRIZE CAT!"

There is one story about the treatment of cats that I positively *won't* believe, horrible as I know that treatment often to be. Of course, I needn't tell you about the correct and dutiful way to feed a cat. A little game when in proper season, of course. If you make a *salmi*, it mustn't be of birds left over from yesterday—that would be a *very* aggravated form of sacrilege. They *do* like cod, but that is vulgar, and much too cheap. A little turbot, with sauce hollandaise, is much more respectful. If you give oyster sauce,

it should be made with Whitstable natives—at not less than 5s. a dozen. But, there!—almost anything from the Hotel Cecil will do, except, of course, the more vulgar dishes. Or you can get a few hints from Soyer's cookery-book. The fearful, the scandalous, the incredible tale I was about to tell you of—but, no! I can't; it's too horrible—too, too frightful!"

The large lady, I observed with joy, seemed about to faint, and slightly relaxed her grip of my arm. But my first attempt to escape alarmed her, and her hand closed again tightly.

"I am stronger now," she said (and, indeed, I felt a few more stitches go as she said it), "and I will whisper the disgusting story—which, mind, I don't believe for a moment. They say—they *do* say"—here she dropped her voice—"they say that there exist in remote and barbarous districts creatures with so savage and vile a contempt for



SURELY NOT AN OWL?

sacred cat-hood that they purchase small slices of horseflesh—yes, horseflesh—threaded on a common wooden skewer—not a gold skewer, mind, nor silver, nor ivory, but mere wood; and not satin-wood, nor mahogany, nor coromandel wood, but the merest and commonest and vulgarest wood such as they light fires with. That they purchase this unspeakable article and—*feed their cats with it!*"

I said it was very shocking, though, no doubt, a mere fabrication, and now that my sleeve was really coming off—



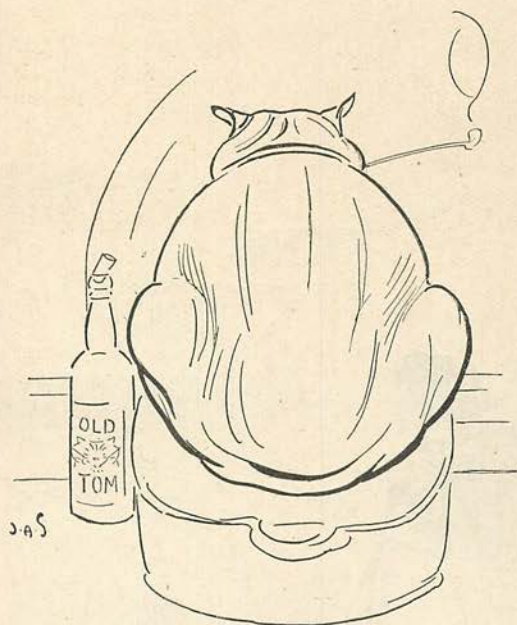
TRUE AFFECTION.

But the large lady paid no attention. "But don't let's talk of horrors," she said, and twisted my arm very painfully; "here all is heavenly among the cats. Even the working man cats are a solace, though some of them do seem a little jealous of the others, and noisy. But what affection! Wonderful, isn't it? True, staunch, undying affection. And bestowed on the commonest objects, too—such is a cat's loving nature. I've seen a cat fondle a mere milk-can—a mere common

pewter milk-can—in the most devoted way, so long as it was full. But even then the wicked, low milkman drove it away. Ah, it's a sad thing to observe the cruel, unsympathetic ways of such people, milkmen and butchers and fishmongers and such—toward the cats who are simply running over with affection, and longing to find some object to lavish it on in their shops. But you—you, I'm sure," the large lady tightened her grip on my arm even more, and gazed earnestly into my face; "you, with such a noble and sympathetic countenance, must be a true devotee. Tell me, how many cats are there in your palatial cattery, and how many cat-maids wait on each?"

"Well," I said, "as to the cat-maids, the number, strictly speaking, is small. In a general way of speaking, there are very few; mathematically, the number is none."

"None!" cried the large lady, aghast, shaking my arm violently. "None! And are you one of those who make your cats wait on each other?"



THE USUAL OLD TOM.

gencies! I shall take you home at once, Orlando, and never, never again——"

The voice seemed strangely familiar. I looked about me helplessly. A cat close by was no longer a cat, but an owl. It gazed at me sleepily, with its hat almost toppling off its head. No, not an owl, either. It was a looking-glass on a stall, and it was *my* hat that was toppling off. At this moment the brown Egyptian came past with a bound, and, running swiftly up the wall, flattened

himself against it, and became the red-brown painted figure again.

"Orlando!" said my dear wife Maria, shaking my arm again, "this is the most disgraceful conduct I ever heard of. No more Crystal Palace for you! Your tea's been waiting for an hour, and when I come to look for you I find you fast asleep on a seat and talking about Old Tom. To think that you should spend the shilling I trusted you with, in gin!"

I protested that I hadn't done so. But really the shilling *was* gone. I suspect that brown Egyptian of pocket-picking.

