THE

CAT'S PILGRIMAGE

BY JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE, M.A.

LATE FELLOW OF EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. B.

EDINBURGH: EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS.

1870.

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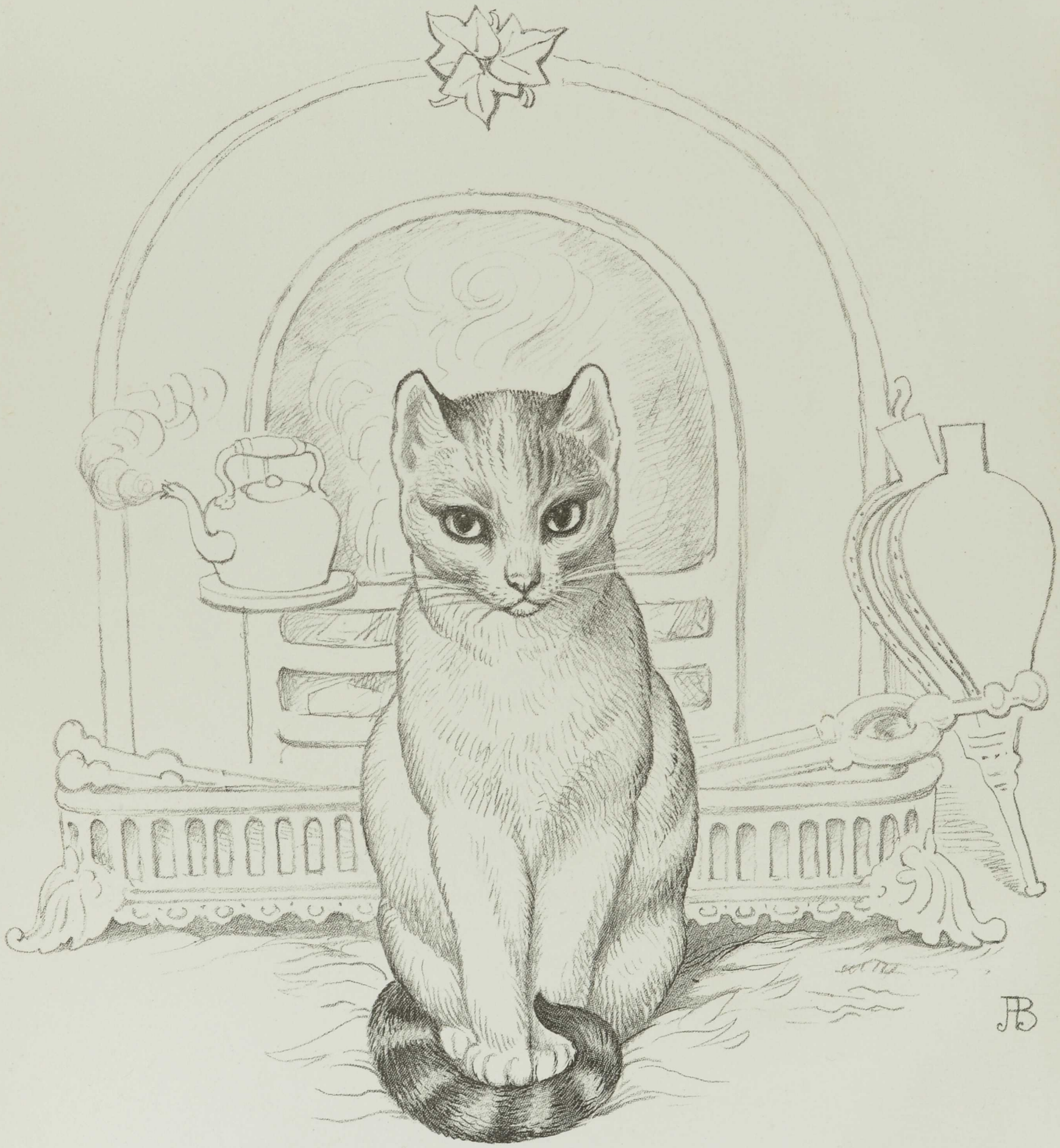

what are we here for ?

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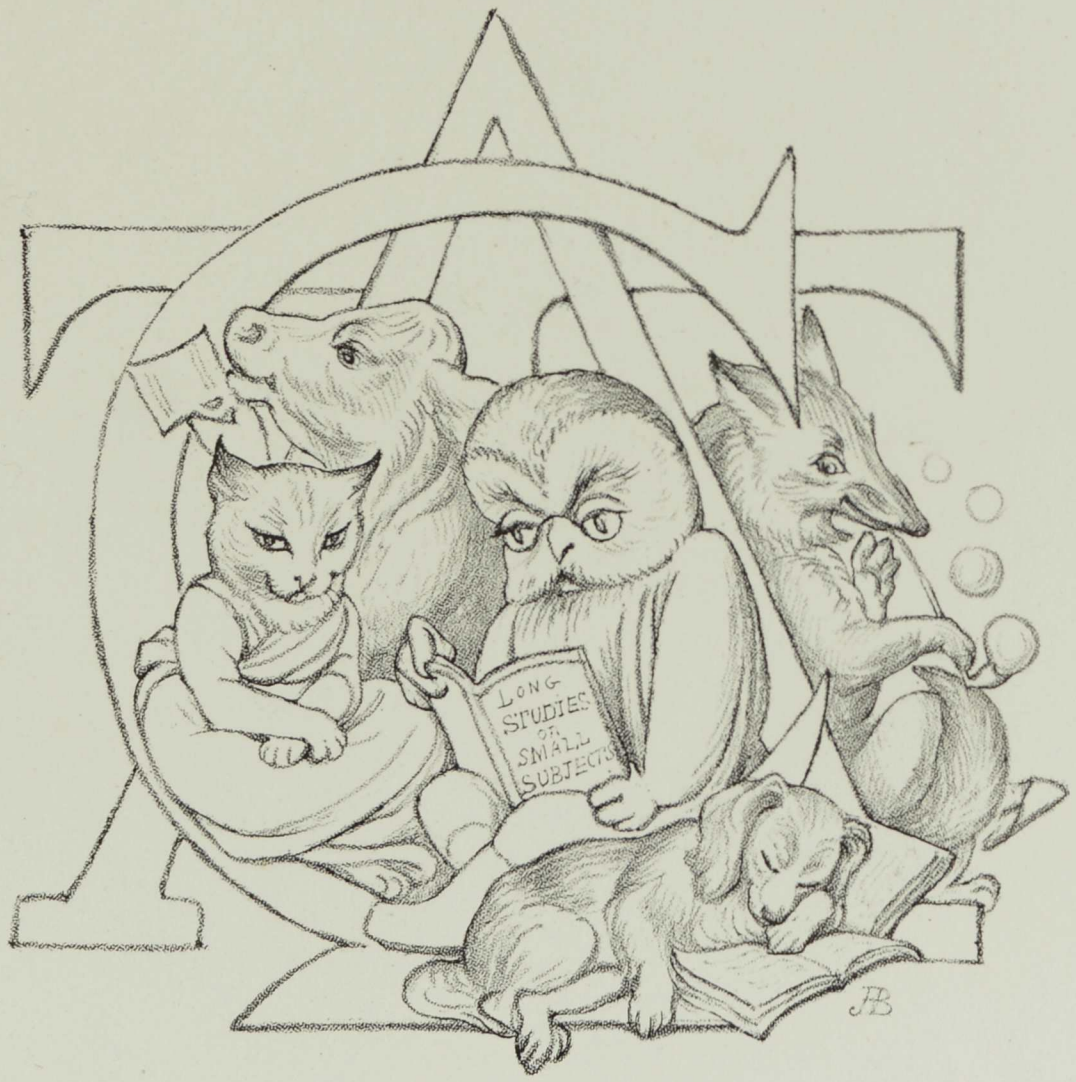

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

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'SHORT STUDIES ON GREAT SUBJECTS.'

THE CAT'S PILGRIMAGE.

I.

"IT is all very fine," said the Cat, yawning, and stretching herself against the fender, "but it is rather a bore; I don't see the use of it." She raised herself, and arranging her tail into a ring, and seating herself in the middle of it, with her fore paws in a straight line from her shoulders, at right angles to the hearth-rug, she looked pensively at the fire. "It is very odd," she went on, "there is my poor Tom; he is gone. I saw him stretched out in the yard. I spoke to him, and he took no notice of me. He won't, I suppose, ever any more, for they put him under the earth. Nice fellow he was. It is wonderful how little one cares about it. So many jolly evenings we spent together; and now I seem to get on quite as well without him. I wonder what has become of him; and my last children, too, what has become of them? What are we here for? I would ask the men, only they are so conceited and stupid they can't understand what we say. I hear them droning away, teaching their little ones every day; telling them to be good, and to do what they are bid, and all that. Nobody ever tells me to do

anything; if they do I don't do it, and I am very good. I wonder whether I should be any better if I minded more. I'll ask the Dog."

"Dog," said she, to a little fat spaniel coiled up on a mat like a lady's muff with a head and tail stuck on to it, "Dog, what do you make of it all?"

The Dog faintly opened his languid eyes, looked sleepily at the Cat for a moment, and dropped them again.

"Dog," she said, "I want to talk to you; don't go to sleep. Can't you answer a civil question?"

"Don't bother me," said the Dog, "I am tired. I stood on my hind legs ten minutes this morning before I could get my breakfast, and it hasn't agreed with me."

"Who told you to do it?" said the Cat.

"Why, the lady I have to take care of me," replied the Dog.

"Do you feel any better for it, Dog, after you have been standing on your legs?" asked she.

"Haven't I told you, you stupid Cat, that it hasn't agreed with me? let me go to sleep and don't plague me."

"But I mean," persisted the Cat, "do you feel improved, as the men call it? They tell their children that if they do what they are told they will improve, and grow good and great. Do you feel good and great?"

"What do I know?" said the Dog. "I eat my breakfast and am happy. Let me alone."

"Do you never think, O Dog without a soul! Do you never wonder what dogs are, and what this world is?"

The Dog stretched himself, and rolled his eyes lazily round the room. "I conceive," he said, "that the world is for dogs, and men and women are put into it to take care of dogs; women to take care of little dogs like me, and men for the big dogs like those in the yard—and cats," he continued, "are to know their place, and not to be troublesome."

"They beat you sometimes," said the Cat. "Why do they do that? They never beat me."

"If they forget their places, and beat me," snarled the Dog, "I bite them, and they don't do it again. I should like to bite you, too, you nasty Cat; you have woke me up."

"There may be truth in what you say," said the Cat, calmly; "but I think your view is limited. If you listened like me you would hear the men say it was all made for them, and you and I were made to amuse them."

"They don't dare to say so," said the Dog.

"They do, indeed," said the Cat. "I hear many things which you lose by sleeping so much. They think I am asleep, and so they are not afraid to talk before me; but my ears are open when my eyes are shut."

"You surprise me," said the Dog. "I never listen to them, except when I take notice of them, and then they never talk of anything except of me."

"I could tell you a thing or two about yourself which you don't know," said the Cat. "You have never heard, I dare say, that once upon a time your fathers lived in a temple, and that people prayed to them."

"Prayed! what is that?"

"Why, they went on their knees to you to ask you to give them good things, just as you stand on your toes to them now to ask for your breakfast. You don't know either that you have got one of those bright things we see up in the air at night called after you."

"Well, it is just what I said," answered the Dog. "I told you it was all made for us. They never did anything of that sort for you?"

"Didn't they? Why, there was a whole city where the people did nothing else, and as soon as we got stiff and couldn't move about any more, instead of being put under the ground like poor Tom, we used to be stuffed full of all sorts of nice things, and kept better than we were when we were alive."

"You are a very wise Cat," answered her companion; "but what good is it knowing all this?"

"Why, don't you see," said she, "they don't do it any more. We are going down in the world, we are, and that is why living on in this way is such an unsatisfactory sort of thing. I don't mean to complain for myself, and you needn't, Dog; we have a quiet life of it; but a quiet life is not the thing, and if there is nothing to be done except sleep and eat, and eat and sleep, why, as I said before, I don't see the use of it. There is something more in it than that; there was once, and there will be again, and I sha'n't be happy till I find it out. It is a shame, Dog, I say. The men have been here only a few thousand years, and we—why, we have been here hundreds of thousands; if we

"Wisdom is good," said the Dog; "but so is the hearth rug, thank you!"

are older, we ought to be wiser. I'll go and ask the creatures in the wood."

"You'll learn more from the men," said the Dog.

"They are stupid, and they don't know what I say to them; besides, they are so conceited they care for nothing except themselves. No, I shall try what I can do in the woods. I'd as soon go after poor Tom as stay living any longer like this."

"And where is poor Tom?" yawned the Dog.

"That is just one of the things I want to know," answered she. "Poor Tom is lying under the yard, or the skin of him, but whether that is the whole I don't feel so sure. They didn't think so in the city I told you about. It is a beautiful day, Dog; you won't take a trot out with me?" she added, wistfully.

"Who? I?" said the Dog. "Not quite."

"You may get so wise," said she.

"Wisdom is good," said the Dog; "but so is the hearth-rug, thank you!"

"But you may be free," said she.

"I shall have to hunt for my own dinner," said he.

"But, Dog, they may pray to you again," said she.

"But I sha'n't have a softer mat to sleep upon, Cat, and as I am rather delicate, that is a consideration."

II.

SO the Dog wouldn't go, and the Cat set off by herself to learn how to be happy, and to be all that a Cat could be. It was a fine sunny morning. She determined to try the meadow first, and, after an hour or two, if she had not succeeded, then to go off to the wood. A Blackbird was piping away on a thornbush as if his heart was running over with happiness. The Cat had breakfasted, and so was able to listen without any mixture of feeling. She didn't sneak. She walked boldly up under the bush, and the bird, seeing she had no bad purpose, sat still and sung on.

"Good-morning, Blackbird; you seem to be enjoying yourself this fine day."

"Good-morning, Cat."

"Blackbird, it is an odd question, perhaps. What ought one to do to be as happy as you?"

"Do your duty, Cat."

"But what is my duty, Blackbird?"

"Take care of your little ones, Cat."

"I haven't any," said she.

"Then sing to your mate," said the bird.

"Tom is dead," said she.

"Get your dinner" said the Ox.

"Poor Cat!" said the bird. "Then sing over his grave. If your song is sad, you will find your heart grow lighter for it."

"Mercy!" thought the Cat. "I could do a little singing with a living lover, but I never heard of singing for a dead one. But you see, bird, it isn't Cats' nature. When I am cross, I mew. When I am pleased, I purr; but I must be pleased first. I can't purr myself into happiness."

"I am afraid there is something the matter with your heart, my Cat. It wants warming; goodbye."

The Blackbird flew away. The Cat looked sadly after him. "He thinks I am like him; and he doesn't know that a Cat is a Cat," said she. "As it happens now, I feel a great deal for a Cat. If I hadn't got a heart, I shouldn't be unhappy. I won't be angry. I'll try that great fat fellow."

The Ox lay placidly chewing, with content beaming out of his eyes and playing on his mouth.

"Ox," she said, "what is the way to be happy?"

"Do your duty," said the Ox.

"Bother," said the Cat, "duty again! What is it, Ox?"

"Get your dinner," said the Ox.

"But it is got for me, Ox; and I have nothing to do but to eat it."

"Well, eat it, then, like me."

"So I do; but I am not happy for all that."

"Then you are a very wicked, ungrateful Cat."

The Ox munched away. A Bee buzzed into a buttercup under the Cat's nose.

"I beg your pardon," said the Cat, "it isn't curiosity—what are you doing?"

"Doing my duty; don't stop me, Cat."

"But, Bee, what is your duty?"

"Making honey," said the Bee.

"I wish I could make honey," sighed the Cat.

"Do you mean to say you can't?" said the Bee. "How stupid you must be! What do you do, then?"

"I do nothing, Bee. I can't get anything to do."

"You won't get anything to do, you mean, you lazy Cat! You are a good-for-nothing drone. Do you know what we do to our drones? We kill them; and that is all they are fit for. Good-morning to you."

"Well, I am sure," said the Cat, "they are treating me civilly; I had better have stopped at home at this rate. Stroke my whiskers! heartless! wicked! good-for-nothing! stupid! and only fit to be killed! This is a pleasant beginning, anyhow. I must look for some wiser creatures than these are. What shall I do? I know. I know where I will go."

It was in the middle of the wood. The bush was very dark, but she found him by his wonderful eye. Presently, as she got used to the light, she distinguished a sloping roll of feathers, a rounded breast, surmounted by a round head, set close to the body, without an inch of a neck intervening. "How wise he looks!" she said; "what a brain! what a forehead! His head is not long, but what an expanse! and what a depth of earnestness! The Owl sloped his head a little on one side; the Cat

And what would you know, Oh my daughter? said the Owl

slanted hers upon the other. The Owl set it straight again, the Cat did the same. They stood looking in this way for some minutes; at last, in a whispering voice, the Owl said, "What are you, who presume to look into my repose? Pass on upon your way, and carry elsewhere those prying eyes."

"O wonderful Owl," said the Cat, "you are wise, and I want to be wise; and I am come to you to teach me."

A film floated backwards and forwards over the Owl's eyes; it was his way of showing that he was pleased.

"I have heard in our schoolroom," went on the Cat, "that you sat on the shoulder of Pallas, and she told you all about it."

"And what would you know, O my daughter?" said the Owl.

"Everything," said the Cat, "everything. First of all, how to be happy."

"Mice content you not, my child, even as they content not me," said the Owl. "It is good."

"Mice, indeed!" said the Cat; "no, Parlour Cats don't eat mice. I have better than mice, and no trouble to get it; but I want something more."

"The body's meat is provided. You would now fill your soul."

"I want to improve," said the Cat. "I want something to do. I want to find out what the creatures call my duty."

"You would learn how to employ those happy hours of your leisure—rather how to make them happy by a worthy use. Meditate, O Cat! meditate! meditate!"

"That is the very thing," said she. "Meditate! that is what I like above all things. Only I want to know how: I want

something to meditate about. Tell me, Owl, and I will bless you every hour of the day as I sit by the parlour fire."

"I will tell you," answered the Owl, "what I have been thinking of ever since the moon changed. You shall take it home with you and think about it too; and the next full moon you shall come again to me; we will compare our conclusions."

"Delightful! delightful!" said the Cat. "What is it? I will try this minute."

"From the beginning," replied the Owl, "our race have been considering which first existed, the Owl or the egg. The Owl comes from the egg, but likewise the egg from the Owl."

"Mercy!" said the Cat.

"From sunrise to sunset I ponder on it, O Cat! When I reflect on the beauty of the complete Owl, I think that must have been first, as the cause is greater than the effect. When I remember my own childhood, I incline the other way."

"Well, but how are we to find out?" said the Cat.

"Find out!" said the Owl. "We can never find out. The beauty of the question is, that its solution is impossible. What would become of all our delightful reasonings, O unwise Cat! if we were so unhappy as to know?"

"But what in the world is the good of thinking about it, if you can't, O Owl?"

"My child, that is a foolish question. It is good, in order that the thoughts on these things may stimulate wonder. It is in wonder that the Owl is great."

"Then you don't know anything at all," said the Cat. "What

did you sit on Pallas's shoulder for? You must have gone to sleep."

"Your tone is over flippant, Cat, for philosophy. The highest of all knowledge is to know that we know nothing."

The Cat made two great arches with her back and her tail.

"Bless the mother that laid you," said she. "You were dropped by mistake in a goose nest. You won't do. I don't know much, but I am not such a creature as you, anyhow. A great white thing!"

She straightened her body, stuck her tail up on end, and marched off with much dignity. But, though she respected herself rather more than before, she was not on the way to the end of her difficulties. She tried all the creatures she met without advancing a step. They had all the old story, "Do your duty." But each had its own, and no one could tell her what hers was. Only one point they all agreed upon—the duty of getting their dinner when they were hungry. The day wore on, and she began to think she would like hers. Her meals came so regularly at home that she scarcely knew what hunger was; but now the sensation came over her very palpably, and she experienced quite new emotions as the hares and rabbits skipped about her, or as she spied a bird upon a tree. For a moment she thought she would go back and eat the Owl—he was the most useless creature she had seen; but on second thoughts she didn't fancy he would be nice: besides that, his claws were sharp and his beak too. Presently, however, as she sauntered down the path, she came on a little open patch of

green, in the middle of which a fine fat Rabbit was sitting. There was no escape. The path ended there, and the bushes were so thick on each side that he couldn't get away except through her paws.

"Really," said the Cat, "I don't wish to be troublesome; I wouldn't do it if I could help it; but I am very hungry, I am afraid I must eat you. It is very unpleasant, I assure you, to me as well as to you."

The poor Rabbit begged for mercy.

"Well," said she, "I think it is hard; I do really—and, if the law could be altered, I should be the first to welcome it. But what can a Cat do? You eat the grass; I eat you. But, Rabbit, I wish you would do me a favour."

"Anything to save my life," said the Rabbit.

"It is not exactly that," said the Cat; "but I haven't been used to killing my own food, and it is disagreeable. Couldn't you die? I shall hurt you dreadfully if I kill you."

"Oh!" said the Rabbit, "you are a kind Cat; I see it in your eyes, and your whiskers don't curl like those of the cats in the woods. I am sure you will spare me."

"But, Rabbit, it is a question of principle. I have to do my duty; and the only duty I have, as far as I can make out, is to get my dinner."

"If you kill me, Cat, to do your duty, I sha'n't be able to do mine."

It was a doubtful point, and the Cat was new to casuistry. What is your duty?" said she.

"I have seven little ones at home
and they will all die without me. Pray let me go."

"I have seven little ones at home—seven little ones, and they will all die without me. Pray let me go."

"What! do you take care of your children?" said the Cat. "How interesting! I should like to see that; take me."

"Oh! you would eat them, you would," said the Rabbit. "No! better eat me than them. No, no."

"Well, well," said the Cat, "I don't know; I suppose I couldn't answer for myself. I don't think I am right, for duty is pleasant, and it is very unpleasant to be so hungry; but I suppose you must go. You seem a good Rabbit. Are you happy, Rabbit?"

"Happy! oh, dear beautiful Cat! if you spare me to my poor babies!"

"Pooh, pooh!" said the Cat, peevishly; "I don't want fine speeches; I meant whether you thought it worth while to be alive! Of course you do! It don't matter. Go, and keep out of my way; for, if I don't find something to eat, you may not get off another time. Get along, Rabbit!"

III.

IT was a great day in the Fox's cave. The eldest cub had the night before brought home his first goose, and they were just sitting down to it as the Cat came by.

"Ah, my young lady! what, you in the woods? Bad feeding at home, eh? Come out to hunt for yourself?"

The goose smelt excellent; the Cat couldn't help a wistful look. She was only come, she said, to pay her respects to her wild friends.

"Just in time," said the Fox. "Sit down and take a bit of dinner; I see you want it. Make room, you cubs; place a seat for the lady."

"Why, thank you," said the Cat, "yes; I acknowledge it is not unwelcome. Pray, don't disturb yourselves, young Foxes. I am hungry. I met a Rabbit on my way here. I was going to eat him, but he talked so prettily I let him go."

The cubs looked up from their plates, and burst out laughing.

"For shame! young rascals," said their father. "Where are your manners? Mind your business, and don't be rude."

"Fox," she said, when it was over, and the cubs were gone to play, "you are very clever. The other creatures are all stupid." The Fox bowed. "Your family were always clever," she continued. "I have heard about them in the books they use in

our schoolroom. It is many years since your ancestor stole the crow's dinner."

"Don't say stole, Cat; it is not pretty. Obtained by superior ability."

"I beg your pardon," said the Cat; "it is all living with those men. That is not the point. Well, but I want to know whether you are any wiser or any better than Foxes were then?"

"Really," said the Fox, "I am what Nature made me. I don't know. I am proud of my ancestors, and do my best to keep up the credit of the family."

"Well, but Fox, I mean do you improve? do I? do any of you? The men are always talking about doing their duty, and that, they say, is the way to improve, and to be happy. And as I was not happy, I thought that had, perhaps, something to do with it, so I came out to talk to the creatures. They also had the old chant—duty, duty, duty; but none of them could tell me what mine was, or whether I had any."

The Fox smiled. "Another leaf out of your schoolroom," said he. "Can't they tell you there?"

"Indeed," she said, "they are very absurd. They say a great deal about themselves, but they only speak disrespectfully of us. If such creatures as they can do their duty, and improve, and be happy, why can't we?"

"They say they do, do they?" said the Fox. "What do they say of me?"

The Cat hesitated.

"Don't be afraid of hurting my feelings, Cat. Out with it."

"They do all justice to your abilities, Fox," said she; "but your morality, they say, is not high. They say you are a rogue."

"Morality!" said the Fox. "Very moral and good they are! And you really believe all that? What do they mean by calling me a rogue?"

"They mean you take whatever you can get, without caring whether it is just or not."

"My dear Cat, it is very well for a man, if he can't bear his own face, to paint a pretty one on a panel and call it a looking-glass; but you don't mean that it takes *you* in."

"Teach me," said the Cat. "I fear I am weak."

"Who get justice from the men unless they can force it? Ask the sheep that are cut into mutton. Ask the horses that draw their ploughs. I don't mean it is wrong of the men to do as they do; but they needn't lie about it."

"You surprise me," said the Cat.

"My good Cat, there is but one law in the world. The weakest goes to the wall. The men are sharper-witted than the creatures, and so they get the better of them and use them. They may call it just if they like; but when a tiger eats a man I guess he has just as much justice on his side as the man when he eats a sheep."

"And that is the whole of it," said the Cat. "Well, it is very sad. What do you do with yourself?"

"My duty, to be sure," said the Fox; "use my wits and enjoy myself. My dear friend, you and I are on the lucky side. We eat and are not eaten."

"You surprise me", said the Cat

"Except by the hounds now and then," said the Cat.

"Yes; by brutes that forget their nature, and sell their freedom to the men," said the Fox, bitterly. "In the meantime my wits have kept my skin whole hitherto, and I bless Nature for making me a Fox and not a goose."

"And are you happy, Fox?"

"Happy! yes, of course. So would you be if you would do like me, and use your wits. My good Cat, I should be as miserable as you if I found my geese every day at the cave's mouth. I have to hunt for them, lie for them, sneak for them, fight for them; cheat those old fat farmers, and bring out what there is inside me; and then I am happy—of course I am. And then, Cat, think of my feelings as a father last night, when my dear boy came home with the very young gosling which was marked for the Michaelmas dinner! Old Reineke himself wasn't more than a match for that young Fox at his years. You know our epic?"

"A little of it, Fox. They don't read it in our schoolroom. They say it is not moral; but I have heard pieces of it. I hope it is not all quite true."

"Pack of stuff! it is the only true book that ever was written. If it is not, it ought to be. Why, that book is the law of the world—*la carrière aux talents*—and writing it was the honestest thing ever done by a man. That fellow knew a thing or two, and wasn't ashamed of himself when he did know. They are all like him, too, if they would only say so. There never was one of them yet who wasn't more ashamed of being called ugly

than of being called a rogue, and of being called stupid than of being called naughty."

"It has a roughish end, this life of yours, if you keep clear of the hounds, Fox," said the Cat.

"What! a rope in the yard! Well, it must end some day; and when the farmer catches me I shall be getting old, and my brains will be taking leave of me; so the sooner I go the better, that I may disgrace myself the less. Better be jolly while it lasts, than sit mewing out your life and grumbling at it as a bore."

"Well," said the Cat, "I am very much obliged to you. I suppose I may even get home again. I shall not find a wiser friend than you, and perhaps I shall not find another good-natured enough to entertain me so handsomely. But it is very sad."

"Think of what I have said," answered the Fox. "I'll call at your house some night; you will take me a walk round the yard, and then I'll show you."

"Not quite," thought the Cat, as she trotted off; "one good turn deserves another, that is true; and you have given me a dinner. But they have given me many at home, and I mean to take a few more of them; so I think you mustn't go round our yard."

IV.

THE next morning, when the Dog came down to breakfast, he found his old friend sitting in her usual place on the hearth-rug.

"Oh! so you have come back," said he. "How d'ye do? You don't look as if you had had a very pleasant journey."

"I have learnt something," said the Cat. "Knowledge is never pleasant."

"Then it is better to be without it," said the Dog.

"Especially, better to be without knowing how to stand on one's hind legs, Dog," said the Cat; "still you see, you are proud of it; but I have learnt a great deal, Dog. They won't worship you any more, and it is better for you; you wouldn't be any happier. What did you do yesterday?"

"Indeed," said the Dog, "I hardly remember. I slept after you went away. In the afternoon I took a drive in the carriage. Then I had my dinner. My maid washed me and put me to bed. There is the difference between you and me; you have to wash yourself and put yourself to bed."

"And you really don't find it a bore, living like this? Wouldn't you like something to do? Wouldn't you like some children to play with? The Fox seemed to find it very pleasant."

"Children, indeed!" said the Dog, "when I have got men and women. Children are well enough for foxes and wild creatures; refined dogs know better; and, for doing—can't I stand on my toes? can't I dance? at least, couldn't I before I was so fat?"

"Ah! I see everybody likes what he was bred to," sighed the Cat. "I was bred to do nothing, and I must like that. Train the cat as the cat should go, and the cat will be happy and ask no questions. Never seek for impossibilities, Dog. That is the secret."

"And you have spent a day in the woods to learn that," said he. "I could have taught you that. Why, Cat, one day when you were sitting scratching your nose before the fire, I thought you looked so pretty that I should have liked to marry you; but I knew I couldn't, so I didn't make myself miserable."

The Cat looked at him with her odd green eyes. "I never wished to marry you, Dog; I shouldn't have presumed. But it was wise of you not to fret about it. Listen to me, Dog—listen. I met many creatures in the wood, all sorts of creatures, beasts and birds. They were all happy; they didn't find it a bore. They went about their work, and did it, and enjoyed it, and yet none of them had the same story to tell. Some did one thing, some another; and, except the Fox, each had got a sort of notion of doing its duty. The Fox was a rogue; he said he was; but yet he was not unhappy. His conscience never troubled him. Your work is standing on your toes, and you are happy. I have none, and this is why I am unhappy. When I came to think about it, I found every creature out in the

wood had to get its own living. I tried to get mine, but I didn't like it, because I wasn't used to it; and as for knowing, the Fox, who didn't care to know anything except how to cheat greater fools than himself, was the cleverest fellow I came across. Oh! the Owl, Dog—you should have heard the Owl. But I came to this, that it was no use trying to know, and the only way to be jolly was to go about one's own business like a decent Cat. Cats' business seems to be killing rabbits and such-like; and it is not the pleasantest possible; so the sooner one is bred to it the better. As for me, that have been bred to do nothing, why, as I said before, I must try to like that; but I consider myself an unfortunate Cat."

"So don't I consider myself an unfortunate Dog," said her companion.

"Very likely you do not," said the Cat.

By this time their breakfast was come in. The Cat ate hers, the Dog did penance for his; and if one might judge by the purring on the hearth-rug, the Cat, if not the happiest of the two, at least was not exceedingly miserable.

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