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## On Cats.

BY CANON LIDDON.

"THE SPECTATOR," 17th January 1885.

CATS are like oysters, in that no one is neutral about them; every one is, explicitly or implicitly, friendly or hostile to them. And they are like children in their power of discovering, by a rapid and sure instinct, who likes them and who does not. It is difficult to win their affection; and it is easy to forfeit what it is hard to win. But when given, their love, although less demonstrative, is more delicate and beautiful than that of a dog. Who that is on really intimate terms with a cat has not watched its dismay at the signs of packing-up and leaving home! We ourselves have known a cat who would recognise his master's footstep after a three months' absence, and come out to meet him in the hall, with tail erect, and purring all over as if to the very verge of bursting. And another cat we know, who comes up every morning between six and seven o'clock to wake his master, sits on the bed, and very gently feels first one eyelid and then the other with his paw. When an eye opens, but not till then, the cat sets up a loud purr, like the prayer of a fire-worshipper to the rising sun.

Those who say lightly that cats care only for places, and not for persons, should go to the Cat Show at the Crystal Palace, where they may see recognitions between cat and owner that will cure them of so shallow an opinion. When we were last there, one striking instance fell in our way. Cats greatly dislike these exhibitions; a cat, as a rule, is like Queen Vashti, unwilling to be shown, even to the nobles, at the pleasure of an Ahasuerus. Shy, sensitive, wayward, and independent, a cat resents being placed upon a cushion in a wire cage, and exposed to the unintelligent criticism, to say nothing of the fingers, of a mob of sightseers. One very eminent cat, belonging to the Master's Common Room at Christ Church, Oxford, whose size and beauty have on several occasions entailed on him the hard necessity of attending a Cat Show, takes, it is said, three days to recover from the sense of humiliation and disgust which he feels, whether he gets a prize or not. On the occasion to which we refer, a row of distinguished cats were sitting, each on his cushion, with their backs turned to the sightseers, while their faces, when from time to time visible, were expressive of the deepest gloom and disgust. Presently two little girls pushed through the crowd to the cage of one of the largest of these cats, crying, "There's Dick!" Instantly the great cat turned round, his face transfigured with joy, purred loudly, and endeavoured to scratch open the front

of the cage, that he might rejoin his little friends, who were with difficulty persuaded to leave him at the show.

No doubt, local attachment is a prominent feature of a cat's mind; and a very good quality it is too. It, however, often gets cats into odd company, as it did those cats whom Baruch mentions as sitting upon the idols of Babylon, if not into serious misfortune. Under this head, our readers should study the story, given by M. Champfleury, of the French *curé's* cat, who was only induced to leave an old presbytery by being put into a bag and dipped in a pond. This attachment to place is closely connected with a cat's fine power of accurate observation. When a piece of furniture has been moved from its accustomed place, all the cats in the house set themselves to examine the phenomenon, with a view to discovering, if possible, its reason. Cats are, we apprehend, inveterate Conservatives. This principle, rather than ill-nature or jealousy, explains their conduct on the arrival of a new companion. They, first of all, tentatively examine it; then, especially if it be a kitten, they all spit at and scratch it. Only after slow approaches and the lapse of three or four days is the new-comer received even provisionally into the circle of established cats; but at the end of a month it is just as secure in its position as is the first Reform Bill in the British Constitution, or any aged peer in the House of Lords. This ready acceptance of accomplished facts illustrates that quality of sagacity in cats upon which M. Champfleury lays stress.

Cats are, however, sometimes strangely at fault. So was Madame Théophile, a red cat with a white breast, pink nose, and blue eyes, who was "on terms of the closest intimacy" with M. Théophile Gautier. When Madame first saw a parrot, she evidently took it for a green chicken, and was preparing to deal with it accordingly. She gradually made her approaches; and at last, with one bound, sprang upon the perch where the parrot was sitting. But the bird, without moving, addressed Madame in a deep bass voice, "As-tu déjeuné, Jacquot?" For this accomplishment the cat was wholly unprepared; after all, it might be a man in disguise. The bird followed up its advantage by further questions, "Et de quoi?" "Du rôti du roi?" and as the cat retired in sheer terror, proceeded to quote French verses, which naturally and utterly completed Madame's discomfiture.