

## NOTES ON THE DOMESTIC CAT.

*(Felix domesticus.)*

BY NICOLAS PIKE.

The Felidæ, or cat tribe, form one of the most natural and characteristic groups of the class mammalia. From the lion or tiger to the domestic cat, all are endowed with the same instincts, the same appetite, the same structure; carnivorous in the extreme, they are admirably framed for a life of rapine.

The feline race are concentrated in the warm latitudes—the species being fewer and more widely dispersed as we pass from the warm to the temperate or colder regions.

The origin of the common domesticated cat is supposed to be a species indigenous in Nubia, Abyssinia, and Northern Africa, and known by the scientific name of *Felix maniculata*. However this may be, the domestic cat was among the sacred animals of very early times, and there is no doubt but that it has been domesticated many thousands of years. The Egyptians held them as sacred, embalmed and placed them with their dead. They were sculptured on their tombs and monuments, and painted on their coffins. There are in the British Museum some Greek vases, dating to the fifth century before Christ, upon which were pictures representing domesticated cats like those of the present day. The cat, says Mr. Mill, in his history of the crusades, was a very important personage in the religious festivals of the times which he describes. At Aix in Provence, on the festival of Corpus Christi, the finest tom cat in the canton, wrapped like a child in swaddling clothes, was exhibited in a magnificent shrine to public admiration. Every knee was bent, and every hand strewed flowers or poured incense, and puss was treated in all respects as the god of the day. In the time of Hoel, the good king of Wales, who died in the year 948, laws were made to protect the cat, as it was of great importance on account of its scarcity. To steal or kill a cat that guarded the king's granary, the forfeit was a sheep or as much wheat as, when poured over the cat suspended by the tail (its head touching the floor), would form a heap high enough to cover the tip of the former. Great care at this time was taken to improve the breed of these prolific creatures. In all countries and places the domesticated cat is found. In Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, it is petted and made much of and becomes attached to its protector. Notwithstanding the statements made by writers that the cat never seems to be under subjugation—as it always acts for itself, all its views confined to the place where it has been brought up—this is a great mistake, as I shall show further on. Cats, I can positively state from my own observation, show as much affection to those who care for them as the horse or any other animal. In the latter part of the last century there lived an artist of the name of Mind, who was a most remarkable man. He was known to the world as the "Raphael of cats," as his whole time was devoted to painting these animals. No painter before him ever succeeded in representing them with so much nature and spirit as he did.

Each of his cats had an individual character and expression, and was in fact a portrait which seemed animated. He had a Maltese cat called Minette, which was his favorite cat, and his attachment to it was unbounded. Sometimes this cat would occupy his lap for hours, while three or four kittens would be perched on his shoulders. He called them the beloved companions of his solitude, whose complacent purrings seemed to him an ample compensation for the inconvenience. Mind devoted much time to his cats, and taught them to spring upon the door latch and open the door, and sit with him at the table while he was eating. He would play hide and go seek with them, and Minette always secured a position at the foot of his bed at night, and would growl if any stray footsteps were heard. When he was sick this favorite cat would not leave the room or take food. All the animals he had were exceedingly fond of him, and in many ways showed strong affection for him.

It is said that the world has taken 5,000 years to become familiar with cats: their nature and instinct are not yet, it appears, completely understood. Cardinal Richelieu was a great lover of cats, and in a room ad-

joining his bed chamber he had a number of cats which he used to play with every morning. History has preserved the name of most of his famous cats. Mohammed was also an enthusiastic admirer of cats. There is a story of one who found rest in one of his sleeves; rather than disturb it, he cut it off and let Tom have his sleep. To show the great affection of puss *The Feathered World* relates the following: "One of a brood of chickens was lame and unable to follow its mother in search of food. The chick was soon half starved. It was missed, and next day was found lying with three kittens, the mother of which gave the fledgling every attention. Every day the cat carried the bird in its mouth into the farmyard, where it obtained food, and as regularly conveyed it in the same manner back to lie with the kittens. Through the care of puss the injured limb grew stronger and the chick throve well. The conduct of the cat was a matter of great interest to the inhabitants of the farm, who carefully watched puss in all her movements."

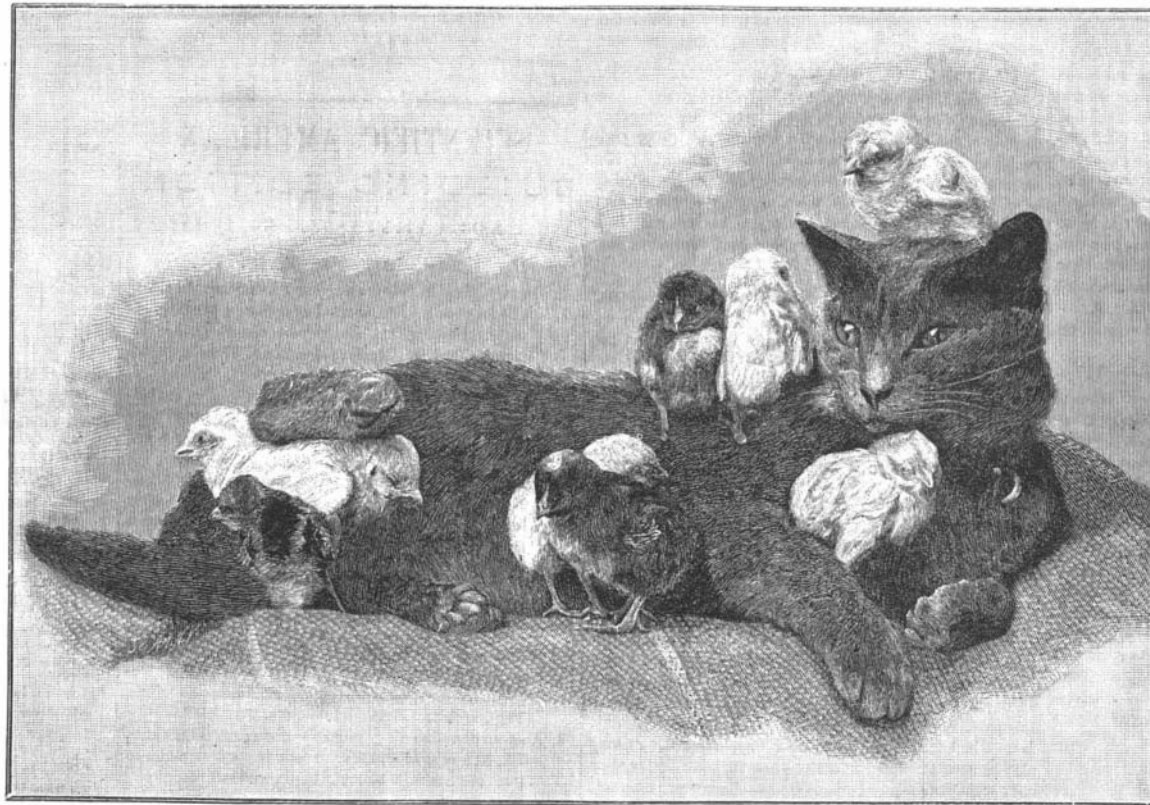
We give a photograph of a young Maltese cat, with nine chickens, which she cares for with as much affection as their natural mother would. If one strays away from her, puss becomes quite excited and mews for it to return. The little chicks appear to be as contented as possible and nestle under her soft fur and go to sleep. When puss has her family around her and crawling over her body, she seems perfectly happy. Here is another case of strong affection which a cat displays for her mistress. A young woman was murdered in New York City a short time ago, and when discovered a large black cat, a favorite of the murdered woman, was found resting on her body. Her large fiery eyeballs glared ferociously in the dim light of the

parture, Prince was told that he must be good during her absence. When she left the house, he would perch himself upon a chair near a window till she was out of sight. About the time she was to return he would watch patiently and gaze up and down the street, and we always knew when she was coming by Prince leaving his post and rushing to the door to welcome her return. He received caresses from others under protest, and seemed to care for his mistress only. Some cats are natural actors and will enter into the spirit with as much zest and understanding of what is wanted as though they were human. At a meeting and exhibition of the Cat Breeders' Association in June last, at Boston, a famous trick cat, three years old, was exhibited dressed up in a gown and bonnet (her name was Muffins), who would pose herself to have her photograph made. Sometimes she would stand three minutes without moving, swing and perform on the trapeze, jump over a bar at the word of command; would jump through a hoop encircled with fire, shake hands, walk on her hind legs, and catch ball with a certainty that would delight Ward, the base ball champion.

One cat on exhibition rides a bicycle. It is a fine white Angora cat. When fairly started she becomes enthusiastic and urges her bicycle rapidly along, with an evident enjoyment that bystanders find contagious. The tabbies do housework to perfection, scrub little handkerchiefs and towels in a tub and hang them up to dry, skate on rollers, and all with such contentment and spirit that they seem like little children masquerading in fur.

The above statements are true, and very much more could be added to verify my statement of the great intelligence of a much abused and useful animal.

It is supposed that cats can see in the dark. In a moderate light the pupil of the eye of a cat is small and of an oval shape, and in the bright glare of the sun at midday it becomes narrow, but in the dark it becomes round and full, and is so expanded that it nearly fills the surface of the eyeball. The Chinese and some of the negro tribes in Africa often examine the eyes of their pets in order to ascertain the time of the day. Some of the East Indians can tell you very nearly the time of the day by this means. When Abbe Huc, a French Jesuit priest, traveled in China and Chinese Tartary, he mentioned the following: On asking his attendant the time of the day, he immediately went over to the cat that was basking in the sun and examined its eyes, told the Abbe that it was about two hours after noon, and on being questioned how



A CAT BROODING CHICKENS.

dingy apartment. When an attempt was made to remove the animal, it growled fiercely and showed its teeth in a wicked manner. Finally it was driven off, but took refuge under the bed, and could not be driven away. An examination showed that it had not attacked or injured the body in any way. It was probably prompted by the strong affection it had for its mistress, which caused it to nestle where it was found.

It would be useless for me to describe the common house cat, it is so well known. We will select such of its peculiarities that may have escaped the notice of the inattentive observer. The common house cat, *Felix domesticus*, brings forth its young twice a year. Her period of gestation is fifty-five days. Sometimes it may be a few hours longer. She will average four young ones at a birth. She is fond of concealing her kittens from the male, who often destroys them as soon as born, if an opportunity offers itself. If cats are well cared for, they will live about fifteen years, sometimes longer. Their vivacity, however, seems to diminish at six or seven years, indicating the fact that they have passed the bounds of youth. It is an intelligent animal and can, with kind treatment, be taught many things. We once had a fine Maltese kitten presented to us, which we brought up with great care. It grew into a beautiful large cat, full of intelligence. It learned to open the door, leap over a high back chair at command, would growl when strangers approached and dive through a hoop covered with tissue paper. Prince, for that was his name, made no friends, but his whole heart was concentrated in his mistress. He would sit in her lap for hours, and seemed always happy when near her. On the days of her de-

he knew that, he explained that the pupil of the eyes were largest in the morning, and that they gradually grew smaller as the light increased until they reached their minimum at noon; that then they began to widen again, till at night they became large. In Sumatra, when there is a drought, and rain is wanted, the women of the village all go to the river scantily clad. They wade into the water and splash each other, then a black cat is brought and thrown in, and made to swim about for a while, then allowed to escape to the bank, pursued by the women, who splash the water after it. The color of the animal is part of the charm. Being black, it will darken the sky with rain clouds. In the middle ages it was deemed by the Romans an ill omen to meet a cat on the way to a wedding. The sneezing of a cat on the evening of a marriage was considered a good omen. A cat carried away from home will almost always find its way back. One taken from Brooklyn, Long Island, to Jamaica, a distance of 12 miles, returned in three days to his home. If a cat falls from a height it generally comes down square on its feet without any harm. I have known of two instances of cats falling over forty feet without injury.

From what has been written, it will be seen that cats have a great amount of intelligence and should be treated with consideration, for kindness to the brute creation is an attribute of a noble nature, while brutality toward them shows a selfish and cowardly disposition. If we worship Almighty God, let us be human to all his creatures. Cats have feelings like ourselves and show them much in the same way that we do sometimes. No animal, in my opinion, is capable of distinguishing with greater acuteness between friend and foe. A cat will often understand words with marked keenness.