

FOR EVERY BOY AND GIRL



How Cats Came to Purr.

By John Bennett.

A BOY having a Pet Cat which he Wished to Feed, Said to Her, "Come, Cat, Drink this Dish of Cream; it will Keep Your Furs as Soft as Silk, and Make You Purr like a Coffee-Mill!"

He had no sooner said this than the Cat, with a Great Glare of her Green-Eyes, bristled her Tail like a Gun-Swab and went over the Back Fence, head first—pop!—as Mad as a Wet Hen. And this is how she came to do so:



THE CAT THAT GROUND COFFEE IN THE KING'S KITCHEN

The story is an old one—very, very old. It may be Persian; it may be not; that is of very little moment. It is so old that if all the nine lives of all the cats that have ever lived in the world were set up together in a line, the other end of it would just reach back to the time when this occurred.

And this is the sad story:

Many, many years ago, in a country which was quite as far from anywhere else as the entire distance thither and back, there was a huge cat that ground the coffee in the King's kitchen, and otherwise assisted with the meals.



"HELLO!" HE SAID GRUFFLY, "COME HURRY UP THE COFFEE."

This cat was, in truth, the actual and very father of all subsequent cats, and his name was Sooty Will (for his hair was as black as a night in a coal hole. He was ninety years old, and his mustaches were like whisk-brooms. But the most singular thing about him was that in all his life he had never once purred nor humped up his back, although his master often stroked him. The fact was that he never had learned to purr, nor had any reason, so far as he knew, for humping up his back. And being the father of all the cats, there was no one to tell him how. It remained for him to acquire a reason, and from his example to devise a habit which cats have followed from that time forth, and no doubt will forever follow.

The King of the country had long been at war with one of his neighbors, but one morning he sent back a

Dutch clock behind a door; banners waved from the castled heights, and bugles sang from every tower; the city gates rang with the cheers of the enthusiastic crowd. Up from cellars, down from lofts, off workbenches, and out at the doors of their masters' shops dodging the thwacks of their masters' straps, "popping like corks from the necks of so many bottles, came apprentices, shop-boys, knaves and scullions, crying: "God save the King! Hurrah! Hurrah! Masters and work may go to Rome; our tasks shall wait on our own sweet wills; 't is holiday when the King comes home. God save the King! Hurrah!"

Then came the procession. There were first three regiments of trumpeters, all blowing different tunes; then fifteen regiments of mounted infantry on coal-black horses, forty squadrons of green-and-blue dra-

just enough pounded to be picturesque, miles on miles of splendid men, all bearing the trophies of glorious war, and armed with lances and bows and arrows, falchions, morgensterns, martels-de-fer, and other choice implements of justifiable homicide, and the reverse, such as hautbois and sackbuts and accordions and dudelsacks and Scotch bag-pipes—a glorious sight!

And, as has been said before, the city gates rang with the cheers of the crowd, crimson banners waved over

I will not stand it; it is not fair. A cat may look at a king; and if any cat may look at a king, why, I am the cat who may. There are no other cats in the world; I am the only one. Poooh the cook may shout till his breath gives out, he cannot frighten me; for once I am going to have my fling!"

So he forthwith swallowed the coffee-mill, box, handle, drawer-knobs, coffee-well, and all, and was off to see the King.

drooping tail, stood by the palace gate, dejected. He was sour and silent and glum. Indeed, who would not be, with a coffee-mill on his conscience? To own up to the entire truth, the cat was feeling decidedly unwell; when suddenly the cook popped his head in at the scullery entry, crying, "How now, how now, you vagabonds! The war is done, but the breakfast is not. Hurry up, scurry up, scamper and trot! The cakes are all cooked and are piping hot! Then why is the coffee so slow?"

The King was in the dining-hall, in dressing-gown and slippers, irately calling for his breakfast! The shamefaced, guilty cat ran hastily down the scullery stairs and hid under the refrigerator, with such a deep inward sensation of remorse that he dared not look the kind cook in the face. It now really seemed to him as if everything had gone wrong with the world, especially his own insides. This any one will readily believe who has ever swallowed a coffee-mill. He began to weep copiously.

The cook came into the kitchen. "Where is the coffee?" he said; then, catching sight of the secluded cat, he stooped, crying, "Where is the coffee?" The cat sobbed audibly. "Some one must have come into the kitchen while I ran out to look at the King!" he gasped, for there seemed to him no way out of the scrape but by telling a plausible untruth. "Some one must have come into the kitchen and stolen it!" And with that, choking upon the handle of the mill, which projected into his throat, he burst into inarticulate sobs. The cook, who was, in truth, a very kind-hearted man, sought to reassure the poor cat. "There; it is unfortunate, very; but do not weep; thieves thrive in king's houses!" he said, and, stooping, he began to stroke the drooping cat's back to show that he held the weeping creature blameless.

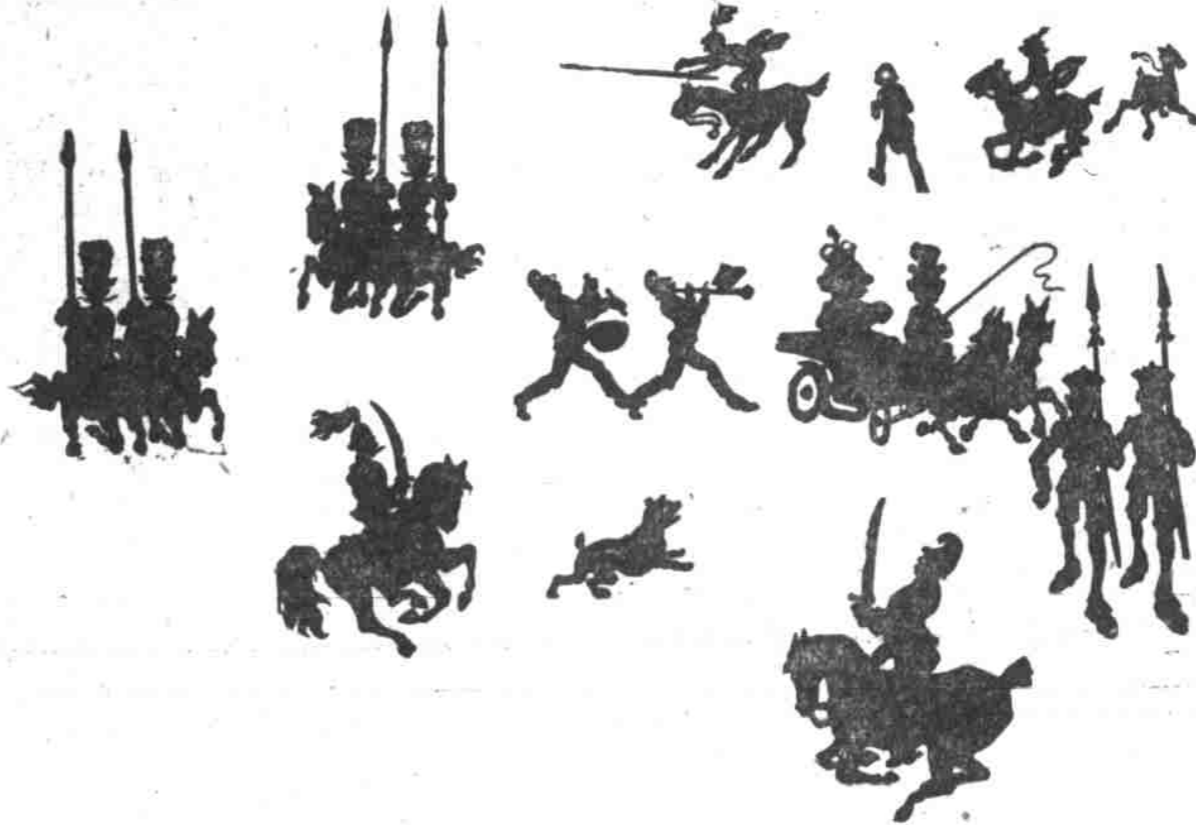
Sooty Will's heart leaped into his throat. "Oh, oh!" he half gasped, "oh, oh! If he rubs his great hand down my back he will feel the corners of the coffee-mill through my ribs as sure as fate! Oh, oh! I am a gone cat!" And with that, in an agony of apprehension lest his guilt and his falsehood be thus presently detected, he humped up his back as high in the air as he could, so that the corners of the mill might not make bumps in his sides and that the mill might thus remain undiscovered.

But, alas! he forgot that coffee-mills turn. As he humped up his back to cover his guilt, the coffee-mill inside rolled over, and, as it rolled, began to grind—rr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr.

"Oh, oh! you have swallowed the mill!" cried the cook.

"No, no," cried the cat; "I was only thinking aloud." At that outstepped the Genius that Lived under the Great Ovens, and, with his finger pointed at the cat, said, in a frightful voice, husky with wood-ashes: "Miserable and pusillanimous beast! By telling a falsehood to cover a wrong you have only made bad matters worse. For betraying man's kindness to cover your shame, a curse shall be upon you and all your kind until the end of the world. Whenever men stroke you in kindness, remembrance of your guilt shall make you hump up your back with shame, as you did to avoid being found out; and in order that the reason for this curse shall never be forgotten, whenever man is kind to a cat the sound of the grinding of a coffee-mill inside shall perpetually remind him of your guilt and shame!"

With that the Genius vanished in a cloud of smoke. And it was even as he said. From that day Sooty Will could never abide having his back stroked without humping it up to conceal the mill within him; and never did he hump up his back but the coffee-mill began slowly to grind, rr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr; so that, even in the prime of life, before his declining days had come, being seized upon by a great remorse for these things, which might never be amended, he retired to a home for aged and reputable cats, and there, so far as the records reveal, lived the remainder of his days in charity and repentance.



PARTS OF THIS GREAT PROCESSION

the city's pinnacled summits, and bugles blew, trumpets brayed, and drums beat until it seemed that wild uproar and rich display had reached its high millennium.



HE FORTHWITH SWALLOWED THE COFFEE MILL

The black cat turned the coffee-mill. "My oh! my oh!" he said. "It certainly is not fair that those bench-



AND WAS OFF TO SEE THE KING

legged turnspits with feet like so much leather should see the King marching home in his glory, while I, who go shod, as it were, in velvet, should hear only the



THE CAT WAS FEELING DECIDEDLY UNWELL

sound through the scullery windows. It is not fair. It is no doubt true that 'The cat may mew, and the dog shall have his day,' but I have as much right to



"WHERE IS THE COFFEE?" SAID THE COOK

So far, so good. But, ah! the sad and undeniable truth, that brightest joys too soon must end! Triumphs cannot last forever, even in a land of legends. There comes a reckoning.



OUT STEPPED THE GENIUS THAT LIVED UNDER THE GREAT OVENS

When the procession was past and gone, as all processions pass and go, vanishing down the shores of forgetfulness: when barons, marquises, dukes, and dons were gone, with their pennants and banners; when the last lanceers had gone prancing past and were lost to sight down the circuitous avenue, Sooty Will, with

But the curse has come down even to the present day, as the Genius that Lived under the Great Ovens said, and still maintains, though cats have probably forgotten the facts, and so, when stroked, hump up their backs and purr as if these actions were a matter of pride instead of being a blot upon their family record.



TURNING HAND SPRINGS, HEAD SPRINGS AND HEEL SPRINGS AS THEY WENT

messenger to say that he had beaten his foeman at last, and that he was coming home for an early breakfast as hungry as three bears. "Have batter-cakes and coffee," he directed, "hot, and plenty of 'em!" At that the turnspits capered and yelped with glee, for batter-cakes and coffee are not cooked upon spits,

goons, and a thousand drummers and fifers in scarlet and blue and gold, making a thundering din with their rattle-te-tootle-te-tootle-te-rattle; and a pretty well up to the front in the ranks was the King himself, bowing and smiling to the populace, with his hand on his breast; and after him the army, all in shining armor,

my day as he; and has it not been said from immemorial that 'A cat may look at a king?' Indeed it has, quite as much as that the dog may have his day,