
THE WORKS OF
THÉOPHILE GAUTIER
VOLUME NINETEEN

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
PROFESSOR F. C. DE SUMICHRAST
Department of French, Harvard University

MY PRIVATE MENAGERIE

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MY PRIVATE MENAGERIE

I ANTIQUITY

I HAVE often been caricatured in Turkish dress seated upon cushions, and surrounded by cats so familiar that they did not hesitate to climb upon my shoulders and even upon

my head. The caricature is truth slightly exaggerated, and I must own that all my life I have been as fond of animals in general and of cats in particular as any brahmin or old maid. The great Byron always trotted a menagerie round with him, even when travelling, and he caused to be erected, in the park of Newstead Abbey, a monument to his faithful Newfoundland dog Boatswain, with an inscription in verse of his own inditing. I cannot be accused of imitation in the matter of our common liking for dogs, for that love [284]manifested itself in me at an age when I was yet ignorant of the alphabet.

A clever man being at this time engaged in preparing a "History of Animals of Letters," I jot down these notes in which he may find, so far as my own animals are concerned, trustworthy information.

The earliest remembrance of this sort that I have goes back to the time of my arrival in Paris from Tarbes. I was then three years old, so that it is difficult to credit the statement made by Mirecourt and Vapereau, who affirm that I "proved but an indifferent pupil" in my native town. Home-sickness of a violence that no one would credit a child with being capable of experiencing, fell upon me. I spoke our local dialect only, and people who talked French "were not mine own people." I would wake in the middle of the night and inquire whether we were not soon to start on our return to our own land.

No dainty tempted me, no toy could amuse me. Drums and trumpets equally failed to relieve my gloom. Among the objects and beings I regretted figured a dog called Cagnotte, whom it had been found impossible to bring with us. His absence told on me to such an extent that one morning, having first chucked out of [285] the window my little tin soldiers, my German village with its painted houses, and my bright red fiddle, I was about to take the same road to return as speedily as possible to Tarbes, the Gascons, and Cagnotte. I was grabbed by the jacket in the nick of time, and Josephine, my nurse, had the happy thought to tell me that Cagnotte, tired of waiting for us, was coming that very day by the stage-coach. Children accept the improbable with artless faith; nothing strikes them as impossible; only, they must not be deceived, for there is no impairing the fixity of a settled idea in their brains. I kept asking, every fifteen minutes, whether Cagnotte had not yet come. To quiet me, Josephine bought on the Pont-Neuf a little dog not unlike the Tarbes specimen. I did not feel sure of its identity, but I was told that travelling changed dogs very much. I was satisfied with the explanation and accepted the Pont-Neuf dog as being the authentic Cagnotte. He was very gentle, very amiable, and very well behaved. He would lick my cheeks, and indeed his tongue was not above licking also the slices of bread and butter cut for my afternoon tea. We lived on the best of terms with each other.

Presently, however, the supposed Cagnotte became [286] sad, troubled, and his movements lost their freedom. He found it difficult to curl himself up, lost his jolly

agility, breathed hard and could not eat. One day, while caressing him, I felt a seam that ran down his stomach, which was much swelled and very tight. I called my nurse. She came, took a pair of scissors cut the thread, and Cagnotte, freed of a sort of overcoat made of curled lambskin, in which he had been tricked out by the Pont-Neuf dealers to make him look like a poodle, appeared in all the wretched guise and ugliness of a street cur, a worthless mongrel. He had grown fat, and his scant garment was choking him. Once he was rid of his carapace, he wagged his ears, stretched his limbs, and started romping joyously round the room, caring nothing about being ugly so long as he was comfortable. His appetite returned, and he made up by his moral qualities for his lack of beauty. In Cagnotte's company I gradually lost, for he was a genuine child of Paris, my remembrance of Tarbes and of the high mountains visible from our windows; I learned French and I also became a thorough-paced Parisian.

The reader is not to suppose that this is a story I have invented for the sole purpose of entertaining[287] him. It is literally true, and proves that the dog-dealers of that day were quite as clever as horse-coupers in the art of making up their animals and taking in purchasers.

After Cagnotte's death, my liking was rather for cats, on account of their being more sedentary and fonder of the fireplace. I shall not attempt to relate their history in detail. Dynasties of felines, as numerous as the dynasties of Egyptian kings, succeeded each other in our home. Accident, flight, or death accounted for them in turns. They were all beloved and regretted; but life is made up of forgetfulness, and the remembrance of cats passes away like the remembrance of men.

It is a sad thing that the life of these humble friends, of these inferior brethren, should not be proportionate to that of their masters.

I shall do no more than mention an old gray cat that used to side with me against my parents, and bit my mother's ankles when she scolded me or seemed about to punish me, and come at once to Childebrand, a cat of the Romanticist period. The name suffices to let my reader understand the secret desire I felt to run counter to Boileau, whom I disliked then, but[288] with whom I have since made my peace. It will be remembered that Nicolas says:—

“Oh! ridiculous notion of poet ignorant
Who, of so many heroes, chooses Childebrand!”

It seemed to me that the man was not so ignorant after all, since he had selected a hero no one knew anything of; and, besides, Childebrand struck me as a most long-haired, Merovingian, mediæval, and Gothic name, immeasurably preferable to any Greek name, such as Agamemnon, Achilles, Idomeneus, Ulysses, or others of that sort. These were the ways of our day, so far as the young fellows were concerned, at least: for never, to quote the expression that occurs in the account of Kaulbach's frescoes on

the outer walls of the Pinacothek at Munich, never did the hydra of “wiggery” (*perruquinisme*) erect its heads more fiercely, and no doubt the Classicists called their cats Hector, Patrocles, or Ajax.

Childebrand was a splendid gutter-cat, short-haired, striped black and tan, like the trunks worn by Saltabadil in “le Roi s’amuse.” His great green eyes with their almond-shaped pupils, and his regular velvet stripes, gave him a distant tigerish look that I liked. “Cats[289] are the tigers of poor devils,” I once wrote. Childebrand enjoyed the honour of entering into some verses of mine, again because I wanted to tease Boileau:—

“Then shall I describe to you that picture by Rembrandt, that pleased me so much; and my cat Childebrand, as is his habit, on my knees resting, and anxiously up at me gazing, shall follow the motions of my finger as in the air it sketches the story to make it clear.”

Childebrand came in well by way of a rime to Rembrandt, for the verses were meant for a Romanticist profession of faith addressed to a friend, since deceased, and in those days as enthusiastic an admirer of Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, and Alfred de Musset as I was.

I am compelled to say of my cats what Don Ruy Gomez de Silva said to Don Carlos, when the latter became impatient at the enumeration of the former’s ancestors, beginning with Don Silvius “who thrice was Consul of Rome,” that is, “I pass over a number, and of the greatest,” and I shall come to Madame-Théophile, a red cat with white breast, pink nose, and blue eyes, so called because she lived with me on a footing of conjugal intimacy. She slept on the foot of my bed, snoozed on the arm of my chair while I was writing, came down to the garden and accompanied me[290] on my walks, sat at meals with me and not infrequently appropriated the morsels on their way from my plate to my mouth.

One day a friend of mine, who was going out of town for a few days, intrusted his parrot to me with the request that I would take care of it during his absence. The bird, feeling strange in my house, had climbed, helping himself with his beak, to the very top of his perch, and looking pretty well bewildered, rolled round his eyes, that resembled the gilt nails on arm-chairs, and wrinkled the whitish membrane that served him for eyelids. Madame-Théophile had never seen a parrot, and she was evidently much puzzled by the strange bird. Motionless as an Egyptian mummy cat in its net-work of bands, she gazed upon it with an air of profound meditation, and put together whatever she had been able to pick up of natural history on the roofs, the yard, and the garden. Her thoughts were reflected in her shifting glance, and I was able to read in it the result of her examination: “It is unmistakably a chicken.”

Having reached this conclusion, she sprang from the table on which she had posted herself to make her investigations, and crouched down in one corner of the[291] room,

flat on her stomach, her elbows out, her head low, her muscular backbone on the stretch, like the black panther in Gérôme's painting, watching gazelles on their way to the drinking-place.

The parrot followed her movements with feverish anxiety, fluffing out its feathers, rattling its chain, lifting its foot, and moving its claws, and sharpening its beak upon the edge of its seed-box. Its instinct warned it that an enemy was preparing to attack it.

The eyes of the cat, fixed upon the bird with an intensity that had something of fascination in it, plainly said in a language well understood of the parrot and absolutely intelligible: "Green though it is, that chicken must be good to eat."

I watched the scene with much interest, prepared to interfere at the proper time. Madame-Théophile had gradually crawled nearer; her pink nose was working, her eyes were half closed, her claws were protruded and then drawn in. She thrilled with anticipation like a gourmet sitting down to enjoy a truffled pullet; she gloated over the thought of the choice and succulent meal she was about to enjoy, and her sensuality was tickled by the idea of the exotic dish that was to be hers.

[292]Suddenly she arched her back like a bow that is being drawn, and a swift leap landed her right on the perch. The parrot, seeing the danger upon him, unexpectedly called out in a deep, sonorous bass voice: "Have you had your breakfast, Jack?"

The words filled the cat with indescribable terror; and she leapt back. The blast of a trumpet, the smash of a pile of crockery, or a pistol-shot fired by her ear would not have dismayed the feline to such an extent. All her ornithological notions were upset.

"And what did you have?—A royal roast," went on the bird.

The cat's expression clearly meant: "This is not a bird; it's a man; it speaks."

"When of claret I've drunk my fill,
The pot-house whirls and is whirling still,"

sang out the bird with a deafening voice, for it had at once perceived that the terror inspired by its speech was its surest means of defence.

The cat looked at me questioningly, and my reply proving unsatisfactory, she sneaked under the bed, and refused to come out for the rest of the day.

Those of my readers who have not been in the habit[293] of having animals to keep them company, and who see in them, as did Descartes, merely machines, will no doubt think I am attributing intentions to the bird and the quadruped, but as a matter of fact, I have merely translated their thoughts into human speech. The next day, Madame-Théophile, having somewhat overcome her fright, made another attempt, and was

routed in the same fashion. That was enough for her, and henceforth she remained convinced that the bird was a man.

This dainty and lovely creature adored perfumes. She would go into ecstasies on breathing in the patchouli and vetiver used for Cashmere shawls. She had also a taste for music. Nestling upon a pile of scores, she would listen most attentively and with every mark of satisfaction to the singers who came to perform at the critic's piano. But high notes made her nervous, and she never failed to close the singer's mouth with her paw if the lady sang the high A. We used to try the experiment for the fun of the thing, and it never failed once. It was quite impossible to fool my dilettante cat on that note.

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II THE WHITE DYNASTY

LET me come to more recent times. A cat brought from Havana by Mlle. Aïta de la Penuela, a young Spanish artist whose studies of white angora cats used to adorn and still adorn the show-windows of the print-sellers, gave birth to the daintiest little kitten, exactly like the puffs used for the application of face powder, which kitten was presented to me. Its immaculate whiteness caused it to be named Pierrot, and this appellation, when it grew up, developed into Don Pierrot of Navarre, which was infinitely more majestic and smacked of a grandee of Spain.

Don Pierrot, like all animals that are fondled and petted, became delightfully amiable, and shared the life of the household with that fulness of satisfaction cats derive from close association with the fireside. Seated in his customary place, close to the fire, he really looked as if he understood the conversation and was interested[295] in it. He followed the speakers with his eyes, and every now and then would utter a little cry, exactly as if to object and give his own opinion upon literature, which formed the staple of our talks. He was very fond of books, and when he found one open on the table, he would lie down by it, gaze attentively at the page and turn the leaves with his claws; then he ended by going to sleep, just as if he had really been reading a fashionable novel. As soon as I picked up my pen, he would leap upon the desk, and watch attentively the steel nib scribbling away on the paper, moving his head every time I began a new line. Sometimes he endeavoured to collaborate with me, and would snatch

the pen out of my hand, no doubt with the intention of writing in his turn, for he was as æsthetic a cat as Hoffmann's Murr. Indeed, I strongly suspect that he was in the habit of inditing his memoirs, at night, in some gutter or another, by the light of his own phosphorescent eyes. Unfortunately, these lucubrations are lost.

Don Pierrot of Navarre always sat up at night until I came home, waiting for me on the inside of the door, and as soon as I stepped into the antechamber he would come rubbing himself against my legs, arching[296] his back and purring in gladsome, friendly fashion. Then he would start to walk in front of me, preceding me like a page, and I am sure that if I had asked him to do so, he would have carried my candle. In this way he would escort me to my bedroom, wait until I had undressed, jump up on the bed, put his paws round my neck, rub his nose against mine, lick me with his tiny red tongue, rough as a file, and utter little inarticulate cries by way of expressing unmistakably the pleasure he felt at seeing me again. When he had sufficiently caressed me and it was time to sleep he used to perch upon the backboard of his bed and slept there like a bird roosting on a branch. As soon as I woke in the morning, he would come and stretch out beside me until I rose.

Midnight was the latest time allowed for my return home. On this point Pierrot was as inflexible as a janitor. Now, at that time I had founded, along with a few friends, a little evening reunion called "The Four Candles Society," the place of meeting happening to be lighted by four candles stuck in silver candlesticks placed at each corner of the table. Occasionally the conversation became so absorbing that I would forget the time, even at the risk of seeing, like Cin[297]derella, my carriage turn into a pumpkin and my coachman into a big rat. Twice or thrice Pierrot sat up for me until two o'clock in the morning, but presently he took offence at my conduct and went to bed without waiting for me. I was touched by this mute protest against my innocently disorderly way of life, and thereafter I regularly returned home at midnight. Pierrot, however, proved hard to win back; he wanted to make sure that my repentance was no mere passing matter, but once he was convinced that I had really reformed, he deigned to restore me to his good graces and again took up his nightly post in the antechamber.

It is no easy matter to win a cat's love, for cats are philosophical, sedate, quiet animals, fond of their own way, liking cleanliness and order, and not apt to bestow their affection hastily. They are quite willing to be friends, if you prove worthy of their friendship, but they decline to be slaves. They are affectionate, but they exercise free will, and will not do for you what they consider to be unreasonable. Once, however, they have bestowed their friendship, their trust is absolute, and their affection most faithful. They become one's companions in hours of solitude, sadness, and labour. A cat will stay on your knees a whole evening,[298] purring away, happy in your company and careless of that of its own species. In vain do mewings sound on the roofs, inviting it to one of the cat parties where red herring brine takes the place of tea; it is not to be tempted and spends the evening with you. If you put it down, it is back in a jiffy with a

kind of cooing that sounds like a gentle reproach. Sometimes, sitting up in front of you, it looks at you so softly, so tenderly, so caressingly, and in so human a way that it is almost terrifying, for it is impossible to believe that there is no mind back of those eyes.

Don Pierrot of Navarre had a mate of the same breed just as white as himself. All the expressions I have accumulated in the "Symphony in White Major" for the purpose of rendering the idea of snowy whiteness would be insufficient to give an idea of the immaculate coat of my cat, by the side of which the ermine's fur would have looked yellow. I called her *Séraphita*, after Balzac's Swedenborgian novel. Never did the heroine of that wondrous legend, when ascending with Minna the snow-covered summits of the Falberg, gleam more purely white. *Séraphita* was of a dreamy and contemplative disposition. She would remain for hours on a cushion, wide-awake and follow[299]ing with her eyes, with intensest attention, sights invisible to ordinary mortals. She liked to be petted, but returned caresses in a very reserved way, and only in the case of persons whom she honoured with her approbation, a most difficult thing to obtain. She was fond of luxury, and we were always sure to find her curled up in the newest arm-chair or on the piece of stuff that best set off her swan's-down coat. She spent endless time at her toilet; every morning she carefully smoothed out her fur. She used her paws to wash herself, and every single hair of her fur, having been brushed out with her rosy tongue, shone like brand-new silver. If any one touched her, she at once removed the traces of the touch, for she could not bear to be rumped. Her elegance and stylishness suggested that she was an aristocrat, and among her own kind she must have been a duchess at the very least. She delighted in perfumes, stuck her little nose into bouquets, and bit with little spasms of pleasure at handkerchiefs on which scent had been put; she walked upon the dressing-table among the scent-bottles, smelling the stoppers, and if she had been allowed to do so would no doubt have used powder. Such was *Séraphita*, and never did a cat bear a poetic name more worthily.

[300]At about this time a couple of those sham sailors who sell striped rugs, handkerchiefs of pine-apple fibre and other exotic products, happened to pass through the Rue de Longchamps, where I was living. They had in a little cage a pair of white Norway rats with red eyes, as pretty as pretty could be. Just then I had a fancy for white creatures, and my hen-run was inhabited by white fowls only. I bought the two rats, and a big cage was built for them, with inner stairs leading to the different stories, eating-places, bedrooms, and trapezes for gymnastics. They were unquestionably happier and better off there than La Fontaine's rat in his Dutch cheese.

The gentle creatures, which, I really do not know why, inspire puerile repulsion, became astonishingly tame as soon as they found out that no harm was intended them. They allowed themselves to be petted just like cats, and would catch my finger in their ideally delicate little rosy hands, and lick it in the friendliest way. They used to be let out at the end of our meals, and would clamber up the arms, the shoulders, and the heads of the guests, emerging from the sleeves of coats and dressing-gowns with marvellous

skill and agility. All these performances, carried out very[301] prettily, were intended to secure permission to forage among the remains of the dessert. They were then placed on the table, and in a twinkling the male and female had put away the nuts, filberts, raisins, and lumps of sugar. It was most amusing to watch their quick, eager ways, and their astonishment when they reached the edge of the table. Then, however, we would hold out to them a strip of wood reaching to their cage, and they stored away their gains in their pantry.

The pair multiplied rapidly, and numerous families, as white as their progenitors, ran up and down the little ladders in the cage, so that ere long I found myself the owner of some thirty rats so very tame that when the weather was cold they were in the habit of nestling in my pockets in order to keep warm, and remained there perfectly still. Sometimes I used to have the doors of my City of Rats thrown open, and, after having ascended to the topmost story of my house, I whistled in a way very familiar to my pets. Then the rats, which find it difficult to ascend steps, climbed up the balusters, got on to the rail, and proceeding in Indian file while keeping their equilibrium like acrobats, ascended that narrow road not infrequently descended astride by schoolboys, and came to[302] me uttering little squeaks and manifesting the liveliest joy. And now I must confess to a piece of stupidity on my part. I had so often been told that a rat's tail looked like a red worm and spoiled the creature's pretty looks, that I selected one of the younger generation and cut off the much criticised caudal appendage with a red-hot shovel. The little rat bore the operation very well, grew apace, and became an imposing fellow with mustaches. But though he was the lighter for the loss of his tail, he was much less agile than his comrades; he was very careful about trying gymnastics and fell very often. He always brought up the rear when the company ascended the balusters, and looked like a tight-rope dancer trying to do without a balancing-pole. Then I understood the usefulness of a tail in the case of rats: it aids them to maintain their equilibrium when scampering along cornices and narrow ledges. They swing it to the right or the left by way of counterpoise when they lean over to the one side or the other; hence the constant switching which appears so causeless. When one observes Nature carefully, one readily comes to the conclusion that she does nothing that is unnecessary, and that one ought to be very careful in attempting to improve upon her.

[303]No doubt my reader wonders how cats and rats, two races so hostile to each other, and the one of which is the prey of the other, can manage to live together. The fact is that mine got on wonderfully harmoniously together. The cats were good as gold to the rats, which had lost all fear of them. The felines were never perfidious, and the rats never had to mourn the loss of a single comrade. Don Pierrot of Navarre was uncommonly fond of them; he would lie down by their cage and spend hours watching them at play. When by chance the door of the room was closed, he would scratch and miaoul gently until it was opened and he could join his little white friends, which often came and slept by him. Séraphita, who was more stand-off and who disliked the strong

odour of musk given out by the rats, did not take part in their sports, but she never harmed them, and allowed them to pass quietly in front of her without ever unsheathing her claws.

The end of these rats was strange. One heavy, stormy summer's day, when the mercury was nearly up to a hundred degrees, their cage had been put in the garden, in an arbour covered with creepers, as they seemed to feel the heat greatly. The storm burst with[304] lightnings, rain, thunder, and squalls of wind. The tall poplars on the river bank bent like reeds. Armed with an umbrella, which the wind turned inside out, I was just starting to fetch in my rats, when a dazzling flash of lightning, which seemed to tear open the very depths of heaven, stopped me on the uppermost of the steps leading from the terrace to the garden.

A terrific thunder-clap, louder than the report of a hundred guns, followed almost instantaneously upon the flash, and the shock was so violent that I was nearly thrown to the ground.

The storm passed away shortly after that frightful explosion, but, on reaching the arbour, I found the thirty-two rats, toes up, killed by the one and same stroke of lightning. No doubt the iron wires of their cage had attracted the electric fluid and acted as a conductor.

Thus died together, as they had lived, the thirty-two Norway rats,—an enviable death, not often vouchsafed by fate!

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III THE BLACK DYNASTY

DON PIERROT of Navarre, being a native of Havana, required a hot-house temperature, and he enjoyed it in the house; round the dwelling, however, stretched great gardens, separated by open fences through which a cat could easily make its way, and rose great trees in which twittered, warbled, and sang whole flocks of birds; so that sometimes Pierrot, profiting by a door left open, would go out at night and start on a hunt, rambling through the grass and flowers wet with dew. In such cases he would have to await daylight to be let in, for although he would come and miaoul under our

windows, his appeals did not always awaken the sleepers in the house. He had a delicate chest, and one night, when it was colder than usual, he caught a cold which soon turned into consumption. After coughing for a whole year poor Pierrot became thin and emaciated, and his coat, formerly so silky, had the mat whiteness of a[306] shroud. His great transparent eyes had become the most important feature in his poor shrunken face; his red nose had turned pale, and he walked with slow steps, in a melancholy fashion, by the sunny side of the wall, watching the yellow autumn leaves whirling and twisting. One could have sworn he was reciting to himself Millevoye's elegy. A sick animal is a very touching object, for it bears suffering with such gentle and sad resignation. We did all we could to save him; I called in a very skilful physician who tested his chest and felt his pulse. Ass's milk was prescribed, and the poor little creature drank it willingly enough out of his tiny china saucer. He would remain for hours at a time stretched out on my knee like the shadow of a sphinx; I could feel his vertebræ like the grains of a chaplet, and he would try to acknowledge my caresses with a feeble purr that sounded like a death-rattle. On the day he died, he lay on his side gasping, but got himself up by a supreme effort, came to me, and opening wide his eyes, fixed upon me a glance that called for help with intense supplication. He seemed to say to me, "You are a man; do save me." Then he staggered, his eyes already glazed, and fell to the ground, uttering so woeful, so despair[307]ing, so anguished a cry that it filled me with mute horror. He was buried at the foot of the garden, under a white rosebush that still marks the place of his tomb.

Séraphita died two or three years later, of croup, which the physician was unable to master. She rests not far from Pierrot.

With her ended the White Dynasty, but not the family. From that pair of snow-white cats had sprung three coal-black kittens, a mystery the solution of which I leave to others. Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables" were then all the rage, and the names of the characters in the novel were in every one's mouth. The two little male cats were called Enjolras and Gavroche, and the female Eponine. They were the sweetest of kittens, and we trained them to fetch and carry pieces of paper thrown at a distance just as a dog would do. We got so far as to throw the paper ball on the top of wardrobes, or to hide it behind boxes or in tall vases, and they would retrieve it very prettily with their paws. On attaining years of discretion, they forsook these frivolous sports and resumed the dreamy, philosophical calm which is the real characteristic of cats.

[308]All negroes are alike to people who land in a slave-owning country in America, and it is impossible for them to tell one from another. So, to those who do not care for them, three black cats are three black cats and nothing more. But an observing eye makes no such mistake. The physiognomies of animals are as different as those of men, and I could always tell to which particular cat belonged the black face, as black as Harlequin's mask, and lighted by emerald disks with golden gleams.

Enjolras, who was by far the handsomest of the three, was marked by his big lion-like head and well whiskered cheeks, by his muscular shoulders, his long back, and his splendid tail, fluffy as a feather duster. There was something theatrical and grandiloquent about him, and he seemed to pose like an actor who attracts admiration. His motions were slow, undulating, and full of majesty; he seemed to be always stepping on a table covered with china ornaments and Venetian glass, so circumspectly did he select the place where he put down his foot. He was not much of a Stoic, and exhibited a liking for food which his namesake would have had reason to blame. No doubt Enjolras, the pure and sober youth, would have said to[309] him, as the angel did to Swedenborg, "You eat too much." We rather encouraged this amusing voracity, analogous to that of monkeys, and Enjolras grew to a size and weight very uncommon among domestic cats. Then I bethought myself of having him shaved in the style of poodles, in order to bring out completely his leonine appearance. He retained his mane and a long tuft of hair at the end of the tail, and I would not swear that his thighs were not adorned with mutton-chop whiskers like those Munito used to wear. Thus trimmed, he resembled, I must confess, a Japanese monster much more than a lion of the Atlas Mountains or the Cape. Never was a more extravagant fancy carried out on the body of a living animal; his closely clipped coat allowed the skin to show through, and its bluish tones, most curious to note, contrasted strangely with his black mane.

Gavroche was a cat with a sharp, satirical look, as if he intended to recall his namesake in the novel. Smaller than Enjolras, he was endowed with abrupt and comical agility, and in the stead of the puns and slang of the Paris street-Arab, he indulged in the funniest capers, leaps, and attitudes. I am bound to add that, yielding to his street instincts, Gavroche was in[310] the habit of seizing every opportunity of leaving the drawing-room and going off to join, in the court, and even in the public streets, numbers of wandering cats, "of unknown blood and lineage low," with whom he took part in performances of doubtful taste, completely forgetful of his dignified rank as a Havana cat, the son of the illustrious Don Pierrot of Navarre, a grandee of Spain of the first class, and of the Marchioness Séraphita, noted for her haughty and aristocratic manners.

Sometimes he would bring in to his meals, in order to treat them, consumptive friends of his, so starved that every rib in their body showed, having nothing but skin and bones, whom he had picked up in the course of his excursions and wanderings, for he was a kind-hearted fellow. The poor devils, their ears laid back, their tails between their legs, their glance restless, dreading to be driven from their free meal by a housemaid armed with a broom, swallowed the pieces two, three, and four at a time, and like the famous dog, *Siete Aguas* (Seven Waters), of Spanish posadas, would lick the platter as clean as if it had been washed and scoured by a Dutch housekeeper who had served as model to Mieris or Gerard Dow. Whenever I saw[311] Gavroche's companions, I remembered the lettering under one of Gavarni's drawings: "A nice lot, the friends you are capable

of proceeding with!" But after all it was merely a proof of Gavroche's kindness of heart, for he was quite able to polish off the plateful himself.

The cat who bore the name of the interesting Eponine was more lissome and slender in shape than her brothers. Her mien was quite peculiar to herself, owing to her somewhat long face, her eyes slanting slightly in the Chinese fashion, and of a green like that of the eyes of Pallas Athene, on whom Homer invariably bestows the title of γλαυκῶπις, her velvety black nose, of as fine a grain as a Perigord truffle, and her incessantly moving whiskers. Her coat, of a superb black, was always in motion and shimmered with infinite changes. There never was a more sensitive, nervous, and electric animal. If she were stroked two or three times, in the dark, blue sparks came crackling from her fur. She attached herself to me in particular, just as in the novel Eponine becomes attached to Marius. As I was less taken up with Cosette than that handsome youth, I accepted the love of my affectionate and devoted cat, who is still the[312] assiduous companion of my labours and the delight of my hermitage on the confines of the suburbs. She trots up when she hears the bell ring, welcomes my visitors, leads them into the drawing-room, shows them to a seat, talks to them—yes, I mean it, talks to them—with croonings and cooings and whimpers quite unlike the language cats make use of among themselves, and which simulate the articulate speech of man. You ask me what it is she says? She says, in the plainest possible fashion: "Do not be impatient; look at the pictures or chat with me, if you enjoy that. My master will be down in a minute." And when I come in she discreetly retires to an arm-chair or on top of the piano, and listens to the conversation without breaking in upon it, like a well-bred animal that is used to society.

Sweet Eponine has given us so many proofs of intelligence, kindly disposition, and sociability that she has been promoted, by common consent, to the dignity of a *person*, for it is plain that a higher order of reason than instinct guides her actions. This dignity entails the right of eating at table like a person, and not from a saucer in a corner, like an animal. So Eponine's chair is placed beside mine at lunch and dinner, and on[313] account of her size she is allowed to rest her fore paws upon the edge of the table. She has her own place set, without fork or spoon, but with her glass. She eats of every course that is brought on, from the soup to the dessert, always waiting for her turn to be served and behaving with a discretion and decency that it is to be wished were more frequently met with in children. She turns up at the first sound of the bell, and when we enter the dining-room we are sure to find her already in her place, standing on her chair, her paws on the edge of the table, and holding up her little head to be kissed, like a well-bred young lady who is polite and affectionate towards her parents and her elders.

The sun has its spots, the diamond its flaws, and perfection itself its little weak points. Eponine, it must be owned, has an overmastering fondness for fish, a taste she shares in common with all her race. The Latin proverb, *Catus amat pisces, sed non vult tingere*

plantas, to the contrary notwithstanding, she is always ready to pop her paw into the water to fish out a blay, a small carp, or a trout. Fish makes her well-nigh delirious, and like children eagerly looking for the dessert, she is apt to object to the soup, when the[314] preliminary investigations she has carried on in the kitchen have enabled her to ascertain that the fish has duly come in and that there is no reason why Vatel should run himself through with his sword. In such cases we do not help her to fish, and I remark to her, in a cold tone, "A lady who has no appetite for soup cannot have any appetite for fish," and the dish is remorselessly sent past her. Then seeing that it is no joking matter, dainty Eponine bolts her soup in hot haste, licks up the very last drop of the bouillon, puts away the minutest crumb of bread or Italian paste, and turns round to me with the proud look of one conscious of being without fear or reproach and of having fulfilled her duty. Her share of the fish is handed to her, and she despatches it with every mark of extreme satisfaction. Then, having tasted a little of every dish, she winds up her meal by drinking one-third of a glassful of water.

If we happen to have guests at dinner, Eponine does not need to have seen them enter to be aware that there is to be company. She simply looks at her place, and if she sees a knife, fork, and spoon laid there, she makes off at once and perches on the piano stool, her usual place of refuge in such cases. Those who[315] deny reasoning powers to animals may explain this fact, so simple apparently, yet so suggestive, as best they may. That judicious and observant cat of mine deduces from the presence by her plate of utensils which man alone understands how to use that she must give up her position for that day to a guest, and she forthwith does so. Never once has she made a mistake. Only, when she is well acquainted with the particular guest, she will climb upon his knee and seek, by her graceful ways and her caresses, to induce him to bestow some tit-bit upon her.

But enough of this; I must not weary my readers, and stories of cats are less attractive than stories about dogs. Yet I deem that I ought to tell of the deaths of Enjolras and Gavroche. In the Latin Rudiments there is a rule stated thus: *Sua eum perdidit ambitio*. Of Enjolras it may be said: *Sua eum perdidit pinguitudo*, that is, his admirable condition was the cause of his death. He was killed by idiotic fanciers of jugged hare. His murderers, however, perished before the end of the year in the most painful manner; for the death of a black cat, an eminently cabalistic animal, never goes unavenged.

Gavroche, seized with a frantic love of freedom, or[316] rather with a sudden attack of vertigo, sprang out of the window one day, crossed the street, climbed the fence of the Parc Saint-James, which faces our house, and vanished. In spite of our utmost endeavours, we never managed to hear of him again, and a shadow of mystery hangs over his fate; so that the only survivor of the Black Dynasty is Eponine, who is still faithful to her master and has become a thorough cat of letters.

Her companion now is a magnificent angora cat, whose gray and silver fur recalls Chinese spotted porcelain. He is called Zizi, alias "Too Handsome to Work." The handsome fellow lives in a sort of contemplative *kief*, like a theriaki under the influence of the drug, and makes one think of "The Ecstasies of Mr. Hochenez." Zizi is passionately fond of music, and, not satisfied with listening to it, he indulges in it himself. Sometimes, in the dead of night, when everybody is asleep, a strange, fantastic melody, which the Kreislers and the musicians of the future might well envy, breaks in upon the silence. It is Zizi walking upon the key-board of the piano which has been left open, and who is at once astonished and delighted at hearing the keys sing under his tread.

[317]It would be unjust not to link with this branch Cleopatra, Eponine's daughter, whose shy disposition keeps her from mingling in society. She is of a tawny black, like Mummia, Atta-Croll's hairy companion, and her two green eyes look like huge aquamarines. She generally stands on three legs, her fourth lifted up like a classical lion that has lost its marble ball.

These be the chronicles of the Black Dynasty. Enjolras, Gavroche, and Eponine recall to me the creations of a beloved master; only, when I re-read "Les Misérables," the chief characters in the novel seem to me to be taken by black cats, a fact that in no wise diminishes the interest I take in it.

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IV THIS SIDE FOR DOGS

I HAVE often been charged with not being fond of dogs; a charge which does not at first sight appear to be very serious, but which I nevertheless desire to clear myself of, for it implies a certain amount of dislike. People who prefer cats are thought by many to be cruel, sensuous, and treacherous, while dog-lovers are credited with being frank, loyal, and open-hearted,—in a word, possessed of all the qualities attributed to the canine race. I in no wise deny the merits of Médor, Turk, Miraut, and other engaging animals, and I am prepared to acknowledge the truth of the axiom formulated by Charlet,—“The best thing about man is his dog.” I have been the owner of several, and I still own some. Should any of those who seek to discredit me come to my house, they

would be met by a Havana lap-dog barking shrilly and furiously at them, and by a greyhound that very likely would bite their legs for them. But my affection for[319] dogs has an understratum of fear. These excellent creatures, so good, so faithful, so devoted, so loving, may go mad at any moment, and then they become more dangerous than a lance-head snake, an asp, a rattlesnake or a cobra capella. This reacts on my love for dogs. Then dogs strike me as a bit uncanny; they have such a searching, intense glance; they sit down in front of you with so questioning a look that it is fairly embarrassing. Goethe disliked that glance of theirs that seems to attempt to incorporate man's soul within itself, and he drove away dogs, saying, "You shall not swallow my monad, much as you may try."

The Pharamond of my canine dynasty was called Luther. He was a big white spaniel, with liver spots, and handsome brown ears. He was a setter, had lost his owner, and after looking for him a long time in vain, had taken to living in my father's house at Passy. Not having partridges to go after, he had taken to rat-hunting, and was as clever at it as a Scotch terrier. At that time I was living in that blind alley of the Doyenné, now destroyed, where Gérard de Nerval, Arsène Houssaye and Camille Rogier were the heads of a little picturesque and artistic Bohemia, the eccentric mode of life in which has been so well told by[320] others that it is unnecessary to relate it over again. There we were, right in the centre of the Carrousel, as independent and solitary as on a desert island in Oceanica, under the shadow of the Louvre, among the blocks of stone and the nettles, close to an old ruinous church, with fallen-in roof which looked most romantic in the moonlight. Luther, with whom I was on a most friendly footing, seeing that I had finally abandoned the paternal nest, made a point of coming to see me every morning. He started from Passy, no matter what the weather was, came down the Quai de Billy, the Cours-la-Reine, and reached my place at about eight o'clock, just as I was waking. He used to scratch at the door, which was opened for him, and he dashed joyously at me with yelps of joy, put his paws on my knees, received with a modest and unassuming air the caresses his noble conduct merited, took a look round the room, and started back to Passy. On arriving there, he went to my mother, wagged his tail, barked a little, and said as plainly as if he had spoken: "I have seen young master; don't worry; he is all right." Having thus reported to the proper person the result of his self-imposed mission, he would drink up half a bowlful of water, eat his food, lie down on[321] the carpet by my mother's chair,—for he entertained peculiar affection for her,—and sleep for an hour or two after his long run. Now, how do people who maintain that animals do not think and are incapable of putting two and two together explain this morning visit, which kept up family relations and brought to the home-nest news of the fledgeling that had so recently left it?

Poor Luther's end was very sad. He became taciturn, morose, and one fine morning bolted from the house, feeling the rabies on him and resolved not to bite his masters; so

he fled, and we have every reason to believe that he was killed as a mad dog, for we never saw him again.

After a pretty long interregnum a new dog was brought into the house. It was called Zamore, and was a sort of spaniel, of very mixed breed, small in size, with a black coat, save the tan spots over his eyes and the tan hair on his stomach. On the whole he was insignificant physically, and ugly rather than handsome; but morally, he was a remarkable dog. He absolutely despised women, would not obey them, never would follow them, and never once did my mother or my sisters manage to win from him the least sign of friend[322]ship or deference. He would accept their attentions and the tit-bits they gave him with a superior air, but never did he express any gratitude for them. Never would he yelp, never would he rap the floor with his tail, never bestow on them a single one of those caresses dogs are so fond of lavishing. He remained impassible in a sphinx-like pose, like a serious man who will not take part in the conversation of frivolous persons. The master he had elected was my father, in whom he acknowledged the authority of the head of the house, and whom he considered a mature and serious man. But his affection for him was austere and stoical, and was not shown by gambadoes, larks, and lickings. Only, he always kept his eyes upon him, followed his every motion and kept close to heel, never allowing himself the smallest escapade or the least nod to any passing comrades. My dear and lamented father was a great fisherman before the Lord, and he caught more barbels than Nimrod ever slew antelopes. It certainly could not be said of his fishing-rod that it was a pole and string with a worm at one end and a fool at the other, for he was a very clever man, and none the less he daily filled his basket with fish. Zamore used to accompany him on his trips, and[323] during the long night-watches entailed by ground-line fishing for the big fellows, he would stand on the very edge of the water, apparently trying to fathom its dark depths and to follow the movements of the prey. Although he often pricked up his ears at the faint and distant sounds that, at night, are heard in the deepest silence, he never barked, having understood that to be mute is a quality indispensable in a fisherman's dog. In vain did Phœbe's alabaster brow show above the horizon reflected in the sombre mirror of the river; Zamore would not bay at the moon, although such prolonged ululation gives infinite delight to creatures of his species. Only when the bell on the set-line tinkled did he look at his master and allow himself one short bark, knowing that the prey was caught; and he appeared to take the greatest interest in the manœuvres involved in the landing of a three or four pound barbel.

No one would have suspected that under his calm, abstracted, philosophical look, this dog, so serious that he was almost melancholy, and despised all frivolity, nursed an overmastering, strange, never to be suspected passion, absolutely contrary to his apparent moral and physical character.

[324]"You do not mean," I hear my reader exclaim, "that the good Zamore had hidden vices?—that he was a thief?" No. "A libertine?" No. "That he loved brandied cherries?"

No. "That he bit people?" Never. Zamore was crazy about dancing. He was an artist devoted to the choregraphic art.

He became conscious of his vocation in the following manner. One day there appeared on the square at Passy a gray moke, with sores on its back, and drooping ears, one of those wretched mountebanks' asses that Decamps and Fouquet used to paint so well. The two baskets balanced on either side of his raw and prominent backbone contained a troupe of trained dogs, dressed as marquesses, troubadours, Turks, Alpine shepherdesses, or Queens of Golconda, according to their sex. The impresario put down the dogs, cracked his whip, and suddenly every one of the actors forsook the horizontal for the perpendicular position, and transformed itself into a biped. The drum and fife started up and the ballet commenced.

Zamore, who was gravely idling around, stopped smitten with wonder at the sight. The dogs, dressed in showy colours, braided with imitation gold lace on every seam, a plumed hat or a turban on their heads,[325] and moving in cadence to a witching rhythm, with a distant resemblance to human beings, appeared to him to be supernatural creatures. The skilfully linked steps, the slides, the pirouettes delighted but did not discourage him. Like Correggio at the sight of Raphael's painting, he exclaimed in his canine speech, *Anch' io son pittore!* and when the company filed past him, he also, filled with a noble spirit of emulation, rose up, somewhat uncertainly, upon his hind legs and attempted to join them, to the great delight of the onlookers.

The manager did not see it in that light, and let fly a smart cut of his whip at Zamore, who was driven from the circle, just as a spectator would be ejected from the theatre did he, during the performance, take on himself to ascend to the stage and to take part in the ballet.

This public humiliation did not check Zamore's vocation. He returned home with drooping tail and thoughtful mien, and during the whole of the remainder of that day was more reserved, more taciturn, and more morose than ever. But in the dead of night my sisters were awakened by slight sounds, the cause of which they could not conjecture, which proceeded from an[326] uninhabited room next theirs, where Zamore was usually put to bed on an old arm-chair. It sounded like a rhythmic tread, made more sonorous by the silence of night. They at first supposed that the mice were romping round, but the sound of steps and leaps on the flooring was too loud for that. The bravest of my sisters rose, partly opened the door, and by the light of a moonbeam streaming in through a pane, she beheld Zamore on his hind legs, pawing the air with his fore paws, and busy studying the dancing steps he had admired in the street that morning. The gentleman was practising!

Nor did this prove, as might be supposed, a passing fancy, a momentary attraction; Zamore persisted in his choregraphic aspirations and turned out a fine dancer. Every

time he heard the fife and drum he would run out on the square, slip between the spectators' legs and watch, with the closest attention, the trained dogs performing their exercises. Mindful, however, of the whip-cut, he no longer attempted to take part in the dancing; he took note of the poses, the steps, and the attitudes, and then, at night, in the silence of his room, he would work away at them, remaining the while, during the day, as austere in his bearing as ever. Ere[327] long he was not satisfied with copying; he took to composing, to inventing, and I am bound to say few dogs surpassed him in the elevated style. I often used to watch him through the half-open door; he practised with such enthusiasm that every night he would drain dry the bowl of water placed in one corner of the room.

When he had become quite sure of himself and the equal of the most accomplished of four-footed dancers, he felt he could no longer hide his light under a bushel and that he must reveal the mystery of his accomplishments. The court-yard of the house was closed, on one side, by an iron fence with spaces sufficiently wide to allow moderately stout dogs to enter in easily. So one fine morning some fifteen or twenty dog friends of his, connoisseurs no doubt, to whom Zamore had sent letters of invitation to his début in the choregraphic art, met around a square of smooth ground nicely levelled off, which the artist had previously swept with his tail, and the performance began. The dogs appeared to be delighted and manifested their enthusiasm by *ouahs! ouahs!* closely resembling the *bravi* of dilettanti at the Opera. With the sole exception of an old and pretty muddy poodle, very wretched looking, and a critic, no doubt, who barked out something about forgetting[328] sound tradition, all the spectators proclaimed Zamore the Vestris of dogs and the god of dancing. Our artist had performed a minuet, a jig, and a *deux temps* waltz. A large number of two-footed spectators had joined the four-footed ones, and Zamore enjoyed the honour of being applauded by human hands.

Dancing became so much a habit of his that when he was paying court to some fair, he would stand up on his hind legs, making bows and turning his toes out like a marquis of the *ancien régime*. All he lacked was the plumed hat under his arm.

Apart from this he was as hypochondriacal as a comic actor and took no part in the life of the household. He stirred only when he saw his master pick up his hat and stick. Zamore died of brain fever, brought on, no doubt, by overwork in trying to learn the schottische, then in the full swing of its popularity. Zamore may say within his tomb, as says the Greek dancer in her epitaph: "Earth, rest lightly on me, for I rested lightly on thee."

How came it that being so talented, Zamore was not enrolled in Corvi's company? For I was even then sufficiently influential as a critic to manage this for him. Zamore, however, would not leave his mas[329]ter, and sacrificed his self-love to his affection, a proof of devotion which one would look for in vain among men.

A singer, named Kobold, a thorough-bred King Charles from the famous kennels of Lord Lauder, took the place of the dancer. It was a queer little beast, with an enormous projecting forehead, big goggle eyes, nose broken short off at the root, and long ears trailing on the ground. When Kobold was brought to France, knowing no language but English, he was quite bewildered. He could not understand the orders given him; trained to answer to "Go on," or "Come here," he remained motionless when he was told in French, "Viens," or "Va-t'en." It took him a year to learn the tongue of the new country in which he found himself and to take part in the conversation. Kobold was very fond of music, and himself sang little songs with a very strong English accent. The A would be struck on the piano, and he caught the note exactly and modulated with a flute-like sound phrases that were really musical and that had no connection whatever with barking or yelping. When we wanted to make him go on, all we had to do was to say, "Sing a little more," and he would repeat the cadence. Although he was fed[330] with the utmost care, as was proper in the case of a tenor singer and so distinguished a gentleman, Kobold had one eccentric taste: he would eat earth just like a South American savage. We never succeeded in curing him of the habit, which proved the cause of his death. He was very fond of the stablemen, the horses, and the stable, and my ponies had no more constant companion than he. He spent his time between their loose-boxes and the piano.

After Kobold, the King Charles, came Myrza, a tiny Havana poodle that had the honour of being for a time the property of Giulia Grisi, who gave her to me. She is snow-white, especially when she is fresh from her bath and has not had time to roll over in the dust, a fancy some dogs share with dust-loving birds. She is extremely gentle and affectionate, and as sweet-tempered as a dove. Her little fluffy face, her two little eyes that might be mistaken for upholstery nails, and her little nose like a Piedmont truffle, are most comical. Tufts of hair, curly as Astrakhan fur, fall over her face in the most picturesque and unexpected way, hiding first one eye and then the other, so that she has the most peculiar appearance imaginable and squints like a chameleon.

[331]In Myrza, nature imitates the artificial so perfectly that the little creature looks as if she had stepped out of a toy-shop. When her coat is nicely curled, and she has got on her blue ribbon bow and her silver bell, she is the image of a toy dog, and when she barks it is impossible not to wonder whether there is a bellows under her paws.

She spends three-fourths of her time in sleep, and her life would not be much changed were she stuffed, nor does she seem particularly clever in the ordinary intercourse of life. Yet she one day exhibited an amount of intelligence absolutely unparalleled in my experience. Bonnegrâce, the painter of the portraits of Tchoumakoff and E. H., which attracted so much attention at the exhibitions, had brought to me, in order to get my opinion upon it, one of his portraits painted in the manner of Pagnest, remarkable for truthfulness of colour and vigour of modelling. Although I have lived on terms of closest intimacy with animals and could tell a hundred traits of the ingenuity, reasoning,

and philosophical powers of cats, dogs, and birds, I am bound to confess that animals wholly lack any feeling for art. Never have I seen a single one notice a picture, and the story of the birds that picked at the^[332] grapes in the painting by Zeuxis, strikes me as a piece of invention. It is precisely the feeling for ornament and art that distinguishes man from brutes. Dogs never look at pictures and never put on earrings. Well, Myrza, at the sight of the portrait placed against the wall by Bonnegrâce, sprang from the stool on which she was lying curled up, dashed at the canvas and barked furiously at it, trying to bite the stranger who had made his way into the room. Great was her surprise when she found herself compelled to recognise that she had a plane surface before her, that her teeth could not lay hold of it, and that it was no more than a vain presentment. She smelled the picture, tried to wedge in behind the frame, looked at us both with a glance of questioning and wonder, and returned to her place, where she disdainfully went to sleep again, refusing to have anything more to do with the painted individual. Myrza's features will not be lost to posterity, for there is a fine portrait of her by the Hungarian artist, Victor Madarasz.

Let me close with the story of Dash. One day a dealer in broken bottles and glass stopped at my door in quest of such wares. He had in his cart a puppy, three or four months old, which he had been commis^[333]sioned to drown, whereat the worthy fellow grieved much, for the dog kept looking at him with a tender and beseeching look as if he knew well what was going to happen. The reason of the severe sentence passed on the puppy was that he had broken his fore paw. My heart was filled with pity for him, and I took charge of the condemned creature; called in a vet, and had Dash's paw set in splints and bandaged. It was impossible, however, to stop him gnawing at the dressings; the paw could not be cured, and the bones not having knitted, it hung limp like the sleeve of a man who has lost an arm. His infirmity, however, did not prevent his being jolly, lively, and full of fun, and he managed to race along quite fast on his three legs.

He was an out and out street dog, a rascally little cur that Buffon himself would have been puzzled to classify. He was ugly, but his features were uncommonly mobile and sparkled with cleverness. He seemed to understand what was told him, and his expression would change according as the words addressed to him, in the same tone of voice, were flattering or injurious. He rolled his eyes, turned up his lips, indulged in the wildest of nervous twitchings, or^[334] else grinned and showed his white teeth, obtaining in this way most comical effects of which he was perfectly conscious. He would often try to talk; laying his paw on my knee, he would fix on me that earnest gaze of his and begin a series of murmurs, sighs, and grunts, so varied in intonation that it was hard not to recognise them as language. Sometimes in the course of a conversation of this sort, Dash would break out into a bark or a yelp, and then I would look sternly at him and say: "That is barking, not speaking. Is it possible that you are an animal?" Dash, feeling humiliated at the suggestion, would go on with his

vocalisation, giving it the most pathetic expression. We used to say then that Dash was telling his tale of woe.

He was passionately fond of sugar, and at dessert, when coffee was brought in, he would invariably beg each guest for a piece with such insistence that he was always successful. He had ended by transforming this merely benevolent gift into a regular tax which he collected with unfailing regularity. He was but a little mongrel, yet with the frame of a Thersites he had the soul of an Achilles. Infirm though he was, he would attack, with madly heroic courage, dogs ten times his^[335] size and was regularly and terribly thrashed by them. Like Don Quixote, the brave Knight of La Mancha, he set out triumphantly and returned in most evil plight. Alas! he was destined to fall a victim to his own courage. Some months ago he was brought home with a broken back, the work of a Newfoundland, an amiable brute, which the next day played the same trick to a small greyhound.

Dash's death was the first of a series of catastrophes: the mistress of the house where he met with the death-stroke was, a few days later, burned alive in her bed, and the same fate overtook her husband who was trying to save her. This was merely a fatal coincidence and by no means an expiation, for these people were of the kindest and as fond of animals as is a Brahmin, besides being wholly innocent of our poor Dash's tragic fate.

It is true that I have still another dog, called Nero, but he is too recent an inmate of our home to have a story of his own.

(NOTE.—Alas! Nero has been poisoned quite recently, just as if he had been supping with the Borgias, and his epitaph comes in the very first chapter of his life.)

[336]

V MY HORSES

NOW let not the reader, on seeing this title, hastily accuse me of being a swell. Horses! That is a pretentious word to be written down by a man of letters! *Musa pedestris*, says Horace; that is, the Muse goes on foot, and Parnassus itself has but one horse in its stable, Pegasus. Besides, he is a winged steed and by no means quiet in harness, if we

may credit what Schiller tells us in his ballad. I am not a sportsman, alas! and deeply do I regret it, for I am as fond of horses as if I had five hundred thousand a year, and I am entirely of the opinion of the Arabs concerning pedestrians. The horse is man's natural pedestal, and the one complete being is the centaur, whom mythology so ingeniously invented.

Nevertheless, although I am merely a man of letters, I have owned horses. In the year 1843 or 1844, I found in the pay-dirt of journalism, washed out in the[337] wooden pan of the *feuilleton*, a sufficient quantity of gold dust to justify the hope that I might feed, besides my cats, dogs, and magpies, a couple of animals of larger size. I first had a couple of Shetland ponies, the size of big dogs, hairy as bears, all mane and tail, and who looked at me in such friendly fashion through their long black hair that I felt more like showing them into the drawing-room than sending them to the stable. They would take sugar out of my pockets like trained horses. But they proved to be decidedly too small; they would have answered as saddle horses for English children eight years of age, or as coach horses for Tom Thumb, but I was already in the enjoyment of that athletic and portly frame for which I am famed, and which has enabled me to bear up, without bending too much under the burden, under forty consecutive years of supplying of copy. The difference between the owner and the animals was unquestionably too striking, even though the little black ponies drew at a very lively gait the light phaeton to which they were harnessed with the daintiest tan harness, that looked as if it had been bought in a toy shop.

Comic illustrated papers were not as numerous then as now, but there were quite enough of them to publish[338] caricatures of me and of my horses. It goes without saying that, profiting by the latitude allowed to caricature, I was represented as of elephantine bulk and appearance, like the god Ganesa, the Hindoo god of wisdom, and that my ponies were shown as no larger than poodles, rats, or mice. It is also true that I could readily enough have carried my pair one under each arm, and taken the carriage on my back. I did for a moment think of having a pony four-in-hand, but such a Liliputian equipage would have merely attracted greater attention. So to my great regret, for I had already become fond of them, I replaced my Shetlands with two dapple-gray cobs of larger size, with powerful necks, broad chests, stout and well set up, which were not Mecklenburghers, no doubt, but plainly more capable of dragging me along. They were both mares, the one called Jane, the other Betsy. So far as outward looks went, they were as alike as two peas, and never was there a better matched pair apparently. But Betsy was as lazy as Jane was willing. While the one drew steadily, the other was satisfied with trotting along, saving herself and taking good care to do nothing. These two animals, of the same breed, of the same age, and destined to live in the same stable, had[339] the liveliest antipathy for each other. They could not bear one another, fought in the stable, and bit each other as they reared in harness. It was impossible to reconcile them, which was a pity, for with their hog manes, like those of the horses on the

Parthenon frieze, their quivering nostrils, and their eyes dilated with anger, they looked uncommonly handsome as they were driven up or down the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. A substitute had to be found for Betsy, and a small mare, somewhat lighter coloured, for it had been impossible to match her exactly, was brought round. Jane immediately welcomed the new-comer and did the honours of the stable to her most graciously, and ere long they became fast friends. Jane would rest her head on Blanche's neck—she had been so called because her gray coat was rather whitish—and when they were let loose in the yard after being rubbed down, they would play together like a pair of dogs of children. If one was taken out driving, the one left in the stable was plainly wearying for her, and as soon as she heard in the distance the ring of her companion's hoofs on the paving-stones, she set up a joyous neigh, like a trumpet-blast, to which the other did not fail to reply as she approached.

[340]They would come up to be harnessed with astonishing docility, and took of themselves their proper place by the pole. Like all animals that are loved and well treated, Jane and Blanche soon became most familiar and trusting. They would follow me without bridle or halter like the best-trained dog, and when I stopped they would stick their noses on my shoulder in order to be caressed. Jane was fond of bread, and Blanche of sugar, and both were crazy about melon skin. I could make them do anything in return for these dainties.

If man were not odiously brutal and ferocious, as he too frequently shows himself towards animals, they would cling to him most gladly. Their dim brain is filled with the thought of that being who thinks, speaks, and does things the meaning of which escapes them; he is a mystery and a wonder to them. They will often look at you with eyes full of questions you cannot answer, for the key to their speech has not yet been found. Yet they have a speech which enables them to exchange, by means of intonations not yet noted by man, ideas that are rudimentary, no doubt, but which are such as may be conceived by creatures within their sphere of action and feeling. Less stupid than we are, animals succeed in understanding a few[341] words of our idiom, but not enough to enable them to converse with us. Besides, as the words they do learn refer solely to what we exact of them, the conversation would be brief. But that animals speak cannot be doubted by any one who has lived in any degree of intimacy with dogs, cats, horses, or other creatures of that sort.

For instance, Jane was naturally intrepid; she never refused, and nothing frightened her, but after a few months of cohabitation with Blanche her character changed and she manifested at times sudden and inexplicable fear. Her companion, much less brave, must have told her ghost stories at night. Often, when going through the Bois de Boulogne at dusk or after dark, Blanche would stop short or shy, as if a phantom, invisible to me, had risen up before her. She trembled in every limb, breathed hard, and broke out into sweat. If I attempted to urge her ahead with the whip, she backed, and all Jane could do, strong as she was, was insufficient to induce her to go on. One of us

would have to get down, cover her eyes with the hand and lead her until the vision had vanished. Little by little Jane became subject to the same terror, the reason of which, no doubt, Blanche told her once they were back in their stable. I may as well confess that for my[342] part, when I would be driving down a dark road on which the moonlight produced alternations of light and shadow, and Blanche suddenly became rooted to the spot as though a spectre had sprung at her head, and refused to move,—she who was usually so docile that Queen Mab’s whip, made of a cricket’s bone with a spider’s thread for a thong, was enough to start her into a gallop,—I could not repress a slight shudder or refrain from peering into the darkness rather anxiously, while at times the harmless trunks of ash or birch trees would appear to me as spectral-looking as one of Goya’s “Caprices.”

I took great delight in driving these dear animals myself, and we soon became very intimate. It was merely as a matter of form that I held the reins, for the least click of the tongue was enough to direct them, to turn them to the right or the left, to make them go faster, or to stop them. They quickly learned all my habits and started of themselves for the office, the printer’s, the publishers’, the Bois de Boulogne, and the houses where I went to dinner on certain days of the week, and this so accurately that they would have ended by compromising me, for they would have revealed the places to which I paid the most mysterious[343] visits. If I happened to forget the time in the course of an interesting or tender conversation they would remind me it was getting late by neighing or pawing in front of the balcony.

Although I greatly enjoyed traversing the city in the phaeton drawn by my two friends, I could not help at times thinking the north wind sharp and the rain cold when the months came along which the Republican calendar named so appropriately the months of mist, of frost, of rain, of wind, of snow (brumaire, frimaire, pluviôse, ventôse, nivôse), so I purchased a small blue coupé, lined with white reps, which was likened to the equipage of the famous dwarf of the day, a piece of impertinence I did not mind. A brown coupé, lined with garnet, followed the blue one, and was itself replaced by a dark-green coupé lined with dark blue, for I actually did sport a coach—I, poor newspaper writer holding no Government stock—for five or six years. And my ponies were none the less fat and in good condition though they were fed on literature, had substantives for oats, adjectives for hay, and adverbs for straw. But alas! there came, no one knows very well why, the Revolution in February; a great many paving-stones were picked up for patriotic purposes, and[344] Paris became rather unfit for carriage travel. I could of course have escalated the barricades with my agile steeds and my light equipage, but it was only at the cook-shop that I could get credit, and I could not possibly feed my horses on roast chicken. The horizon was dark with heavy clouds, through which flashed red gleams. Money had taken fright and gone into hiding; the *Presse*, on the staff of which I was, had suspended publication, and I was glad enough to find a person willing to buy my horses, harness, and carriages for a fourth of

their value. It was a bitter grief to me, and I would not venture to say that no tears ran down my cheeks on to the manes of Jane and Blanche when they were led away. Sometimes their new owner would drive past the house; I always knew their quick, sharp trot at a distance, and always the sudden way they would stop under my windows proved that they had not forgotten the place where they had been so tenderly loved and so well cared for, and a sigh would break responsive from me as I said to myself: "Poor Jane, poor Blanche! I wonder if they are happy."

And the loss of them is the one and only thing I felt sore over when I lost my slender fortune.

Transcriber's Note

The following typographical error was corrected.

286 scissors cut scissors, cut

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