

CAT AND DOG STORIES.

IT was a rainy November afternoon, and floods of water poured down from the skies, growing hourly in strength. "Just as if the heaven were weeping to find that its tears grew so plentiful," I thought. I know that it is sometimes the case with me. When I am naughty and am scolded, I begin to cry just a little; but my tears flow quicker and quicker as I think how shameful it is for a great girl like me to be weeping, and the more ashamed I become, the more I cry. But I must not go on like this, or my story will turn out a tearful one, and I shall really end by weeping myself.

Well, it was a rainy day, raining so hard that I could not go out on the lawn to play; and I was tired of amusing myself with my soft ball indoors. I was sitting with my head resting between my hands, trying to think of some new game, when suddenly the door swung open, and in walked a crooked old woman, trudging towards me on her crooked staff.

"Why are you so unhappy, my dear?" she asked me in a kind, though croaking, voice.

"I don't know how to pass the time, ma'am," I said, rather frightened.

"Little girls, aye, and big girls too, should always have something to do; they should never idle away their hours. I am your fairy godmother, Nelly; look at my face."

And I looked up at her. Sure enough, she did look like my godmother, only a little more ugly and a good deal more kind!

"As you have been a good girl this morning, and finished your knitting and sewing, I am going to give you something that will amuse you. I am going to gift you with the knowledge of animal language. Look at your cat and dog on the hearth! They are telling each other stories. Would you like to listen to what they are saying?"

"Oh, that I should!" I exclaimed.

She touched me on the lips with her crooked staff, and suddenly I heard two little voices gossiping round the fire. I glanced round at my fairy godmother, but she had vanished. I had not time to think how wonderful it all was--I was too much taken up with what I heard. There sat my precious Miss Perkie, with King Charlie

at her side, so interested that his little pink tongue had pushed its way out through his teeth.

I drew my chair nearer to the hearth, so that I might hear their conversation the better. But Charlie turned round upon me rather angrily, and said:

"If you want to listen, Nelly, don't make such a noise with your stool. It disturbs me, and it is really provoking to lose the thread of an adventure in that way. Pray begin the story again, Perkie."

He always was rather a sharp-tempered dog, so I did not answer him. Yet the rude way in which he addressed me struck me as rather funny. I remember thinking that, perhaps, if all the world spoke dog-language, dogs would be the masters, and we human beings the slaves.

Perkie then continued:

"As I was saying----"

"No, she has put the first part out of my head, now! If I am once stopped in a story all the first part vanishes. I never was very quick at learning and all that, you know. People think that petting and cuddling are quite enough for a dog of my royal pedigree! They never consider my mind. It is true I can beg, and play at hide-and-seek with a biscuit: I can eat game, and drink real turtle-soup. And they pay great respect to my dignity and kingly grace; but as for my mental--however, never mind that, Pussy; it's not to the point! Go on with your story from the beginning, and Nelly and I will listen."

"I was going to tell Charlie of an adventure that I once had with some horrid, mongrel dogs," said Pussy. "I hate dogs, and so does my whole race, and mongrels more than any others. Now a noble mastiff or a royal King Charles" (and here Miss Perkie bowed graciously to her companion, though I fancied I could see a faint little smile curl round her lower jaw as she glanced up at me, as if to say to me that she only put up with him for my sake), "neither of them would worry a harmless cat, for they are real gentlemen, who honour weakness and timidity" (another little nod). "But to go on with my story--"

'I was out in the yard one day to see if I could not pick up a stray mouseling or so, when I suddenly came upon three brutal-looking dogs, asleep and snoring near a basket.

"I turned to flee, as quickly as I could; but the middle dog must have heard the little cry of fright that escaped me. He leaped up, gave a loud bark that awoke his

two friends, and all three set after me.

"A tall wall surrounded the yard, and foolishly I had not made for the gate through which I had come in. What was I to do? 'They will have me,' I thought, 'they must have me sooner or later!' My terror was too great for me to describe.

"Round and round the yard they chased me--round and round again! I could not see the opening of the gate for a long time, so quickly did I tear along.

"Mongrel curs are clever, though I don't know why they should be. They had sense enough--bad sense I then thought it; but now I laugh at the adventure, as it is happily over, and as I paid the dogs back in their own coin--well, they had sense enough to separate and drive me into a corner. 'Now, surely, it is all over with me!' I said to myself; but I managed to keep them off for a long while by setting up my back and spitting at them. They dared not draw nigh, they dared not touch me, for they knew my claws were all ready stretched out to scratch their eyes out.

"How long we stood thus I cannot say. My nerves were so tight-strung that I was scarcely myself at all."

"Well, and what did you do?" asked King Charlie, his big eyes almost starting from his head, and his tongue far protruded from his mouth. "Do go on! You keep one so long in suspense! Did they kill you or not?"

I could not help laughing at his silly question; but Charlie seemed mightily offended at my conduct, so I smothered my merriment as best I could.

"Shall I go on?" asked Pussy; to which we both eagerly replied, "Yes, yes, please, Pussy."

She continued: "I was in this awkward position, hissing, spitting, back up, claws shot out, when an idea struck me. The dogs were close together in a body, and it was not much of a jump for me--I sprang forward, right over their heads, and rushed away towards the gate which stood straight before me. I reached it in safety, and looked around.

"There were the three dogs, barking loudly, close behind me! 'Now for my idea!' thought I, 'now or never! Victory or death!'

"The door was only half open, and that favoured my plans. If that had not been the case----"

"Do keep to the story!" again interrupted the eager King Charles; "you are always moralizing."

"If that had not been the case, I should have been lost," continued Pussy, quite calmly, and not regarding His Highness. "Well, I jumped violently against the half-closed gate, and slammed it to with a loud bang. It just caught the first dog's toe, and I knew what had happened by the yelping and howling of the wretched cur. Ah! the tables were turned now! And, in triumph, I laid my side close up against the door, and purred as loudly as I could, until my throat ached. The dog howled still louder than before on the other side, his two brother sinners barking all the time in disappointed fury.

"A funny concert it must have been! All the animals flocked out from the farmyard close by, to see what was the matter. The turkey joined in, screeching at her loudest. The little pig grunted and squeaked, and I lay against the door, purring louder than ever.

"Then the donkey came up, and looked on. He was a bit of a philosopher, and looked grave and unconcerned. Or it may have been that the clover he had in his mouth was too precious to gobble down or to drop. In fact, his attention did seem to be divided; for one ear appeared to be listening to the concert, the other to the music of his own crunching. Poor old Neddy! he thinks himself so wise and such a philosopher in human and animal things! And all the time he is such a stupid! Even I stopped purring for a moment to laugh at him.

"The kid in the neighbouring field pranced for very joy at the music. He had never had an accompaniment before; and he frisked about here, there, and everywhere, inviting even the frog beneath his feet to join him in the dance. Unequal playmates, you will say; and so thought the frog; but the kid was delighted nevertheless, though he soon forsook his partner, and went careering on.

"Out from her hutch the rabbit poked her head, with a sprig of forget-me-not in her mouth. Her ears were pricked up, and she listened. 'What can it all mean?' she asked her little ones.

"I looked towards the duck-pond. 'What lovely music!' cried one duckling to his comrade.

"'Hideous, you mean!' cried the other, and then they fought and quarrelled till scarcely a feather was left between them. This is the way with quick-tempered little ducklings: they fight for a worm, and are good friends again as soon as either of them has eaten it up. Sulky little boys and girls have a lesson to learn from them in this, so that even a duckling is a teacher at times, if we can only

read our lesson aright.

"The noise the dogs were making reached even the end of the field, where a blackbird was busily engaged with an obstinate worm, who preferred his hole to the open air. And the terrified bird forsook half his dinner, in his anxiety to get away.

"My adventure, you see," continued Pussy, "at any rate created a noise in the neighbourhood! At length the dogs' master came out with a whip in his hand. He walked up to them, and must have laid about him pretty freely, for their howling increased to something indescribable. Then suddenly they stopped, and I heard the dog-whip flung fiercely at the crouching curs. And then their master went away, as I could tell by his retreating steps.

"I was full of curiosity to see how they looked in their humbled frame of mind. So I with great difficulty scrambled up the wall. I looked over, and nearly tumbled over too, for I could hardly keep my balance, so great was my inward rejoicing at their discomfiture.

"So you are paid out, you three cruel, mischief-makers!" I cried, and leaped down again from the wall.

"They howled back their reply, which I did not wait to hear--and that is the end of my story," said Pussy.

"Thank you, Pussy dear!" I said. And King Charlie danced frantically round the room to show his delight at the way the adventure had ended.

"I hate low under-bred curs, and I am always glad to see them punished," he cried, again assuming his kingly look. He was a despot in spirit, and really thought himself King of the dogs. Poor, harmless, vain little Charlie, I loved him all the same!

"Now it is your turn to tell me a story," said Miss Perkie to him. "I will tell you something more of these three dogs afterwards."

"Very well," began King Charles, "very well; a tale you shall have, but a short one. My tail is not long, and my tales are not long," and he looked towards Pussy; then at me; but neither of us smiled: he was only a dog of small intellect, so I forgave him.

"Your story was of dogs," he went on; "mine shall be of cats. You hate dogs--I hate cats; therefore we like each other."

Pussy did not quite follow the reasoning, as I could see from her puzzled face; but since the end was true, and the argument sounded well, she thought it must be all right.

"My story is of a cat of your tribe, Perkie," he continued; "of a Maltese kitten. They are all great play-babies, you know, and I suppose you owe your earnestness of character to me. But that is not to the point! The kitten I am speaking of was called Pussy. That seems to be a common name in your family, Pussy; and it is a most extraordinary thing that all the cats and kittens I have ever known have had that name, and it is yours too, Perkie, isn't it? However, it is a very pretty name, so I won't say anything more about it. It is not to the point either! To proceed: this Pussy was a very great play-baby. A soft ball was her joy, her comfort; a saucer of milk, her greatest delight. How you cats can live on milk, I cannot understand. It's very nice in its way, but it goes such a little way, though that is not much to the point again! Well, this cat's mother was a thief--all cats are thieves--she used regularly, when she had a chance, to go to the jar of milk that was kept for me and for the family, and lap up as much as she could reach with her tongue.

"Of course I hated her for this alone; but another vile practice she had increased my dislike for her. She would, every morning after the piano was dusted, jump upon the music-stool, and thence bound on to the keyboard. She would then walk about on it backwards and forwards, making the most abominable sounds--screeching notes, buzzing notes, groaning notes; groaning notes, buzzing notes, screeching notes, worse than the railway train. I could not stay in the same room with her, and used rather to go out and sit in the cold attic.

"I never actually fought her, for I always pitied her weakness, and her claws were very long and sharp. Her daughter was just as annoying in other ways, though I must confess that her ball-games were rather pretty. But still I do not agree with frivolity being turned into a science, and her games were almost scientific in grace and action. I will try to describe to you her morning occupation.

"First of all, of course, was the mewling scene--'Mieaou--mieaou--mieaou!' 'What is it my little sweetie wants, then?' the lady of the house would ask; 'does it want its pretty little ball?' And then she would throw the miserable soft ball to her.

"I sat by and looked on, half scornful, half amused, half---- I forget what the other half was!"

"Half asleep?" suggested Pussy.

"Perhaps half asleep, but I forget. The kitten would then watch where the ball fell,

waiting till it stopped rolling. She would never touch it until it got to a considerable distance from her. Then she would suddenly dart upon a hassock or a footstool close by it, and fiercely gaze down upon it. After a while, she would stretch out one paw, and set it rolling, and, as it rolled, crawl after it, crouching low down to the ground.

"Suddenly a pounce, and a little squeak of delight: 'The ball is mine,' she thinks, and begins to play with it. She tosses it to and fro, now biting it, now patting it--preparatory, no doubt, to swallowing it.

"But do not be too sure, Miss Pussy! See, the ball flies from her, as if possessed with life. It rolls away, on and on. And Pussy, who had thought it dead, seems struck with wonder. 'Can it be alive after all?' she thinks; 'there must be a mouse inside it!' then scamper, scamper, a spring and a leap, and she has caught the ball again. Once more it escapes from her claws--once more she bounds towards it, and now it is surely hers. I confess it was rather interesting to me to look on, and more than once I nearly joined in the chase after the ball myself. Then Pussy would roll about on the floor with it, but never did she find a mouse inside it. Poor Pussy, every day she deceived herself thus! Then I would laugh to myself. Cats are such silly aimless things! They have no higher motives than a soft ball!"

"Yes," said Miss Perkie, "but isn't it time you began your story?"

"That is my story, you simpleton!" answered King Charlie.

"Oh, I did not know that: it was not much like one, you know."

"Eh? I call it a capital story. But now it is your turn again, unless Miss Nelly will tell us one?" he said, and turned to me.

"I don't know many stories of cats' and dogs' adventures; but I will describe a walk I once took with the dog I had before you, Charlie, if you like."

And I began: "His name was Tim, and he was a Pomeranian dog. Everybody liked him, and he liked everybody and everything excepting cats. He never harmed our cats, though--it was before your time, Perkie--and never used even to worry them. But he could not abide strange cats. His greatest enemy was a big black tom, that lived quite near here. He is dead now, killed by Tim, and I am going to tell you how it all happened.

"One day we were out for our morning walk--just as we go now, Charlie--when he spied this hated cat perched up on a high rock that overhung the lane. He was peering down at us, and I suppose he thought we should not see him. But 'Tim's

eyes looked everywhere when we were out together,' I used to say. At any rate, he saw his enemy up there at once, and made after him at full speed. The frightened cat did not seem to know what to do, and in his flurry did the worst thing he could have done. Behind him stretched a field of barley, and the foolish animal rushed straight into it. I called to Tim, but he did not hear, or pretended not to.

"The next thing I saw was Tim coming along, wagging his tail, the tom-cat dead between his teeth.

"I scolded Tim, and beat him; but he could not understand that he had not done a very virtuous deed. For my own part, I was not sorry the cat had been killed; he was a great nuisance in the neighbourhood, and often used to steal our chickens. So I could not find the heart to give Tim all the beating he deserved; and when he stood up on his hind-legs, half-sorrowfully, half-beseechingly, looking into my face, I felt that he had only acted according to his nature, and that what was wrong in us to do might not be a sin in him. Therefore I took the dear old dog back again into my favour, and forgave him his disobedience in not coming when I called him. The darling old fellow bore me no spite, and soon he was gambolling along again at my side, as though nothing had happened."

"Quite right, quite right!" interposed King Charlie at this point; "but go on with the story."

"We walked on until we came to a farm-yard," I continued. "All of a sudden Tim rushed forward, then back again to me, barking loudly, as though mad.

"What is it, Tim? What is it? Good dog! good fellow!" I cried to him, but no good; he seemed distracted about something.

"Then I looked in the direction in which he was barking, and there I saw on the steps of the barn a large toy-lamb, which some children must have left behind them. On its back a bird was perched. The poor dickie had made a mistake; he thought, no doubt, it was a real lamb! And Tim, too, who had never seen such an extraordinary sight before, was astonished beyond measure, and resented what he thought was meant for a personal insult to himself.

"He scrambled under the wooden fence that surrounded the farm-yard, and hurried towards the terrible object.

"Come back--here, Tim--Tim!" I shouted after him, but in vain: the bird had flown from the lamb's back, and the lamb was already torn to tatters by the furious dog.

"Then he came back to me, barking 'See how I have treated the impostor!'

"But I did not see with his eyes. I whipped him again, and after having given the woman at the farm enough money to buy another lamb, I took him home. Two misbehaviours in one walk I thought quite enough.

"Poor old Tim! he died soon afterwards, and then you came, you know, Charlie. That's all my story. I love to recall my memories of dear old Tim; but I am afraid I've not interested you two much."

"No, not much, as far as I am concerned," rudely answered King Charles. I did not mean it, but I had made him very jealous by the love I had shown for Tim. I could not therefore take offence at his rude answer, especially as His Majesty had always been petted and spoilt so much.

"It is Perkie's turn now to tell her other story," he added.

"I am ready," said Pussy, and began at once: "As I said before, my story shall be about the same three dogs, and how they tried to catch a mouse. I heard it from the mouse's own lips--I'll tell you how, later on--so it must be true!

"The lazy dogs were, as usual, snoring in the kitchen of the house to which they belonged. A little mouse peeped her head out of a hole, and saw them asleep. 'Surely,' she thought,--'surely I can get onto the table without waking them.' So she tried.

"She reached the table without a sound, and the dogs still snored on peacefully. To mount the leg of the table, and to climb up among the dishes and glass were but the matter of a moment to her. Then she set to work. As she tasted the nice, fresh cheese, she quite forgot all about her enemies, the dogs. She clattered the plates, and made such a noise, that they soon started from their sleep.

"A mouse! a mouse on the table!' they cried, and rushed towards it.

"I am, anyhow, safe up here,' thought mousie, and nibbled on.

"The dogs soon grew weary of waiting below, and consulted together as to what they should do. At last they hit upon a plan. They seized the table-cloth between their teeth, and began to drag it from the table. Crash! crash! down came the dishes and plates and vases, knives and forks and all, smothering the dogs in broken bits of glass and water.

"Poor little mousie was nearly dragged down too, only she just managed to

scramble onto the table again, whence she leaped down to the ground. The dogs saw her, however, and gave chase. She climbed up the wooden partition leading to the loft; but a friend of mine sat up there in wait for her. The sly puss had expected that all would turn out as it had happened, and thought she would get a nice meal without the trouble of hunting it down. She was mistaken, though--for mousie saw her, and stopped half-way up the wall, just out of reach of the dogs. They stood below, barking at her, but could do nothing more.

"After a while mousie felt her strength giving way, so she ran a little sideways along the wall, jumped down, and scampered through the open door along the passage. Her three torturers hurried after her, and away they all went helter-skelter.

"Now, midway across the passage stood the hall-bench. The mouse sprang over it at one bound; but the three clumsy dogs were not so clever. The first one jumped too short, and he just caught the further side of the bench; he pulled it backwards, and together both came down with a crash. He limped back to the hearth-side with a lame leg, having had enough of mouse-catching. His two companions saw his fall, and followed him. All bullies are cowards!" sagely added Pussy, parenthetically.

"And what became of the mouse?" asked the impatient Charlie.

"Why, I was there for her all ready at the end of the passage, and the dogs had done my work for me. But I did not eat her up. I promised her her life if she would tell me all about how she escaped from them, and what they had suffered--and that's how I know it all."

"Thank you, Pussy dear, for your----"

"What are you thinking about, child, calling me Pussy?" exclaimed my godmother, shaking me from a deep sleep. "I have come to bid you good-bye, as I am going now. Little girls should be more respectful to their elders."

"But, really, I suppose I must have been dreaming that----"

"Little girls should not dream foolish things. You should know better, my dear. Now, good-bye, Nelly!"

And so it was all a dream! Yes, there lay Pussy and Charlie fast asleep, too. Dear me! I wish it had been real, though!