

T H E C A T*.

THE cat is an unfaithful domestic, and kept only from the necessity we find of opposing him to other domestics still more incommodious, and which cannot be hunted; for we value not those people, who, being fond of all brutes, foolishly keep cats for their amusement. Though these animals, when young, are frolicksome and beautiful, they possess, at the same

* The cat has six cutting teeth, and two canine in each jaw; five toes before, and four behind; sharp hooked claws, lodged in a sheath, that may be exerted or drawn in at pleasure; a round head, short visage, and rough tongue. The wild cat has long soft hair, of a yellowish white colour, mixed with gray; the gray is disposed in streaks, pointing downwards, and rising from a dusky list, which runs from head to tail, along the middle of the back; the tail is marked with alternate bars of black and white, and its tip, and the hind part of the legs, are black. It is three times as large as the domestic cat, and very strongly made; *Pennant. Synop. of Quad.* p. 183.

Charact. gen. Dentes primores æquales; molares terni. Lingua retrorsum aculeata. Ungues retractiles. *Charact. spec.* Felis catus, cauda elongata fusco-annulata, corpore fasciis nigricantibus; dorsalibus longitudinalibus tribus; lateralibus spiralis; *Lyn. Syst. Nat.* p. 62.

Catus sylvestris; *Gesner. Quad.* 325.

Catus sylvestris ferus vel feralis, eques arborum; *Klein. Quad.* p. 75.

Felix ex fusco, flavicante, et albedo, variegatis vestita; cauda annulis alternatim nigris, et ex sordide albo flavicantibus cincta; *Brisson. Quad.* 192.

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time, an innate malice, and perverse disposition, which increase as they grow up, and which education learns them to conceal, but not to subdue. From determined robbers, the best education can only convert them into flattering thieves; for they have the same address, subtlety, and desire of plunder. Like thieves, they know how to conceal their steps and their designs, to watch opportunities, to catch the proper moment for laying hold of their prey, to fly from punishment, and to remain at a distance till solicited to return. They easily assume the habits of society, but never acquire its manners; for they have only the appearance of attachment or friendship. This dissimulatio[n] of character is betrayed by the obliquity of their movements, and the duplicity of their eyes. They never look their best benefactor in the face; but, either from distrust or faleness, they approach him by windings, in order to procure caresses, in which they have no other pleasure than what arises from flattering those who bestow them. Very different from that faithful animal the dog, whose sentiments totally centre in the person and happiness of his master, the cat appears to have no feelings which are not interested, to have no affection that is not conditional, and to carry on no intercourse with men, but with the view of turning it to his own advantage. By these dispositions, the cat has a greater relation to man

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than to the dog, in whom there is not the smallest mark of insincerity or injustice.

The form and temperament of the cat's body perfectly accord with his temper and dispositions. He is jolly, nimble, dexterous, cleanly, and voluptuous. He loves ease, and chooses the softest and warmest situations for repose. He is likewise extremely amorous, and, what is singular in this animal, the female seems to be more ardent than the male. She not only invites and goes in quest of him, but announces, by loud cries, the fury of her passion, or rather the pressure of her necessities; and, when the male disdains her, or flies from her, she pursues, tears, and, though their embraces are always accompanied with the most acute pain, compels him to comply with her desires. This passionate ardour of the female continues only nine or ten days, and it happens generally twice a-year, though often thrice, and even four times. The period of gestation is 55 or 56 days, and four or five are commonly produced at a litter. As the male has an inclination to devour the young, the female carefully conceals them; and, when apprehensive of a discovery, she takes them up, one by one, in her mouth, and hides them in holes, and in inaccessible places. After suckling them a few weeks, she presents them with mice, or young birds, to learn them to eat flesh. But, by an unaccountable caprice, these same careful, tender, and affectionate mothers, some-

times assume an unnatural species of cruelty, and devour their own offspring.

Young cats are gay, vivacious, and frolicksome, and, if nothing was to be apprehended from their claws, would afford excellent amusement to children. But their toying, though always light and agreeable, is never altogether innocent, and is soon converted into habitual malice. As their talents can only be exerted with advantage against small animals, they lie in wait, with great patience and perseverance, to seize birds, mice, and rats, and, without any instruction, become more expert hunters than the best trained dogs. Naturally averse to every kind of restraint, they are incapable of any system of education. It is related, however, that the Greek Monks of the island of Cyprus had trained cats to hunt and destroy serpents, with which that island was much infested*. But this hunting must rather be ascribed to their general desire of slaughter, than to any kind of tractability or obedience; for they delight in watching, attacking, and destroying all weak animals indiscriminately, as birds, young rabbits, hares, rats, mice, bats, moles, frogs, toads, lizards, and serpents. They have not that docility and fineness of scent, for which the dog is so eminently distinguished. They hunt by the eye only: Neither do they properly pursue, but lie in wait, and attack animals by surprise; and, after sporting with them,

* Descript. des Isles de l'Archipel, par Dapper, p. 51.

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and tormenting them for a long time, they at last kill them without any necessity, and even when well fed, purely to gratify their sanguinary appetite.

The most obvious physical cause of their watching and catching other animals by surprise, proceeds from the advantage they derive from the peculiar structure of their eyes. In man and most other animals, the pupil is capable of a certain degree of contraction and dilatation. It enlarges a little when the light is faint, and contracts when the light is too splendid. But, in cats and night birds, as owls, &c. the contraction and dilatation are so great, that the pupil, which is round in the dark, becomes, when exposed to much light, long and narrow like a line. Hence these animals see better in the night than in the day. The pupil of the cat during the day is perpetually contracted, and it is only by a great effort that he can see with a strong light. But, in the twilight, the pupil resumes its natural roundness, the animal enjoys perfect vision, and takes advantage of this superiority to discover and surprise his prey.

Though cats live in our houses, they are not entirely domestic. Even the tamest cats are not under the smallest subjection, but may rather be said to enjoy perfect liberty; for they act to please themselves only; and it is impossible to retain them a moment after they choose to go off. Besides, most cats are half wild. They know

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not their masters, and only frequent barns, offices, or kitchens, when pressed with hunger.

Though greater numbers of them are reared than of dogs, as they are seldom seen, their number makes less impression on us. They contract a stronger attachment to our houses than to our persons. When carried to the distance of a league or two, they return of their own accord, probably because they are acquainted with all the retreats of the mice, and all the passages and outlets of the house, and because the labour of returning is less than that which would be necessary to acquire the same knowledge in a new habitation. They have a natural antipathy at water, cold, and bad smells. They are fond of basking in the sun, and of lying in warm places. They are also fond of perfumes, and willingly allow themselves to be taken and caressed by persons who carry aromatic substances. They are so delighted with valerian root, that it seems to throw them into a transport of pleasure. To preserve this plant in our gardens, we are under the necessity of fencing it round with a rail; for the cats smell it at a distance, collect about it in numbers, and, by frequently rubbing, and passing and repassing over it, they soon destroy the plant.

Cats require fifteen or eighteen months before they come to their full growth. In less than a year, they are capable of procreating, and retain this faculty during life, which extends not beyond

beyond nine or ten years. They are, however, extremely hardy and vivacious, and are more nervous than other animals which live longer.

Cats eat slowly, and with difficulty: Their teeth are so short and ill-placed, that they can tear, but not grind their food. Hence they always prefer the most tender victuals, as fishes, which they devour either raw or boiled. They drink frequently; their sleep is light; and they often assume the appearance of sleeping, when they are only meditating mischief. They walk softly, and without making any noise. As their hair is always clean and dry, it is easily electrified, and the sparks become visible when it is rubbed across with the hand in the dark. Their eyes also sparkle in the dark like diamonds, and seem to throw out, in the night, the light they imbibe during the day.

The wild cat couples with the domestic kind; and, consequently, they belong to the same species. It is not uncommon to see both males and females quit their houses in the season of love, go to the woods in quest of wild cats, and afterwards return to their former habitations. It is for this reason that some domestic cats so perfectly resemble the wild cat. The only real difference is internal; for the intestines of the domestic cat are commonly much longer than those of the wild cat. The latter, however, is larger and stronger than the domestic kind; his lips are always black; his ears are also stiffer; his

tail larger, and his colours more constant. In this climate there is only one species of wild cat; and it appears from the testimony of travellers, that this kind is found in all climates, without being subject to much variety. They existed in America before its discovery by the Europeans. A hunter brought one of them to Christopher Columbus*, which was of an ordinary size, of a brownish gray colour, and having a very long and strong tail. They were likewise found in Peru†, though not in a domestic state, and also in Canada‡, in the country of the Illinois, &c. They have been seen in many places of Africa, as in Guiney||, and the Gold Coast; at Madagascar§, where the natives keep them in a domestic state; and at the Cape of Good Hope**, where M. Kolbe says there is likewise a wild kind, of a blue colour; but they are not numerous. These blue, or rather slate coloured cats, are also found in Asia. 'In Persia,' says Pietro della Valle††, 'there is a species of cats which properly belong to the province of Chorazan. Their figure and size are the same with those of the common cat. Their beauty consists in the colour of their hair, which is gray, and uniformly the same over the whole body, except that it is darker on the back

* Vie de Christ. Colomb. part ii. p. 167. † Hist. des Incas, tom. ii. p. 121.

‡ Hist. de Nouvelle France, par Charlevoix, tom. iii. p. 407. § Prevot, tom. iv. p. 230.

¶ Relation de François Couche, p. 225. ** Descript. du Cap. par Kolbe, p. 49. †† Voyage, tom. v. p. 98.

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and head, and clearer on the breast and belly, where it approaches to whiteness, with that agreeable mixture of clare-obscure, to use the language of painters, which has always a wonderful effect. Besides, the hair is fine, shining, soft as silk, and so long, that, though not frizled, it forms ringlets in some parts, and particularly under the throat. These cats are among other cats, what the water-dog is among other dogs. The most beautiful part of the body is the tail, which is very long, and covered with hair five or six inches in length. They extend and turn it upon their backs, like the squirrel, the point resembling a plume of feathers. They are very tame; and the Portuguese have brought them from Persia into India. The same author adds, that he had four couple of these cats, which he intended to bring to Italy. From this description it appears, that the Persian cats resemble, in colour, those we call Chartreux cats, and that, except in colour, they have a perfect resemblance to the cat of Angora. It is probable, therefore, that the cat of Chorazan in Persia, the cat of Angora in Syria, and the Chartreux cat, constitute but one race, whose beauty proceeds from the particular influence of the climate, as the Spanish cats, which are red, black, and white, owe their beauty to the climate of Spain. It may be remarked in general, that, of all climates on the habitable parts of the globe, those of Spain and

Syria

Syria are most favourable to the production of beautiful varieties in natural objects. In Spain and Syria, the sheep, the goats, the dogs, the cats, the rabbits, &c. have the finest wool, the most beautiful and longest hair, and the most agreeable and variegated colours. These climates, it should appear, soften Nature, and embellish the form of all animals.

The wild cat, like most other animals in a savage state, has coarse colours, and hard hair. But, when rendered domestic, the hair softens, the colours vary; and, in the favourable climates of Chorazan and Syria, the hair grows long, fine, and bushy; all the colours become more delicate; the black and red change into a shining brown, and the grayish brown is converted into an ash-coloured gray. By comparing the wild cat with the Chartreux cat, it will be found, that they differ only in this degradation in the shades of colour. As these animals have always more or less whiteness on their sides and belly, it is apparent, that, to produce cats entirely white and with long hair, like the cats of Angora, nothing farther is requisite, than to join those who have the greatest quantity of white, as has been done to procure white rabbits, dogs, goats, fags, &c. In the Spanish cat, which is only another variety of the wild kind, the colours, instead of being weakened by uniform shades, as in the cat of Syria, are exalted, and have become more lively and brilliant; the yellow is

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changed into red, the brown into black, and the gray into white. These cats, though transported into America, have not degenerated, but preserve their beautiful colours. 'In the Antilles,' says Father Tertre, 'there are a number of cats, which have probably been brought from Spain. They are mostly marked with red, white, and black. Several of our countrymen, after eating the flesh, carry the skins of these cats into France. When we first arrived at Guadaloupe, the cats were so accustomed to feed on partridges, pigeons, thrushes, and other small birds, that they disdained the rats; but, when the game was much diminished, they attacked the rats with great fury *,' &c. In general, cats are not subject, like dogs, to degeneration, when transported into warm climates. 'The European cats,' Bosman remarks, 'when carried to Guiney, change not, like the dogs, but preserve their original figure †,' &c. Their nature is indeed more constant; and, as their domestic state is neither so complete, so universal, nor, perhaps, so ancient as that of the dog, it is not surprising that they are also less variegated. Our domestic cats, though they differ in colour, form no distinct races. The climates of Spain and Syria have alone produced permanent varieties: To these may be added the climate of Pe-chi-ly in China, where the cats have long

* Hist. Gen. des Antilles, par le P. du Tertre, tom. ii. p. 306.

† Voyage de Guinée, par Bosman, p. 2403.

hair

hair and pendulous ears, and are the favourites of the ladies*. These domestic cats with pendulous ears, of which we have full descriptions, are still farther removed from the wild and primitive race, than those whose ears are erect.

We shall here terminate the history of the cat, and at the same time that of domestic animals. The horse, the ass, the ox, the sheep, the goat, the hog, the dog, and the cat, are our only domestic animals. We add not to this list the camel, elephant, rein-deer, &c. which, though domestic in other countries, are strangers to us; and we shall not treat of foreign animals, till we have given the history of the wild animals which are natives of our own climate. Besides, as the cat may be considered as only half-domestic, he forms the shade between domestic and wild animals; for we ought not to rank among domestics those troublesome neighbours, mice, rats, and moles, which, though they inhabit our houses and gardens, are perfectly wild and free. Instead of being attached or submissive to man, they fly from him, and preserve entire, in their obscure retreats, their manners, their habits, and their liberty.

We have seen, in the history of each domestic animal, the great influence which education, shelter, and the careful hand of man, have upon the manners, dispositions, and even the form of

* Hist. Gen. des Voyages, par M. l'Abbé Prevot, tom. vi. p. 10.

animals.

animals. We have seen, that these causes, joined to the effects of climate, modify and change the species to such a degree, as to make them very different from what they are in a natural state, and, at the same time, introduce such changes among individuals of the same species, that they would be regarded as different animals, if they preserved not the faculty of intermixing and producing fertile individuals, which is the only essential characteristic of species. We have seen, that the different races of domestic animals observe, in different climates, nearly the same order as the races of the human kind; that, like men, they are stronger, larger, and more courageous in cold countries, milder and more civilized in temperate climates, and weaker and more deformed in very warm regions; and that, in temperate climates, and among polished people, the varieties of each species are most numerous and diversified, and exhibit the most evident marks of the antiquity of their slavery: Pendulous ears, variegated colours, fine long hair, are effects produced by their long continuance in a domestic state. Most wild animals have erect ears. The ears of the wild boar are erect and stiff; but those of the domestic hog are inclined and half-pendulous. Among the Laplanders, the savages of America, the Hottentots, the Negroes, and other unpolished people, all the dogs have erect ears; but they are generally soft and pendulous in Spain, France, Britain,

Britain, Turkey, Persia, China, and other civilized nations. The ears of the domestic cat are not so stiff and erect as those of the wild kind; and in China, a nation which has been very long in a state of civilization, and whose climate is mild, there are cats with pendulous ears. It is for this reason, that the goat of Angora, whose ears are pendulous, should be regarded as a variety farthest removed from the natural state. The strong and marked influence of the climate of Syria, joined to the domestic condition of these animals among a people very anciently civilized, would, in the progress of time, produce this variety, which cannot be preserved in any other climate. In the goats of Angora, brought forth in France, the ears are neither so long nor so pendulous as in those of Syria, and would probably, after a certain number of generations, resume the ears and coarse hair of our common goat.

S U P P L E M E N T.

BY mistaking some of my expressions in the above history of the cat, I find it has been imagined that I had denied him altogether the power of sleeping. I always knew that cats slept, but not so profoundly as I now find they sometimes do. On this subject M. Pafumot, of the academy

academy of Dijon, an able naturalist, communicated to me a letter, of which the following is an extract.

‘ Permit me, Sir, to remark, that, in your work, you seem to deny the cat the power of sleeping. I assure you, that, though he sleeps seldom, his sleep is so profound, that it is a species of lethargy, which I have observed at least ten times in different cats. When young, a favourite cat lay every night in bed at my feet. One night, I pushed him from me; but I was surprised to find him so heavy, and at the same time so immoveable, that I believed him to be dead. I pulled him smartly with my hand; but I felt no motion. I then tossed him about, and, by the force of the agitation, he began slowly to awake. This profound sleep, and difficulty of wakening, I have frequently observed. It generally happened in the night, having only once observed it in the day; and this was after perusing what you have said concerning the sleep of these animals. I know another gentleman who has likewise often seen cats sleeping in this profound manner. He tells me, that, when cats sleep during the day, it is always at the time of the greatest heat, and particularly before the approach of stormy weather.’

M. de Lestree, a merchant of Chalons in Champagne, who is accustomed to allow cats to lie in his bed, remarks:

1. 'That, when these animals purr, when they are tranquil, and appear to be sleeping, they sometimes make a long inspiration, which is followed by a strong expiration; and that, at this period, their breath has an odour which greatly resembles that of musk.

2. 'That, when surprised by a dog, or any other object which suddenly alarms them, they make a kind of hissing noise, which is accompanied with the same odour. This is not peculiar to the males; for I have remarked the same thing of both sexes, and of cats of all ages and colours.'

From these facts, M. de Lestree seems to think, that, in the breast or stomach of the cat, there are some vessels filled with an aromatic substance, the perfume of which issues from the mouth. But we discover nothing of this kind from anatomy.

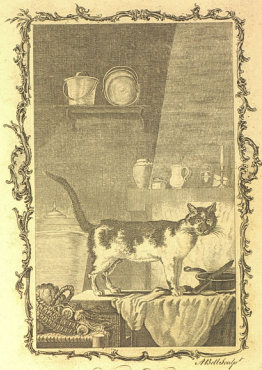
I formerly remarked, that, in China, there were cats with pendulous ears. This variety is not found any where else, and perhaps it is an animal of a different species; for travellers, when mentioning an animal called *Sumnu*, which is entirely domestic, say, that they can compare it to nothing but the cat, with which it has a great resemblance. Its colour is black or yellow, and its hair very bright and glittering. The Chinese put silver collars about the necks of these animals, and render them extremely familiar. As they are not common, they give a high price, both

Plate XLVIII.



WILD CAT

Plate XLIX.



DOMESTIC CAT

Plate LI.



SPANISH CAT

A. Bell Sculp.

Plate LI.



CHARTREUX CAT

A. Bell Sculp.

Plate I.II.



CAT of ANGORA
A Bell design

both on account of their beauty, and because they destroy rats*.

At Madagascar there are also wild cats rendered domestic. Most of them have twisted tails; and they are called *Saca* by the natives. But these wild cats are of the same species with the domestic kind; for they intermix and produce†.

Another variety has been observed. In our own climate, cats are sometimes produced with pencils of hair at the points of their ears. M. de Seve writes me (Nov. 16. 1773), that a young cat was brought forth in his house at Paris, of the same race with that we have called the *Spanish cat*, with pencils at the points of its ears, though neither of the parents had any pencils. In a few months the pencils of this cat were as large in proportion to its size, as those of the Canadian lynx.

The skin of an animal, which greatly resembles that of our wild cat, has been lately sent me from Cayenne. It is called *Haira* in Guiana, where they eat its flesh, which is white and good; and hence we may presume, that, however similar to the cat, it belongs to a different species. But, perhaps, the name *baira* is improperly applied; for it is probably the same with *taira*, which is not a cat, but a small martin, taken notice of in the last volume of this work.

* Journal des Sçavans, tom. i. p. 261.

† Voy. de Flacourt, p. 152.

† Voy. de Flacourt, p. 152.