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STORY OF "WILDCAT."

Now "Wilicat" was a wonderful cat in his day ; and this is the way he came to belong to Moses, and at the same time came to be called Wildcat.

One cold December day when Moses, who was quite a little boy, living in a western village, was getting unusually lonesome from being shut in the house and having no little brother to play with, a strange, wild, hungry, gray and Maltese cat made his appearance. He was very shy and suspicious of everybody, though Moses tried his best to make friends with him by giving him nice bits of meat. The cat ate greedily, but would skulk away again, appearing the next day for his dinner. This was repeated day after day, but had little effect in taming him ; so in consideration of his wild nature he was called Wildcat, which soon dropped into Wilie, for short.

When mamma asked her little boy what he would like for a New-Year's present, he said, "I think I would like Wildcat better than anything else in the world." So when he opened his eyes on the first morning of the new year and saw Wildcat lying near his pillow, he said it was the happiest New-Year he had ever seen.

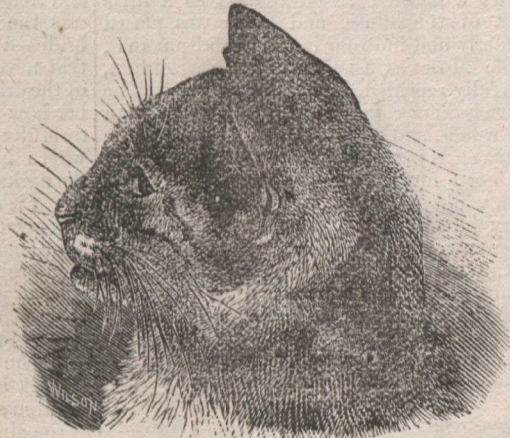
From that day Wildcat put aside his gypsy-life, became as tractable as a kitten, and was really installed a member of the clergyman's family.

He couldn't be called at this time a handsome cat. Every hair on his long, lank body seemed to have an individuality of its own and to stand out separate and distinct from the others ; he had a starved, eager, warlike look ; but there was character in his face ; his prominent jaw and compressed mouth showed great firmness and a determined hang-on. He was a warrior, no doubt of that, and had been in battles and tournaments innumerable, as a tattered ear and several scars on his body testified. But no one knew anything definite of his early history ; it was believed, however, that, in spite of his uncomely appearance, he had sprung from an old and respectable family and had seen better days. On a more familiar acquaintance he showed unmistakable signs of good-breeding, and could perform many wonderful tricks. He would sit in Moses' chair and eat very daintily from his

plate on the table, he would stand on his hind feet and plead in a touching way for his dinner, he would tap at the door to come in, and lift the latch himself when not bid to enter. Moreover, Moses believed he was a religious cat, for he asked his mother one day if she didn't think Wilie, with Blackie, a grown-up kitten, and some neighboring cats didn't hold prayer meetings under the barn, to which she made answer, "Political meetings, I guess, Moses."

When Wilie had lived with them about a year, the clergyman with his family moved East, and the cat was boxed up and expressed "right side up with care" to the new home. Moses was at the station to meet the train, and heard Wilie's voice the moment the locomotive stopped whizzing, and was as glad to release him as was Wilie glad to stretch his legs after the long hours' cramping in his wooden cage. Whether Wilie didn't like his new home in the East or whether from a foolish prejudice he entertained against dogs, which he doubtless inherited, and was fright-

ened away by some neighboring ones : or whether his old roving habits clung to him and pushed him out to new adventures no one could tell ; but he suddenly disappeared. Moses mourned and would not be comforted, everybody missed him, the clergyman advertised him, offering a handsome reward, but no Wilie came. About a month after, on Thanksgiving-day, a boy called with a covered basket in his hand, the contents of which were soon discovered by Wilie's well-known voice again, which was a joyful sound. When the lost pet was passed around, hugged and kissed with the satisfaction of all parties, it was declared the best Thanksgiving that had ever come to them. It was found out that Wilie had turned some of his smart tricks to as good account as Signor Blitz ; they had really become his stock in trade while travelling about. When hunger oppressed he would stand on his hind feet, put up his paws and plead in such a way that the boys would give him meat in return, then he would turn somersaults in gratitude, and he had added a number of new tricks to his repertoire. He had lost two teeth and had received a wound in the right shoulder which he kept silent about, but which took some of the old spirit out of him. This was Wilie's last sowing of wild oats. He never left his home again, but



Perhaps the spirit of love and kindness among these children had its effect upon Wilie, who was really of a belligerent nature, for I believe where children dwell together in love and unity it not only has its influence on other children all about them, but on cats all the live things in the neighborhood. So, if Wilie did not really become considerate and self-denying in his old days he was at least tolerant, and allowed new cats to come in and be at ease in the household, and sometimes he even gave up his own favorite corner to them ; but it must be confessed that he often took the biggest half of the loaf to himself. One little instance will show how he sometimes forgot his better self and fell back into his old habits in spite of the good example of his superiors. Three mice had been caught in the trap one night and were handed over to Wilie in the morning for division among the feline family. The old feeling of power and love of self to the exclusion of others must have come over him to such a degree that he resolved to appropriate the whole three to himself, but by the time he had despatched one and had taken a few bites from the second, Blackie put in an appearance and asked for her part of the feast. Wilie dropped at once the half-eaten mouse for Blackie, and took the last whole one for himself. With all Moses' love for Wilie, he liked fairness between cats as well as folks better, and he couldn't defend him in this piece of practical selfishness, and showed his disapproval by dividing the choice bits at the next mouse-feast himself.

Cats came and went to the minister's household, yet none of these changes seemed to affect Wilie in the least ; in fact, he welcomed new-comers with a sort of patronizing air as if sole owner and proprietor of the premises. The scarlet fever broke out at one time among the children, and Blackie took it and died, but Wilie managed somehow to hold on, though he was getting to be an old cat. As near as they could calculate, he must have seen at least eighteen birthdays. He cared less and less about hunting and out-door sports, and seemed content and satisfied when in Moses' arms or lying on the rug close by the fire. He would stand at the door



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settled down into a staid, sober, musing, purring old cat, always knowing Moses' voice and touch from the rest of the family ; for since he had become a member of it, two little girls and a boy had been added, of whom Wilie was very fond, but no one quite took the place of Moses, his first love.