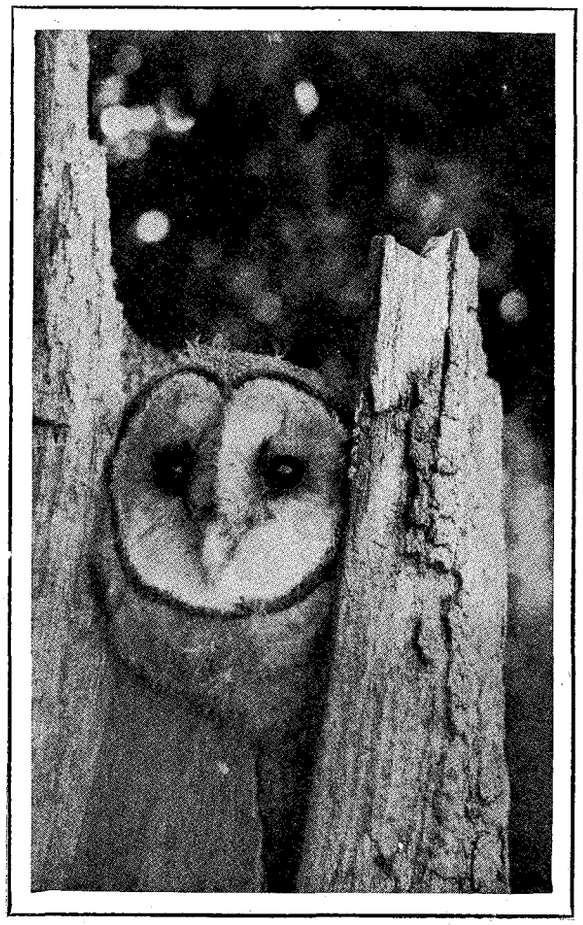
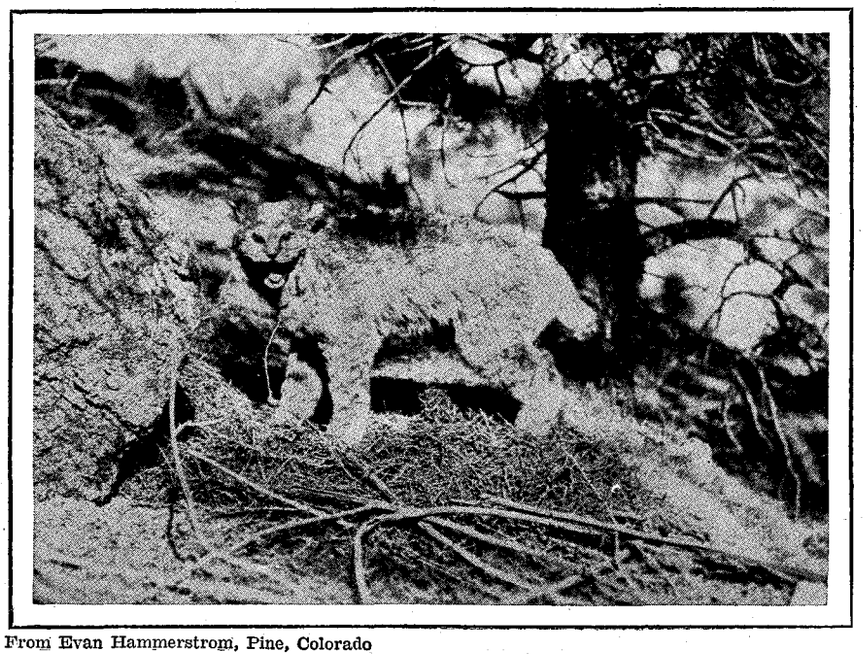
THE OWL AND THE PUSSY-CAT

PICTURES FROM OUTLOOK READERS



THE OWL

From G. D. Smith, Richmond, Kentucky



THE PUSSY-CAT

The camera, our informant states, was placed near by and exposure made by means of a string attached, sprung by the pussy-cat, which in this case is also known as a bobcat

From Evan Hammerstrom, Pine, Colorado

THE BOOK TABLE

POETRY AND COLLAR-BUTTONS

BY DOROTHY GILES

"I SEE," said Philemon, "that the educators have begun to take up poetry in a serious way."

I am not generally accounted an unlettered person, nor one whose ears are unattuned to a concourse of sweet sounds, yet—as well admit it first as last—I groaned. Are we to be educated in poetry, forsooth? To be primed with quatrains? Forced to sit *in statu pupillari* while oracular young Gamaliels in horn spectacles mount the rostrum and dissect a sonnet for our edification? Prut! shall nothing be left us to discover for ourselves?

My sentiments are perhaps the more embittered because I am not myself an educated person, as Philemon has taken pains to point out. That truth has been borne in upon me more than once of late. Though a neat five feet five by my tailor's yardstick, I shrink into puny insignificance when measured by the standards imposed by the keen-eyed gentlemen of the advertisements who point suspicious fingers and demand, "Are you educated?" Mr. Edison's questionnaire was not needed to reveal the haphazardness of my mental equipment, which is like Autolycus's pack, filled with come-by-chances and unconsidered trifles. For no solicitous cicerone guided me by carefully graded steps up the slopes of Parnassus. Rather was my introduction to Apollo one of rollicking informality.

Ours was a nursery built on the generous proportions of the days before obdurate landlords and the H. C. L. took it upon themselves to regulate the size of families. Across one wall were ranged three beds and the wooden crib from which each of us had in turn been graduated to make room for a new tenant, and opposite this wall, and in full view of one lying snugly beneath the blankets, were two doors. One led prosaically enough into the hall and served as an entrance for nurse or the housemaids bearing brooms; the other, into my father's dressing-room. That door was seldom shut. Through its narrow proscenium we saw my father come and go, could watch the intimate ceremonies of hair-brushing and cravat-tying, and—oh, most wonderful!—were drawn into the circle of the mystic Nine. For it was my father's habit, not to stand Narcissus-like before his glass as he dressed, but to pace the floor, and as he strode to repeat aloud in his full voice with its faint suspicion of an Ulster burr, scraps of the verse with which his memory was stored.

"Word was brought to the Danish king
(Hurry!)
That the love of his heart lay suffering."

Ah! The terror of it clutched my throat. I stood tense, one stocking on, one a limp banner in my hand, to listen to the thrilling lay:

"And pined for the comfort his voice would bring
(O! ride as though you were flying.)"

Hurry, O king! Spur your charger on beside the frozen northland fjord. A little girl in ruffled petticoats and hair unbrushed shivers with suspense.

"Better he loves each golden curl
On the brow of that Scandinavian girl
Than his rich crown jewels of ruby and pearl."

Here was high romance. Cinderella and her prince were pallid creatures beside this northland Cophetua.

"And his Rose of the Isles lay dying."

Does any one read "The King of Denmark's Ride" nowadays, I wonder? Or have the educators flouted Gustavus Vasa along with "Marco Bozzaris" and "The Irish Emigrant," all of whom one used to meet within the respectable confines of the Third Reader? Horrible thought! Perhaps the "First Lesson in Poetry" now begins with polyphonic prose.

There were mornings when we went on pilgrimage with Childe Harold:

"Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean—roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain."

Ferris's Pond, where we went to try out our double-runner skates during the Christmas holidays, was the only body of water more extensive than my bath that I had ever seen. But now I stood upon a curving strand, I saw the proud triremes of Nineveh and caravels of Spain sweep by, the horizon was filled with bellying sails, the salt spume stung my cheeks. For my father belonged to a generation which devoured its Byron as had an earlier one its Pope. I have heard it told of his father that, coming in, book in hand, and finding his offspring seated expectantly about the dinner table, he sat down at the head of the board and read them the whole first canto of "The Corsair" while the soup cooled in the tureen and the old nurse-housekeeper glowered in the doorway, yet dared not interrupt.

Not that we received our dole of poesy in such generous servings. On the contrary. Nor was the recital without interruptions, as all who have struggled to insert gold studs into stiffly starched buttonholes will appreciate. But, this accomplished, the minstrel once more took up his lay, often enough in more jocund vein, trolling out the stanzas as might one who, having overcome his adversary, goes light-heartedly upon his way:

"As I was going to Salisbury
All on a market day,
I chanced to meet a pretty maid
A-going the selfsame way."

Once, late in the night, I awoke. Through the half-open door glowed a thin thread of light, and I knew that my father was making ready to go out. Lying there snug in my bed, I pictured William in the stable, grumbling as he put the sorrel to the gig, and I saw in imagination the dark avenue with fearsome shadows lurking behind every tree. Then reassuringly came the sound of my father's footsteps, hushed on our account, but lacking none of their accustomed firmness, and in a moment his voice:

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home."

Long after the gig's lamps had winked in at the nursery window and the sorrel's hoof beats died away did I lie wide-eyed and staring in the dark. In one illumined moment I was made aware of the intrinsic value of life, though stripped of all its gifts, and, filled with incalculable wonder, I entered upon my heritage.

Hang your heads, O wise young Solons! That open sesame lies not in hornbooks nor in hustings. As certain of your own poets have said, "Beside the education of the heart, all else is mere moonshine."

THE NEW BOOKS

FICTION

MIDNIGHT. By Octavus Roy Cohen. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. $1.75.

The mystery of a murder is cleverly put before the reader. A woman, carrying a bag, gets into a supposedly empty taxicab at midnight at a railway station and orders the driver to take her to a certain address. When he gets there, the woman is not in the cab, but a murdered man is; and the bag handed to the driver by the woman turns out to belong to this murdered man and contains his clothes. The driver is honest and innocent. The explanation is logical, if not quite probable.

SLEEPING FIRES. By Gertrude Atherton. The Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York.

Mrs. Atherton's stories seem to have a tendency to alternate between elaborate, well-thought-out novels, such as "The Perch of the Devil" and "The Sisters-in-Law," on the one hand, and pot-boilers like "The Avalanche" and "Mrs. Balfame," on the other hand. This new story, "Sleeping Fires," belongs to the