

**ROBERT
MICHAEL
BALLANTYNE**

MY DOGGIE AND I

Robert Michael Ballantyne
My Doggie and I

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36097077

My Doggie and I:

Содержание

Chapter One	4
Chapter Two	16
Chapter Three	28
Chapter Four	39
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	44

R. M. Ballantyne

My Doggie and I

Chapter One

Explains Itself

I possess a doggie—not a dog, observe, but a doggie. If he had been a dog I would not have presumed to intrude him on your notice. A dog is all very well in his way—one of the noblest of animals, I admit, and pre-eminently fitted to be the companion of man, for he has an affectionate nature, which man demands, and a forgiving disposition, which man needs—but a dog, with all his noble qualities, is not to be compared to a doggie.

My doggie is unquestionably the most charming, and, in every way, delightful doggie that ever was born. My sister has a baby, about which she raves in somewhat similar terms, but of course that is ridiculous, for her baby differs in no particular from ordinary babies, except, perhaps, in the matter of violent weeping, of which it is fond; whereas my doggie is unique, a perfectly beautiful and singular specimen of—of well, I won't say what, because my friends usually laugh at me when I say it, and I don't like to be laughed at.

Freely admit that you don't at once perceive the finer qualities,

either mental or physical, of my doggie, partly owing to the circumstance that he is shapeless and hairy. The former quality is not prepossessing, while the latter tends to veil the amiable expression of his countenance and the lustre of his speaking eyes. But as you come to know him he grows upon you; your feelings are touched, your affections stirred, and your love is finally evoked. As he resembles a door-mat, or rather a scrap of very ragged door-mat, and has an amiable spirit, I have called him "Dumps." I should not be surprised if you did not perceive any connection here. You are not the first who has failed to see it; I never saw it myself.

When I first met Dumps he was scurrying towards me along a sequestered country lane. It was in the Dog Days. Dust lay thick on the road; the creature's legs were remarkably short though active, and his hair being long he swept up the dust in clouds as he ran. He was yelping, and I observed that one or two stones appeared to be racing with, or after, him. The voice of an angry man also seemed to chase him, but the owner of the voice was at the moment concealed by a turn in the lane, which was bordered by high stone-walls.

Hydrophobia, of course, flashed into my mind. I grasped my stick and drew close to the wall. The hairy whirlwind, if I may so call it, came wildly on, but instead of passing me, or snapping at my legs as I had expected, it stopped and crawled towards me in a piteous; supplicating manner that at once disarmed me. If the creature had lain still, I should have been unable to distinguish its

head from its tail; but as one end of him whined, and the other wagged, I had no difficulty.

Stooping down with caution, I patted the end that whined, whereupon the end that wagged became violently demonstrative. Just then the owner of the voice came round the corner. He was a big, rough fellow, in ragged garments, and armed with a thick stick, which he seemed about to fling at the little dog, when I checked him with a shout—

“You’d better not, my man, unless you want your own head broken!”

You see I am a pretty well-sized man myself, and, as I felt confidence in my strength, my stick, and the goodness of my cause, I was bold.

“What d’you mean by ill-treating the little dog?” I demanded sternly, as I stepped up to the man.

“A cove may do as he likes with his own, mayn’t he?” answered the man, with a sulky scowl.

“A ‘cove’ may do nothing of the sort,” said I indignantly, for cruelty to dumb animals always has the effect of inclining me to fight, though I am naturally of a peaceable disposition. “There is an Act of Parliament,” I continued, “which goes by the honoured name of Martin, and if you venture to infringe that Act I’ll have you taken up and prosecuted.”

While I was speaking I observed a peculiar leer on the man’s face, which I could not account for. He appeared, however, to have been affected by my threats, for he ceased to scowl, and

assumed a deferential air as he replied, "Vell, sir, it do seem rather 'ard that a cove should be blowed up for kindness."

"Kindness!" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"Ay, kindness, sir. That there hanimal loves me, it do, like a brother, an the love is mootoal. Ve've lived together now—off an' on—for the matter o' six months. Vell, I gits employment in a factory about fifteen miles from here, in which no dogs is allowed. In coorse, I can't throw up my sitivation, sir, can I? Neither can my doggie give up his master wot he's so fond of, so I'm obleeged to leave 'im in charge of a friend, with stric' orders to keep 'im locked up till I'm fairly gone. Vell, off I goes, but he manages to escape, an' runs arter me. Now, wot can a feller do but drive 'im 'ome with sticks an' stones, though it do go to my 'eart to do it? but if he goes to the factory he's sure to be shot, or scragged, or drownded, or somethink; so you see, sir, it's out o' pure kindness I'm a peltin' of 'im."

Confess that I felt somewhat doubtful of the truth of this story; but, in order to prevent any expression of my face betraying me, I stooped and patted the dog while the man spoke. It received my attentions with evident delight. A thought suddenly flashed on me:—

"Will you sell your little dog?" I asked.

"Vy, sir," he replied, with some hesitation, "I don't quite like to do that. He's such a pure breed, and—and he's so fond o' me."

"But have you not told me that you are obliged to part with him?"

I thought the man looked puzzled for a moment, but only for a moment. Turning to me with a bland smile, he said, "Ah, sir I that's just where it is. I am obleeged to part with him, but I ain't obleeged to sell him. If I on'y part with 'im, my friend keeps 'im for me, and we may meet again, but if I sell 'im, he's gone for ever! Don't you see? Hows'ever, if you wants 'im wery bad, I'll do it on one consideration."

"And that is?"

"That you'll be good to 'im."

I began to think I had misjudged the man. "What's his name?" I asked.

Again for one moment there was that strange, puzzled look in the man's face, but it passed, and he turned with another of his bland smiles.

"His name, sir? Ah, his name? He ain't got no name, sir!"

"No name!" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"No, sir; I object to givin' dogs names on principle. It's too much like treatin' them as if they wos Christians; and, you know, they couldn't be Christians if they wanted to ever so much. Besides, wotever name you gives 'em, there must be so many other dogs with the same name, that you stand a chance o' the wrong dog comin' to 'e ven you calls."

"That's a strange reason. How then do you call him to you?"

"Vy, w'en I wants 'im I shouts 'Hi,' or 'Hallo,' or I vistles."

"Indeed," said I, somewhat amused by the humour of the fellow; "and what do you ask for him?"

“Fi’ pun ten, an’ he’s dirt cheap at that,” was the quick reply.

“Come, come, my man, you know the dog is not worth that.”

“Not worth it, sir!” he replied, with an injured look; “I tell you he’s cheap at that. Look at his breedin’, and then think of his affectionate natur’. Is the affections to count for nuffin’?”

Admitted that the affections were worth money, though it was generally understood that they could not be purchased, but still objected to the price, until the man said in a confidential tone—

“Vell, come, sir, since you do express such a deal o’ love for ’im, and promise to be so good to ’im, I’ll make a sacrifice and let you ’ave ’im for three pun ten—come!”

Gave in, and walked off, with my purchase leaping joyfully at my heels.

The man chuckled a good deal after receiving the money, but I took no notice of that at the time, though I thought a good deal about it afterwards.

Ah! little did I think, as Dumps and I walked home that day, of the depth of the attachment that was to spring up between us, the varied experiences of life we were destined to have together, and the important influence he was to exercise on my career.

Forgot to mention that my name is Mellon—John Mellon. Dumps knows my name as well as he knows his own.

On reaching home, Dumps displayed an evidence of good breeding, which convinced me that he could not have spent all his puppyhood in company with the man from whom I had bought him. He wiped his feet on the door-mat with great vigour before

entering my house, and also refused to pass in until I led the way.

“Now, Dumps,” said I, seating myself on the sofa in my solitary room (I was a bachelor at the time—a medical student, just on the point of completing my course), “come here, and let us have a talk.”

To my surprise, the doggie came promptly forward, sat down on his hind-legs, and looked up into my face. I was touched by this display of ready confidence. A confiding nature has always been to me powerfully attractive, whether in child, cat, or dog. I brushed the shaggy hair from his face in order to see his eyes. They were moist, and intensely black. So was the point of his nose.

“You seem to be an affectionate doggie, Dumps.”

A portion of hair—scarce worthy the name of tail—wagged as I spoke, and he attempted to lick my fingers, but I prevented this by patting his head. I have an unconquerable aversion to licking. Perhaps having received more than an average allowance, in another sense, at school, may account for my dislike to it—even from a dog!

“Now, Dumps,” I continued, “you and I are to be good friends. I’ve bought you—for a pretty large sum too, let me tell you—from a man who, I am quite sure, treated you ill, and I intend to show you what good treatment is; but there are two things I mean to insist on, and it is well that we should understand each other at the outset of our united career. You must never bark at my friends—not even at my enemies—when they come to see

me, and you must not beg at meals. D'you understand?"

The way in which that shaggy creature cocked its ears and turned its head from side to side slowly, and gazed with its lustrous eyes while I was speaking, went far to convince me it really did understand what I said. Of course it only wagged its rear tuft of hair in reply, and whimpered slightly.

Refer to its rear tuft advisedly, because, at a short distance, my doggie, when in repose, resembled an elongated and shapeless mass; but, when roused by a call or otherwise, three tufts of hair instantly sprang up—two at one end, and one at the other end—indicating his ears and tail. It was only by these signs that I could ascertain at any time his exact position.

I was about to continue my remarks to Dumps when the door opened and my landlady appeared bearing the dinner tray.

"Oh! I beg parding, sir," she said, drawing back, "I didn't 'ear your voice, sir, till the door was open, an' I thought you was alone, but I can come back a—"

"Come in, Mrs Miff. There is nobody here but my little dog—one that I have just bought, a rather shaggy terrier—what do you think of him?"

"Do 'e bite, sir?" inquired Mrs Miff, in some anxiety, as she passed round the table at a respectful distance from Dumps.

"I think not. He seems an amiable creature," said I, patting his head. "Do you ever bite, Dumps?"

"Well, sir, I never feel quite easy," rejoined Mrs Miff in a doubtful tone, as she laid my cloth, with, as it were, one eye ever

on the alert: “you never knows w'en these 'airy creatures is goin' to fly at you. If you could see their heyes you might 'ave a guess what they was a thinkin' of; an' then it is so orkard not knowin' w'ich end of the 'airy bundle is the bitin' end, you can't help bein' nervish a little.”

Having finished laying the cloth, Mrs Miff backed out of the room after the manner of attendants on royalty, overturning two chairs with her skirts as she went, and showing her full front to the enemy. But the enemy gave no sign, good or bad. All the tufts were down flat, and he stood motionless while Mrs Miff retreated.

“Dumps, what do you think of Mrs Miff?”

The doggie ran to me at once, and we engaged in a little further conversation until my landlady returned with the viands. To my surprise Dumps at once walked sedately to the hearth-rug, and lay down thereon, with his chin on his paws—at least I judged so from the attitude, for I could see neither chin nor paws.

This act I regarded as another evidence of good breeding. He was not a beggar, and, therefore, could not have spent his childhood with the man from whom I had bought him.

“I wish you could speak, Dumps,” said I, laying down my knife and fork, when about half finished, and looking towards the hearth-rug.

One end of him rose a little, the other end wagged gently, but as I made no further remark, both ends subsided.

“Now, Dumps,” said I, finishing my meal with a draught of

water, which is my favourite beverage, “you must not suppose that you have got a greedy master; though I don’t allow begging. There, sir, is your corner, where you shall always have the remnants of my dinner—come.”

The dog did not move until I said, “come.” Then, with a quick rush he made for the plate, and very soon cleared it.

“Well, you have been well trained,” said I, regarding him with interest; “such conduct is neither the result of instinct nor accident, and sure am I, the more I think of it, that the sulky fellow who sold you to me was not your tutor; but, as you can’t speak, I shall never find out your history, so, Dumps, I’ll dismiss the subject.”

Saying this, I sat down to the newspaper with which I invariably solaced myself for half an hour after dinner, before going out on my afternoon rounds.

This was the manner in which my doggie and I began our acquaintance, and I have been thus particular in recounting the details, because they bear in a special manner on some of the most important events of my life.

Being, as already mentioned, a medical student, and having almost completed my course of study, I had undertaken to visit in one of the poorest districts in London—in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel; partly for the purpose of gaining experience in my profession, and partly for the sake of carrying the Word of Life—the knowledge of the Saviour—into some of the many homes where moral as well as physical disease is rife.

Leanings and inclinations are inherited not less than bodily peculiarities. My father had a particular tenderness for poor old women of the lowest class. So have I. When I see a bowed, aged, wrinkled, white-haired, feeble woman in rags and dirt, a gush of tender pity almost irresistibly inclines me to go and pat her head, sit down beside her, comfort her, and give her money. It matters not what her antecedents may have been. Worthy or unworthy, there she stands now, with age, helplessness, and a hopeless temporal future, pleading more eloquently in her behalf than could the tongue of man or angel. True, the same plea is equally applicable to poor old men, but, reader, I write not at present of principles so much as of feelings. My weakness is old women!

Accordingly, on my professional visiting list—I had at that time a considerable number of these. One of them, who was uncommonly small, unusually miserable, and pathetically feeble, lay heavy on my spirit just then. She had a remarkably bad cold at the time, which betrayed itself chiefly in a frequent, but feeble, sneeze.

As I rose to go out, and looked at my doggie—who was, or seemed to be, asleep on the rug—a sudden thought occurred to me.

“That poor old creature,” I muttered, “is very lonely in her garret; a little dog might comfort her. Perhaps—but no. Dumps, you are too lively for her, too bouncing. She would require something feeble and affectionate, like herself. Come, I’ll think

of that. So, my doggie, you shall keep watch here until I return.”

Chapter Two

Introduces a Young Hero

The day had become very sultry by the time I went out to visit my patients. The sky was overcast with dark thunderous clouds, and, as there seemed every chance of a heavy shower, I returned to my lodgings for an umbrella.

“Oh, Mr Mellon!” exclaimed my landlady, as I entered the lobby, “was there ever a greater blessin’—oh!—”

“Why, what’s the matter, Mrs Miff?”

“Oh, sir! that ’orrid little dog as you brought ’as gone mad!”

“Is that the blessing you refer to, Mrs Miff?”

“No, sir; but your comin’ back is, for the creetur ’as bin rampagin’ round the room, an yellin’ like a thing possessed by demons. I’m so glad you’ve come!”

Feeling sure that the little dog, unaccustomed, perhaps, to be left alone in a strange place, was merely anxious to be free, I at once went to my room-door and opened it. Dumps bounced out, and danced joyfully round me. Mrs Miff fled in deadly silence to her own bedroom, where she locked and bolted herself in.

“Dumps,” said I, with a laugh, “I shall have to take you with me at the risk of losing you. Perhaps the memory of the feed I’ve given you, and the hope of another, may keep you by me. Come, we shall see.”

My doggie behaved much better than I had anticipated. He did indeed stop at several butchers' shops during our walk, and looked inquiringly in. He also evinced a desire to enter into conversation with one or two other sociable dogs, but the briefest chirp or whistle brought him at once obediently to my heel, just as if he had known and obeyed me all his life.

When we reached the poorer parts of the city, I observed that the free-and-easy swagger, and the jaunty hopping of each hind-leg alternately, gave place to a sedate walk and a wary turn of the head, which suggested keen suspicious glances of the unseen eyes.

"Ah!" thought I, "evidently he has suffered hardships and bad treatment in places like this."

I stooped and patted his head. He drew closer to me, as if seeking protection.

Just then a low grumbling of thunder was heard, and soon after the rain came down so heavily that, the umbrella forming an insufficient protection, Dumps and I sought shelter in the mouth of an alley. The plump was short-lived, and the little knots of people who had sought shelter along with us melted quickly away.

My doggie's aspect was not improved by this shower. It had caused his hairy coat to cling to his form, producing a drowned-rat aspect which was not becoming; but a short run and some vigorous shakes soon restored his rotundity.

In a few minutes thereafter we reached a narrow square or court at the end of a very dirty locality, in one corner of which

was a low public-house. Through the half-open swing-door could be seen the usual melancholy crowd of unhappy creatures who had either already come under the full influence and curse of strong drink, or were far on the road to ruin. It was a sight with which I had become so familiar that, sad though it was, I scarce gave it a thought in passing. My mind was occupied with the poor old woman I was about to visit, and I would have taken no further notice of the grog-shop in question if the door had not opened violently, and a dirty ragged street-boy, or "waif," apparently about eight or nine years of age, rushed out with a wild cry that may be described as a compound cheer-and-yell. He came out in such blind haste that he ran his ragged head with great violence against my side, and almost overturned me.

"Hallo, youngster!" I exclaimed sternly.

"Hallo, oldster!" he replied, in a tone of the most insolent indignation, "wot ever do you mean by runnin' agin my 'ead like that? Hain't you got no genteel boys in the West-end to butt agin, that you come all the way to Vitechapel to butt agin *me*? I've a good mind to 'and you over to the p'leece. Come, you owes me a copper for that."

The ineffable insolence of this waif took me quite by surprise. He spoke with extreme volubility, and assumed the commanding air of a man of six-feet-four, though only a boy of four-feet-six. I observed, however, that he kept at a sufficient distance to make sure of escaping in the event of my trying to seize him.

"Come," said I, with a smile, "I think you rather owe me a

copper for giving me such a punch in the ribs.”

“Vell, I don’t mind lookin’ at it in that light,” he replied, returning my smile. “I *vill* give you a copper, on’y I hain’t got change. You wouldn’t mind comin’ into this ’ere grog-shop while I git change, would you? Or if you’ll lend me a sixpence I’ll go in and git it for you.”

“No,” said I, putting my fingers into my waistcoat pocket; “but here is a sixpence for you, which you may keep, and never mind the change, if you’ll walk along the streets with me a bit.”

The urchin held out his dirty hand, and I put the coin into it. He smiled, tossed the sixpence, caught it deftly, and transferred it to his right trousers pocket.

“Vell, you are a rum ’un. But I say, all square? No dodges? Honour bright?”

“No dodges. Honour bright,” I replied.

“Come along.”

At this point my attention was attracted by a sudden change in the behaviour of Dumps. He went cautiously towards the boy, and snuffed at him for a moment.

“I say, is he wicious?” he asked, backing a little.

“I think not, but—”

I was checked in my speech by the little dog uttering a whine of delight and suddenly dancing round the boy, wagging its tail violently, and indeed wriggling its whole shapeless body with joy; as some dogs are wont to do when they meet with an old friend unexpectedly.

“Why, he seems to know you,” said I, in surprise.

“Vell, he do seem to ’ave ’ad the honour of my acquaintance some’ow,” returned the boy, whose tone of banter quickly passed away. “What d’ee call ’im?”

“Dumps,” said I.

“That won’t do. Has he a vite spot on the bridge of ’is nose?” asked the boy earnestly.

“I really cannot tell. It is not long—”

“Here, Punch, come here!” called the boy, interrupting.

At the name of Punch my doggie became so demonstrative in his affections that he all but leaped into the boy’s arms, whined lovingly, and licked his dirty face all over.

“The verry dog,” said the boy, after looking at his nose; “only growed so big that his own mother wouldn’t know ’im.—Vy, where ’ave you bin all this long while, Punch?”

“D’you mean to say that you know the dog, and that his name is Punch?”

“Vell, you *are* green. Wouldn’t any cove with half an eye see that the dog knows me, an’ so, in course, I must know *him*? An’ ven I called ’im Punch didn’t he answer?—hey?”

I was obliged to admit the truth of these remarks. After the first ebullition of joy at the meeting was over, we went along the street together.

“Then the dog is yours?” said I as we went along.

“No, he ain’t mine. He was mine once—ven he was a pup, but I sold ’im to a young lady for—a *verry* small sum.”

“For how much?” I asked.

“For five bob. Yes—on’y five bob! I axed vun pound, but the young lady was so pleasant an’ pritty that I come down to ten bob. Then she said she was poor—and to tell ’ee the plain truth she looked like it—an’ she wanted the pup so bad that I come down to five.”

“And who was this young lady?”

“Blow’d if I knows. She went off wi’ my Punch, an’ I never saw’d ’em more.”

“Then you don’t know what induced her to sell Punch to a low fellow—but of course you know nothing about that,” said I, in a musing tone, as I thought of the strange manner in which this portion of my doggie’s history had come to light, but I was recalled from my reverie by the contemptuous tones of my little companion’s voice, as he said—

“But I *do* know something about that.”

“Oh, indeed! I thought you said you never saw the young lady again.”

“No more I did. Neither did I ever see Punch again till to-day, but I know for certain that my young lady never sold no dog wotsomedever to no *low* feller as ever walked in shoe leather or out of it!”

“Ah, I see,” said I slowly, “you mean—”

“Yes, out with it, that’s just wot I do mean—that the low feller prigged the pup from her, an’ I on’y vish as I ’ad a grip of his ugly nose, and I’d draw it out from his uglier face, I would, like the

small end of a telescope, and then shut it up flat again—so flat that you'd never know he'd had no nose at all!"

My little sharp-witted companion then willingly gave me an account of all he knew about the early history of my doggie.

The story was not long, but it began, so to speak, at the beginning.

Punch, or Dumps, as I continued to call him, had been born in a dry water-butt which stood in a back yard near the Thames. This yard was, or had been, used for putting away lumber.

"It was a queer place," said my little companion, looking up in my face with a droll expression—"a sort o' place that, when once you had gone into it, you was sure to wish you hadn't. Talk o' the blues, sir; I do assure *you* that w'en I used to go into that yard of a night it gave me the black-an'-blues, it did. There was a mouldiness an' a soppiness about it that beat the katticombs all to sticks. It looked like a place that some rubbish had bin flung into in the days before Adam an' Eve was born, an' 'ad been forgotten tee-totally from that time to this. Oh, it was awful! Used to make my marrow screw up into lumps w'en I was used to go there."

"But why did you go there at all if you disliked it so much?" I asked.

"Vy? because I 'adn't got no better place to go to. I was used to sleep there. I slep' in the self-same water-butt where Punch was born. That's 'ow I come to scrape acquaintance with 'im. I'd bin away from 'ome in the country for a week's slidin'."

"A week's what?"

“Slidin’. Don’t you know what sliding on the ice is?”

“Oh!—yes. Are you very fund of that?”

“I should think I was—w’en my boots are good enough to stick on, but they ain’t always that, and then I’ve got to slide under difficulties. Sometimes I’m out o’ boots an’ shoes altogether, in vich case slidin’s impossible; but I can look on and slide in spirit, vich is better than nuffin’. But, as I was sayin’ w’en you ’ad the bad manners to interrupt me, I ’ad bin away from ’ome for a week—”

“Excuse my interrupting you again, but where is your home, may I ask?”

“You may ask, but it ’ud puzzle me to answer for I ain’t got no ’ome, unless I may say that London is my ’ome. I come an’ go where I pleases, so long’s I don’t worrit nobody. I sleep where I like, if the bobbies don’t get their eyes on me w’en I’m agoin’ to bed, an’ I heat wotever comes in my way if it ain’t too tough. In winter I sleeps in a lodgin’ ’ouse w’en I can but as it costs thrippence a night, I finds it too expensive, an’ usually prefers a railway arch, or a corner in Covent Garden Market, under a cart or a barrow, or inside of a empty sugar-barrel—anywhere so long’s I’m let alone; but what with the rain, the wind, the cold, and the bobbies, I may be said to sleep under difficulties. Vell, as I was agoin’ to say w’en—”

“Excuse me once more—what is your name?” said I.

“Hain’t got no name.”

“No name! Come, you are joking. What is your father’s name?”

“Hain’t got no father—never ’ad, as I knows on, nor mother neither, nor brother, nor sister, nor aunt, nor wife—not even a mother-in-law. I’m a unit in creation, I is—as I once heerd a school-board buffer say w’en he was luggin’ me along to school; but he was too green, that buffer was, for a school-boarder. I gave ’im the slip at the corner of Watling Street, an’ they’ve never bin able to catch me since.”

“But you must be known by some name,” said I. “What do your companions call you?”

“They call me bad names, as a rule. Some o’ the least offensive among ’em are Monkey-face, Screwnose, Cheeks, Squeaker, Roundeyes, and Slidder. I prefers the last myself, an’ ginerally answers to it. But, as I was agoin’ to say, I’d bin away for a veek, an’ w’en I comed ’ome—”

“To which part of home? for London is a wide word, you know,” I said.

“Now, sir, if you go for to interrupt me like that I’ll ’ave to charge a bob for this here walk; I couldn’t stand it for sixpence.”

“Come, Slidder, don’t be greedy.”

“Vell, sir, if you got as many kicks as I do, and as few ha’pence, p’r’aps you’d be greedy too.”

“Perhaps I should, my boy,” said I, in a gentle tone. “But come, I will give you an extra sixpence if we get along well. Let’s have the rest of your story; I won’t interrupt again.”

“It ain’t my story, it’s Punch’s story,” returned the waif, as he stooped to pat the gratified doggie. “Vell, w’en I com’d ’ome it

was lateish and I was tired, besides bein' 'ungry; so I goes right off to my water-butt, intendin' to go to bed as usual, but no sooner did I put my head in, than out came a most awful growl. The butt lay on its side, and I backed out double quick just in time, for a most 'orrible-lookin' terrier dog rushed at me. Bein' used to dogs, I wasn't took by surprise, but fetched it a clip with one o' my feet in its ribs that sent it staggerin' to the palin' o' the yard. It found a hole, bolted through, scurried up the lane yellin', and I never saw'd it more! This was Punch's mother. On goin' into the butt afterwards I found three dead pups and one alive, so I pitched the dead ones away an' shoved the live one into the breast of my coat, where he slep' till mornin'. At first I 'ad a mind to drown the pup, but it looked so comfortable an' playful, an' was such a queer critter, that I called him Punch, an' became a father to 'im. I got him bones an' other bits o' grub, an' kep' 'im in the water-butt for three veeks. Then he began to make a noise v'en I left him; so, bein' sure the bobbies would rout 'im out at last, I took 'im an' sold 'im to the first pleasant lady that seemed to fancy 'im."

"Well, Slidder," said I, as we turned down into the mean-looking alley where Mrs Willis, my little old woman, dwelt, "I am greatly interested in what you have told me about my little dog, and I am interested still more in what you have told me about yourself. Now, I want you to do me a favour. I wish you to go with me to visit an old woman, and, after that, to walk home with me—part of the way, at least."

The boy, whose pinched, hunger-smitten face had an expression of almost supernatural intelligence on it, bestowed on me a quick, earnest glance.

“No dodges? Honour bright? You ain’t a school-board buffer?” he asked.

“No dodges. Honour bright,” I replied, with a smile.

“Vell, then, heave ahead, an’ I’ll foller.”

We passed quickly down to the lower end of the alley, which seemed to lose itself in a wretched court that appeared as if it intended to slip into the river—an intention which, if carried out, would have vastly improved its sanitary condition. Here, in a somewhat dark corner of the court, I entered an open door, ascended a flight of stairs, and gained a second landing. At the farthest extremity of the passage I stopped at a door and knocked. Several of the other doors of the passage opened, and various heads were thrust out, while inquisitive eyes surveyed me and my companion. A short survey seemed to suffice, for the doors were soon shut, one after another, with a bang, but the door at which I knocked did not open.

Lifting the latch, I entered, and observed that Mrs Willis was seated by the window, looking wistfully out. Being rather deaf, she had not heard my knock.

“Come in,” I whispered to little Slidder, “sit down on this stool near the door, and keep quiet until I speak to you.”

So saying, I advanced to the window. The view was not interesting. It consisted of the side of a house; about three feet

distant, down which ran a water-spout, or drain-pipe, which slightly relieved the dead look of the bricks. From one pane of the window it was possible, by squeezing your cheek against it, to obtain a perspective view of chimney-pots. By a stretch of the neck upwards you could see more chimney pots. By a stretch of imagination you could see cats quarrelling around them,—or anything else you pleased!

Sitting down on a rickety chair beside the little old woman, I touched her gently on the shoulder. She had come to know my touch by that time, I think, for she looked round with a bright little smile.

Chapter Three

Treats of an Old Heroine

It was pleasant yet sad to observe the smile with which old Mrs Willis greeted me—pleasant, because it proved that she was rejoiced to see me; sad, because it was not quite in keeping with the careworn old face whose set wrinkles it deranged.

“I knew you would come. You never miss the day,” she said, both words and tone showing that she had fallen from a much higher position in the social scale.

“It costs me little to visit you once a week, dear Mrs Willis,” I replied, “and it gives me great pleasure; besides, I am bound by the laws of the Society which grants your annuity to call personally and pay it. I only wish it were a larger sum.”

“Large enough; more than I deserve,” said the old woman in a low tone, as she gazed somewhat vacantly at the dead wall opposite, and let her eyes slowly descend the spout.

The view was not calculated to distract or dissipate the mind. The bricks were so much alike that the eye naturally sought and reposed on or followed the salient feature. Having descended the spout as far as the window-sill permitted, the eyes of Mrs Willis slowly reascended as far as possible, and then turned with a meek expression to my face. “More than I deserve,” she repeated, “and *almost* as much as I require. It is very kind of the Society to give

it, and of you to bring it. May God bless you both! Ah, doctor! I'm often puzzled by—eh! What's that?"

The sudden question, anxiously asked, was accompanied by a feeble attempt to gather her poor garments close round her feet as Dumps sniffed at her skirts and agitated his ridiculous tail.

"It's only my dog, granny,"—I had of late adopted this term of endearment; "a very quiet well-behaved creature, I assure you, that seems too amiable to bite. Why, he appears to have a tendency to claim acquaintance with everybody. I do believe he knows *you!*"

"No, no, he doesn't. Put him out; pray put him out," said the old woman, in alarm.

Grieved that I had unintentionally roused her fear, I opened the door and called Dumps. My doggie rose, with his three indicators erect and expectant.

"Go out, sir, and lie down!"

The indicators slowly drooped, and Dumps crawled past in abject humility. Shutting the door, I returned.

"I hope you don't dislike little boys as well as little dogs, granny, because I have brought one to wait for me here. You won't mind his sitting at the door until I go?"

"No, no!" said Mrs Willis quickly; "I like little boys—when—when they're good," she added, after a pause.

"Say I'm one o' the good sort, sir," suggested Slidder, in a hoarse whisper. "Of course, it ain't true, but wot o' that, if it relieves her mind?"

Taking no notice of this remark, I again sat down beside my old woman.

“What were you going to say about being puzzled, granny?”

“Puzzled, doctor! did I say I was puzzled?”

“Yes, but pray don’t call me doctor. I’m not quite fledged yet, you know. Call me Mellon, or John. Well, you were saying—”

“Oh, I remember. I was only going to say that I’ve been puzzled a good deal of late by that text in which David says, ‘I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.’ Now, my father and mother were both good Christians, and, although I cannot claim to be a *good* one myself, I do claim to be a poor follower of Jesus. Yet here am I—”

She paused.

“Well, granny,” said I, “are you forsaken?”

“Nay, John, God forbid that I should say so; but am I not a beggar? Ah pride, pride, you are hard to kill!”

“*Are* you a beggar?” I asked in a tone of surprise. “When did you beg last, granny?”

“Is not a recipient of charity a beggar?”

“No,” I replied stoutly, “he is not. A solicitor of charity is a beggar, but a recipient thereof is not. In your case it was I who was the beggar. Do you not remember when I found you first, without a crust in the house, how I had to beg and entreat you to allow me to put your name on this charity, and how you persistently refused, until at last I did it without your consent; and how, eventually, you gave in only when I charged you with

pride? You are not forsaken, granny, and you are not a beggar.”

“Brayvo, doctor! you have ’er there!” came in a soft whisper from the door.

For a moment I felt tempted to turn the boy out, as I had turned out the dog; but, seeing that my old woman had not overheard the remark, I took no notice of it.

“You have put the matter in a new light John,” said Mrs Willis slowly, as her eyes once more sought the spout. “You often put things in new lights, and there does seem some truth in what you say. It did hurt my pride at first, but I’m gettin’ used to it now. Besides,” continued the old lady, with a deep sigh, “that trouble and everything else is swallowed up in the great sorrow of my life.”

“Ah! you refer to your granddaughter, I suppose,” said I in a tone of profound sympathy. “You have never told me about her, dear granny. If it is not too painful a subject to speak of, I should like to hear about her. When did she die?”

“Die!” exclaimed Mrs Willis with a burst of energy that surprised me—“she did not die! She left me many, many months ago, it seems like years now. My Edie went out one afternoon to walk, like a beautiful sunbeam as she always was, and—and—she never came back!”

“Never came back!” I echoed, in surprise.

“No—never. I was not able to walk then, any more than now, else I would have ranged London all round, day and night, for my darling. As it was, a kind city missionary made inquiries at

all the police-offices, and everywhere else he could think of, but no clew could be gained as to what had become of her. At last he got wearied out and gave it up. No wonder; he had never seen Edie, and could not love her as I did. Once he thought he had discovered her. The body of a poor girl had been found in the river, which he thought answered to her description. I thought so too when he told me what she was like, and at once concluded she had tumbled in by accident and been drowned—for, you see, my Edie was good and pure and true. She could not have committed suicide unless her mind had become deranged, and there was nothing that I knew of to bring about that. They got me with much trouble into a cab, and drove me to the place. Ah! the poor thing—she was fair and sweet to look upon, with her curling brown hair and a smile still on the parted lips, as if she had welcomed Death; but she was not my Edie. For months and months after that I waited and waited, feeling sure that she would come. Then I was forced to leave my lodging. The landlord wanted it himself. I begged that he would let me remain, but he would not. He was a hard-hearted, dissipated man. I took another lodging, but it was a long way off, and left my name and new address at the old one. My heart sank after that, and—and I've no hope now—no hope. My darling must have met with an accident in this terrible city. She must have been killed, and will never come back to me.”

The poor creature uttered a low wail, and put a handkerchief to her old eyes.

“But, bless the Lord!” she added in a more cheerful tone, “I will go to her—soon.”

For some minutes I knew not what to say in reply, by way of comforting my poor old friend. The case seemed indeed so hopeless. I could only press her hand. But my nature is naturally buoyant, and ready to hope against hope, even when distress assails myself.

“Do not say there is no hope, granny,” said I at last, making an effort to be cheerful. “You know that with God all things are possible. It may be that this missionary did not go the right way to work in his search, however good his intentions might have been. I confess I cannot imagine how it is possible that any girl should disappear in this way, unless she had deliberately gone off with some one.”

“No, John, my Edie would not have left me thus of her own free will,” said the old woman, with a look of assurance which showed that her mind was immovably fixed as to that point.

“Well, then,” I continued, “loving you as you say she did, and being incapable of leaving you deliberately and without a word of explanation, it follows that—that—”

I stopped, for at this point no plausible reason for the girl’s disappearance suggested itself.

“It follows that she must have been killed,” said the old woman in a low broken tone.

“No, granny, I will not admit that.—Come, cheer up; I will do my best to make inquiries about her, and as I have had

considerable experience in making investigations among the poor of London, perhaps I may fall on some clew. She would be sure to have made inquiries, would she not, at your old lodging, if she had felt disposed to return?"

"Felt disposed!" repeated Mrs Willis, with a strange laugh. "If she *could* return, you mean."

"Well—if she could," said I.

"No doubt she would; but soon after I left my old lodging the landlord fled the country, and other people came to the house, who were troubled by my sending so often to inquire. Then my money was all expended, and I had to quit my second lodging, and came here, which is far, far from the old lodging, and now I have no one to send."

"Have you any friends in London?" I asked.

"No. We had come from York to try to find teaching for my darling, for we could get none in our native town, and we had not been long enough in London to make new friends when—when—she went away. My dear Ann and Willie, her mother and father, died last year, and now we have no near relations in the world."

"Shall I read to you, granny?" said I, feeling that no words of mine could do much to comfort one in so sad a case.

She readily assented. I was in the habit of reading and praying with her during these visits. I turned, without any definite intention of doing so, to the words, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I cannot

tell why, but I paused here instead of reading on, or commenting on the words.

The old woman looked earnestly at me.

“These words,” she said, “have been in my mind all yesterday and the day before. I have been greatly comforted by them, because ‘He is faithful who has promised.’ Pray over them, John; don’t read any more.”

I knelt by the poor woman’s chair; she could not kneel with me in body, though she did in spirit, I doubt not. I had quite forgotten Slidder, but, on rising, observed that he had followed my example and gone down on his knees.

“Were you praying with us, Slidder?” I asked, after we left Mrs Willis, and were walking up the alley, followed by Dumps.

“Dun know, sir; I’ve never heard nor seen nuffin’ o’ this sort before. In coorse I’ve heard the missionaries sometimes, a-hollerin’ about the streets, but I never worried myself about *them*. I say, doctor, that’s a rum go about that gal Edie—ain’t it? I’ve quite took a fancy to that gal, now, though I ain’t seen her. D’ye think she’s bin drowneded?”

“I scarce know what to think. Her disappearance so suddenly does seem very strange. I fear, I fear much that—however, it’s of no use guessing. I shall at once set about making inquiries.”

“Ha! so shall I,” said the little waif, with a look of determination on his small face that amused me greatly, “for she’s a good gal is Edie—if she ain’t drowneded.”

“Why, boy, how can you know whether the girl is good or

bad?”

“How can I know?” he echoed, with a glance of almost superhuman wisdom. “In coorse I know by the powers of obseruation. That old gal, Mrs Willis, is a good old thing—as good as gold. Vell, a good mother is always cocksure to ’ave a good darter—specially ven she’s a only darter—so the mother o’ Edie bein’ good, Edie herself *must* be good, don’t you see? Anythink as belonged to Mrs Willis can’t help bein’ good. I’m glad you took me to see her, doctor, for I’ve made up my mind to take that old ’ooman up, as the bobbies say w’en they’re wexed with avin’ nuffin’ to do ’xcept strut about the streets like turkey-cocks. I’ll take ’er up and do for ’er, I will.”

On questioning him further I found that this ragged and homeless little waif had indeed been touched by Mrs Willis’s sad story, and drawn towards her by her soft, gentle nature—so different from what he had hitherto met with in his wanderings,—and that he was resolved to offer her his gratuitous services as a message-boy and general servant, without requiring either food or lodging in return.

“But Mrs Willis may object to such a dirty ragged fellow coming about her,” said I.

“Ain’t there no pumps in London, stoopid?” said Slidder, with a look of pity, “no soap?”

“True,” I replied, with a laugh, “but you’d require needles and thread and cloth, in addition, to make yourself respectable.”

“Nothink of the sort; I can beg or borryer or steal coats and

pants, you know.”

“Ah, Slidder!” said I, in a kind but serious tone, “doubtless you can, but begging or borrowing are not likely to succeed, and stealing is wrong.”

“D’you think so?” returned the boy, with a look of innocent surprise. “Don’t you think, now, that in a good cause a cove might:—

“Take wot isn’t his’n,
An’ risk his bein’ sent to pris’n?”

I replied emphatically that I did not think so, that *wrong* could never be made *right* by any means, and that the commencement of a course of even disinterested kindness on such principles would be sure to end ill.

“Vell, then, I’ll reconsider my decision, as the magistrates ought to say, but never do.”

“That’s right. And now we must part, Slidder,” I said, stopping. “Here is the second sixpence I promised you, also my card and address. Will you come and see me at my own house the day after to-morrow, at eight in the morning?”

“I will,” replied the boy, with decision; “but I say, all fair an’ above-board? No school-boardin’ nor nuffin’ o’ that sort—hey? honour bright?”

“Honour bright!” I replied, holding out my hand, which he grasped and shook quite heartily.

We had both taken two or three steps in opposite directions, when, as if under the same impulse, we looked back at each other, and in so doing became aware of the fact that Dumps stood between us on the pavement in a state of extreme indecision or mental confusion.

“Hallo! I say! we’ve bin an’ forgot Punch!” exclaimed the boy.

“Dumps,” said I, “come along!”

“Punch,” said he, “come here, good dog!”

My doggie looked first at one, then at the other. The two indicators in front rose and fell, while the one behind wagged and drooped in a state of obvious uncertainty.

“Won’t you sell ’im back?” said Slidder, returning. “I’ll work it out in messages or anythink else.”

“But what of the bobbies?” I asked.

“Ah! true, I forgot the bobbies. I’d on’y be able to keep ’im for a week, p’r’aps not so long, afore they’d nab him.—Go, Punch, go, you don’t know ven you’re vell off.”

The tone in which this was uttered settled the point, and turned the wavering balance of the creature’s affections in my favour. With all the indicators extremely pendulous, and its hairy coat hanging in a species of limp humility, my doggie followed me home; but I observed that, as we went along, he ever and anon turned a wistful glance in the direction in which the ragged waif had disappeared.

Chapter Four

In Which Dumps Finds Another Old Friend

One morning, a considerable time after the events narrated in the last chapter, I sat on the sofa waiting for breakfast, and engaged in an interesting conversation with Dumps. The only difference in our mode of communication was that Dumps talked with his eyes, I with my tongue.

From what I have already said about my doggie, it will be understood that his eyes—which were brown and speaking eyes—lay behind such a forest of hair that it was only by clearing the dense masses away that I could obtain a full view of his liquid orbs. I am not sure that his ears were much less expressive than his eyes. Their variety of motion, coupled with their rate of action, served greatly to develop the full meaning of what his eyes said.

“Mrs Miff seems to have forgotten us this morning, Dumps,” I remarked, pulling out my watch.

One ear cocked forward, the other turned back towards the door, and a white gleam under the hair, indicating that the eyes turned in the same direction, said as plainly as there was any occasion for—

“No; not quite forgotten us. I hear her coming now.”

“Ha! so she is. Now you shall have a feed.” Both ears elevated to the full extent obviously meant “Hurrah!” while a certain motion of his body appeared to imply that, in consequence of his sedentary position, he was vainly attempting to wag the sofa.

“If you please, sir,” said my landlady, laying the breakfast tray on the table, “there’s a shoe-black in the kitchen says he wants to see you.”

“Ah! young Slidder, I fancy. Well, send him up.”

“He says he’s ’ad his breakfast an’ will wait till you have done, sir.”

“Very considerate. Send him up nevertheless.”

In a few minutes my *protégé* stood before me, hat in hand, looking, in the trim costume of the brigade, quite a different being from the ragged creature I had met with in Whitechapel. Dumps instantly assaulted him with loving demonstrations.

“How spruce you look, my boy!”

“Thanks to *you*, sir,” replied Slidder, with a familiar nod; “they do say I’m lookin’ up.”

“I hope you like the work. Have you had breakfast? Would a roll do you any good?”

“Thankee, I’m primed for the day. I came over, sir, to say that granny seems to me to be out o’ sorts. Since I’ve been allowed to sleep on the rug inside her door, I’ve noticed that she ain’t so lively as she used to was. Shivers a deal w’en it ain’t cold, groans now an’ then, an whimpers a good deal. It strikes me, now—though I ain’t a reg’lar sawbones—that there’s suthin’ wrong with

her in'ards."

"I'll finish breakfast quickly and go over with you to see her," said I.

"Don't need to 'urry, sir," returned Slidder; "she ain't wery bad—not much wuss than or'nary—on'y I've bin too anxious about her—poor old thing. I'll wait below till you're ready.—Come along, Punch, an' jine yer old pal in the kitchen till the noo 'un's ready."

After breakfast we three hurried out and wended our way eastward. As the morning was unusually fine I diverged towards one of the more fashionable localities to deliver a note with which I had been charged. Young Slidder's spirits were high, and for a considerable time he entertained me with a good deal of the East-end gossip. Among other things, he told me of the great work that was being done there by Dr Barnardo and others of similar spirit, in rescuing waifs like himself from their wretched condition.

"Though some on us don't think it so wretched arter all," he continued. "There's the Slogger, now, he won't go into the 'ome on no consideration; says he wouldn't give a empty sugar-barrel for all the 'omes in London. But then the Slogger's a lazy muff. He don't want to work—that's about it. He'd sooner starve than work. By consikence he steals, more or less, an finds a 'ome in the 'stone jug' pretty frequent. As to his taste for a sugar-barrel, I ain't so sure that I don't agree with 'im. It's big, you know—plenty of room to move, w'ich it ain't so with a flour-barrel. An'

then the smell! Oh! you've no notion! W'y, that's wuth the price of a night's lodgin' itself, to say nothin' o' the chance of a knot-hole or a crack full o' sugar, that the former tenants has failed to diskiver."

While the waif was commenting thus enthusiastically on the bliss of lodging in a sugar-barrel, we were surprised to see Dumps, who chanced to be trotting on in front come to a sudden pause and gaze at a lady who was in the act of ringing the door-bell of an adjoining house.

The door was opened by a footman, and the lady was in the act of entering when Dumps gave vent to a series of sounds, made up of a whine, a bark, and a yelp. At the same moment his tail all but twirled him off his legs as he rushed wildly up the stairs and began to dance round the lady in mad excitement.

The lady backed against the door in alarm. The footman, anxious apparently about his calves, seized an umbrella and made a wild assault on the dog, and I was confusedly conscious of Slidder exclaiming, "Why, if that ain't *my* young lady!" as I sprang up the steps to the rescue.

"Down, Dumps, you rascal; down!" I exclaimed, seizing him by the brass collar with which I had invested him.—"Pardon the rudeness of my dog, madam," I said, looking up; "I never saw him act in this way before. It is quite unaccountable—"

"Not quite so unaccountable as you think," interrupted Slidder, who stood looking calmly on, with his hands in his pockets and a grin on his face.—"It's your own dog, miss."

“What do you mean, boy?” said the lady, a gaze of surprise chasing away the look of alarm which had covered her pretty face.

“I mean ’xactly what I says, miss. The dog’s your own: I sold it to you long ago for five bob!”

The girl—for she was little more than sixteen—turned with a startled, doubting look to the dog.

“If you don’t b’lieve it, miss, look at the vite spot on the bridge of ’is nose,” said Slidder, with a self-satisfied nod to the lady and a supremely insolent wink to the footman.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.