Stables Gordon

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Содержание

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Preface

Prefaces are not always necessary; but when an author has either to acknowledge a courtesy, or to make an apology, then a preface becomes a duty. I have to do both.

Firstly, then, as regards acknowledgment. I have endeavoured in this book to give sketches – as near to nature as a line could be drawn – of a few of my former friends and favourites in the animal world, and many of these have appeared from time to time in the magazines and periodicals, to which I have the honour to contribute.

I have to thank, then, the good old firm of Messrs Chambers, of Edinburgh, for courteously acceding to my request to be allowed to republish "My Cabin Mates and Bedfellows," and "Blue-Jackets' Pets," from their world-known Journal.

I have also to thank Messrs Cassell and Co., London, for the re-appearance herein of several short stories I wrote for their charming magazine *Little Folks*, on the pages of which, by the way, the sun never sets.

Mr Dean, one of my publishers, kindly permitted me to reprint the story of my dead-and-gone darling "Tyro," and the story of "Blucher." This gentleman I beg to thank. I have also to thank Messrs Routledge and Son for a little tale from my book, "The Domestic Cat."

Nor must I forget to add that I have taken a few sketches, though no complete tales, from some of my contributions to that queen of periodicals yclept *The Girl's Own Paper*, to edit which successfully, requires as much skill and taste, as an artist displays in the culling and arrangement of a bouquet of beautiful flowers.

With the exception of these tales and sketches, all else in the book is original, and, I need hardly add, painted from the life.

Secondly, as regards apology. The wish to have, in a collected form, the life-stories of the creatures one has loved; to have, as it were, the graves of the pets of one's past life arranged side by side, is surely only natural; no need to apologise for that, methinks. But, reader, I have to apologise, and I do so most humbly, for the too frequent appearance of the "*ego*" in this work.

I have had no wish to be autobiographical, but my own life has been as intimately mixed up with the lives of the creatures that have called me "master," as is the narrow yellow stripe, in the tartan plaid of the Scottish clan to which I belong. And so I crave forgiveness.

Gordon Stables.

Gordon Grove, Twyford, Berks.

Chapter One.
Prologistic

Scene: A lofty pine wood, from which can be caught distant glimpses of the valley of the Thames. “Aileen Aroon,” a noble Newfoundland, has thrown herself down by her master’s side. All the other dogs at play in the wood.

Aileen’s master (*speaks*): “And so you have come and laid yourself down beside me, Aileen, and left your playmates every one? left your playmates roaming about among the trees, while you stay here by me?

“Yes, you may put your head on my knee, dear, honest Aileen, or your chin at all events, for you yourself, old girl, have no idea of the weight of your whole head. No, Aileen, thank you, not a paw as well; you are really attempting now to take the advantage of my good nature. So be content, ‘Sable’[1] – my good, old, silly, simple Sable. There, I smooth your bonnie brow to show you that the words ‘old’ and ‘silly’ are truly terms of endearment, and meant neither as a scoff at your age, nor to throw disparagement upon the amount or quality of your intellect. Intellect? Who could glance for a single moment at that splendid head of yours, my Aileen, and doubt it to be the seat of a wisdom almost human, and of a benevolence that might easily put many of our poor fallen race to shame. And so I smooth your bonnie brow thus, and thus. But now, let us understand each other, Aileen. We must have done with endearments for a little time. For beautiful though the day be, blue the sky, and bright the sunshine, I really have come out here to the quiet woods to work. It is for that very purpose I have seated myself beneath this great tree, the branches of which are close and thick enough to defend us against yonder shower, that comes floating up the valley of the Thames, if indeed it can ever reach this height, my Sable.

“No noisy school children, no village cries to disturb and distract one here, and scatter his half-formed ideas to the winds, or banish his best thoughts to the shades of oblivion. Everything is still around us, everything is natural; the twittering of the birds, the dreamy hum of insect life, the sweet breath of the fir-trees, combine to calm the mind and conduce to thought.

“Why do I not come and romp and play? you ask. I cannot explain to you why. There *are* some things, Aileen, that even the vast intellect of a Newfoundland cannot comprehend; the electric telegraph, for instance, the telephone, and why a man must work. You do not doubt the existence of what you do not understand, however, my simple Sable. We poor mortal men do. What a thing faith is even in a Newfoundland!

“No, Sable, I must work. Here look, is proof of the fifteenth chapter of my serial tale, copy of the sixteenth must go to town with that. In this life, Aileen, one must keep ahead of the printer. This is all Greek to you, is it? Well then, for just one minute I will talk to you in language that you do understand.

“There, you know what I mean, don’t you, when I fondle your ear, and smooth it and spread it over my note-book? What a great ear it is, Aileen! No, I positively refuse to have that paw on my knee in addition to your head. Don’t be offended, I know you love me. There, put back that foot on the grass.

“Yes, Aileen, it *was* very good of you, I admit, to leave your fan and your romps, and come and lay your dear kindly head on my lap. The other dogs prefer to play. Even ‘Theodore Nero,’ your husband, is tumbling on the ground on that broad back of his, with his four immense legs pointing skywards, and his whole body convulsed with merriment. The three collies are in chase of a hare, the

[1] The subject of this memoir was called ‘Sable’ before she came into my possession. She is well remembered by all lovers of the true Newfoundland, as Sable One of the show benches, and was generally admitted to be the largest and most handsome of her breed and sex ever exhibited. – The Author.

occasional excited yelp that is borne along on the breeze can tell us that; we pray they may not meet the keeper. The Dandie Dinmont is hidden away in the dark depths of a rabbit burrow, and the two wiry wee Scotch terriers are eagerly watching the hole 'gainst the rabbit bolts.

"Fun and romps did I say, Aileen? Alas! dear doggie, these are hardly the words to apply to your little games, for you seldom play or romp with much heart, greatly though it rejoices me to see you lively. You seldom play with much heart, mavourneen, and when you do play, you seem but to play to please me and you tire all too soon. I know you have a deep sorrow at your heart, for you lost your former master, Aileen, and you are not likely to forget him. There always is a sad look in those hazel eyes of yours, and forgive me for mentioning it, but you are turning very grey around the lips. Your bright saucy-eyed husband yonder is three years older than you, Sable, and he isn't grey. But, Aileen, I know something that you don't know, poor pet, for I'm very learned compared to you. The seeds of that terrible disease, phthisis, are in your blood, I fear, and will one day take you from me, and I'll have to sit and write under this tree – alone. I'm talking Greek again, am I? It is as well, Aileen, it should be Greek to you. Why do my eyes get a trifle moist, you seem to ask me. Never mind. There! the sad thoughts have all flown away for a time, but, my dear, loving dog, when you have gone to sleep at last and for ever, I'll find a quiet corner to lay your bones in, and – I'll write your story. Yes, I promise you that, and it is more than any one will ever do for me, Aileen.

"Don't sigh like that. You have a habit of sighing, you tell me. Very well, so be it, but I thought at first that it was the wind soughing through this old pine-tree of ours. Yes, *ours*– yours and mine, Aileen. Now, *do* let me work. See, I'll put my note-book close to your great nose, and your chin shall touch my left hand; you can lie so and gaze all the time in my face. That will help me materially. But by-and-by you'll fall asleep and dream, and I'll have to wake you, because you'll be giving vent to a whole series of little ventriloquistic barks and sobs and sighs, and I will not know whether you are in pain or whether your mind is but reverting to —

> "'Visions of the chase,
> Of wild wolves howling over hills of snow,
> Slain by your stalwart fathers, long ago.'"

Chapter Two.
Introducing Aileen Aroon

"With eye upraised his master's looks to scan,
The joy, the solace, and the aid of man,
The rich man's guardian, and the poor man's friend,
The only creature faithful to the end."

Crabbe.

"The Newfoundland, take him all in all, is unsurpassed, and possibly unequalled as the companion of man." —*Idstone*.

"These animals are faithful, good-natured, and friendly. They will allow no one to injure either their master or his property, however great be the danger. They only want the faculty of speech to make their good wishes understood." – "*Newfoundland Dogs*," in *McGregor's "Historical and Descriptive Sketches of British America*."

Dog Barks. Shepherd. – "Heavens! I could hae thocht that was 'Bronte.'"

Christopher North. – "No bark like his, James, now belongs to the world of sound."

Shepherd. – "Purple black was he all over, as the raven's wing. Strength and sagacity emboldened his bounding beauty, but a fierceness lay deep down within the quiet lustre of his eye, that tauld ye, had he been angered he could hae torn in pieces a lion."

North. – "Not a child of three years old and upwards in the neighbourhood that had not hung by his mane, and played with his paws, and been affectionately worried by him on the flowery greensward." – "*Noctes Ambrosianae*."

"Heigho!" I sighed, as I sat stirring the fire one evening in our little cosy cottage. "So that little dream is at an end."

"Twenty guineas," said my wife, opening her eyes in sad surprise. "Twenty guineas! It is a deal of money, dear."

"Yes," I assented, "it is a deal of money for us. Not, mind you, that Sable isn't worth double. She has taken the highest honours on the show benches; her pedigree is a splendid one, and all the sporting papers are loud in her praises. She is the biggest and grandest Newfoundland ever seen in this country. But twenty guineas! Yes, that is a deal of money."

"I wish I could make the money with my needle, dear," my wife remarked, after a few minutes' silence.

"I wish I could make the money with my pen, Dot," I replied; "but I fear even pen and needle both together won't enable us to afford so great a luxury for some time to come. There are bills that must be paid; both baker and butcher would soon begin to look sour if they didn't get what they call their little dues."

"Yes," said Dot, "and there are these rooms to be papered and painted."

"To say nothing of a new carpet to be bought," I said, "and oilcloth for the lobby, and seeds for the garden."

"Yes, dear," said my wife, "and that American rocking-chair that you've set your heart upon."

"Oh, that can wait, Dot. There are plenty other things needed more than that. But it is quite evident, Sable is out of the question for the present."

I looked down as I spoke, and patted the head of my champion Newfoundland Theodore Nero, who had entered unseen and was gazing up in my face with his bonnie hazel eyes as if he comprehended every word of the conversation.

"Poor Nero," I said, "I *should* have liked to have had Sable just to be a mate and companion for you, old boy."

The great dog looked from me to my wife, and back again at me, and wagged his enormous tail.

"I've got you, master," he seemed to say, "and my dear mistress. What more could I wish?"

Just as I pen these lines, gentle reader, two little toddlers are coming home from forenoon school, with slates under their arms; but when the above conversation took place, no toddlers were on the books, as they say in the navy. We were not long married. It was nine long years ago, or going on that way. The previous ten years of my life had been spent at sea; but service in Africa had temporarily ruined my health, so that invaliding on a modicum of half-pay seemed more desirable than active service on full.

These were the dear old days of poverty and romance. Retirement from active duty afloat and – marriage. It is too often the case that he who marries for love has to work for siller. Henceforward, literature was to be my staff, if not the crutch on which I should limp along until "my talents should be recognised," as my wife grandly phrased it.

"Poor and content is rich, and rich enough," says the greatest William that ever lived. There is nothing to be ashamed of in poverty, and just as little to boast about. Naval officers who retire young are all poor. I know some who once upon a time were used to strut the quarter-deck or ship's bridge in blue and gold, and who are now, God help them, selling tea or taking orders for wine.

"With all my worldly goods I thee endow." I squeezed the hand of my bride at the altar as I spoke the words, and well she knew the pressure was meant to recall to her mind a fact of which she was already cognisant, that "all my worldly goods" consisted of a Cremona fiddle, and my Newfoundland dog, and my old sea-chest; but the bottom of that was shaky.

But to resume my story.

"Hurrah!" I shouted some mornings after, as I opened the letters. "Here's news, Dot. We're going to have Sable after all. Hear how D. O'C writes. He says —

"'Though I have never met you, judging from what I have seen of your writings, I would rather you accepted Sable as a gift, than that any one else should have my favourite for money,' and so on and so forth."

These are not the exact words of the letter, but they convey the exact meaning.

Sable was to come by boat from Ireland, and I was to go to Bristol, a distance of seventy miles, to meet her, for no one who values the life and limbs of a dog, would trust to the tender mercies of the railway companies.

"I'll go with you, Gordon," said my dear friend, Captain D – . Like myself, he had been a sailor, but unmarried, for, as he used to express it, "he had pulled up in time." He had taken *Punch's* advice to people about to marry – "Don't."

Captain D – didn't.

"Well, Frank," I said, "I'll be very glad indeed of your company."

So off we started the night before, for the boat would be in the basin at Hotwells early the next morning. The scene and the din on board that Irish boat beggars description, and I do not know which made the most noise, the men or the pigs. I think if anything the pigs did. It seemed to me that evil spirits had entered into the pigs, and they wanted to throw themselves into the sea. I believe evil spirits had entered into the men, too; some of them, at all events, *smelt* of evil spirits.

"Is it a thremendeous big brute 'av a black dog you've come to meet, sorr?" said the cook to me.

"Yes," I replied, "a big black dog, but not a brute."

"Well, poor baste, sorr, it's in my charge she has been all the way, and she's had lashin's to ate and to drink. Thank you koindly, sir, and God bless your honour. Yonder she is, sorr, tied up foreninst the horse-box, and she's been foighting with the pigs all the noight, sorr."

She certainly had been fighting with the pigs, for she herself was wounded, and the ears of some of the pigs were in tatters.

Sable was looking very sour and sulky. She certainly had not relished the company she had been placed among. She permitted me to lead her on shore; then she gave me one glance, and cast one towards my friend.

"You'll be the *man* that has come for me," she said; she did not say "the gentleman."

"Who is your fat friend?" she added.

We both caressed her without eliciting the slightest token on her part of any desire to improve our acquaintance.

"You may pat me," she told us, "and call me pet names as much as you please. I won't bite you as I did the pigs, but I don't care a bone for either of you, and, what is more, I never intend to. I have left my heart in Ireland; my master is there."

"Come on, Sable," I said; "we'll go now and have some breakfast."

"Don't pull," said Sable; "I'm big enough to break the chain and bolt if I wish to. I'll go with you, but I'll neither be dragged nor driven."

No dog ever had a better breakfast put before her, but she would not deign even to look at it.

"Yes," she seemed to say, "it is very nice, and smells appetising, and I'm hungry, too; a bite of a sow's ear is all I've had since I left home; but for all that I don't mean to eat; I'm going to starve myself to death, that is what I'm going to do."

It is very wrong and unfair to bring home any animal, whether bird or beast, to one's house without having previously made everything needful ready for its reception. Sable's comfort had not been forgotten, and on her arrival we turned her into the back yard, where, in a small wooden house, was a bed of the cleanest straw, to say nothing of a dish of wholesome food, and a bowl of the purest water. The doors to the yard were locked, but no chain was put on the new pet, for the walls were seven feet high or nearly so, and her safety was thus insured.

So we thought, but, alas for our poor logic! We had yet to learn what Sable's jumping capabilities were. When I wrote next day, and told her old master that Sable had leapt the high wall and fled, the reply was that he regretted very much not having told me, that she was the most wonderful dog to jump ever he had seen or heard tell of.

Meanwhile Sable was gone. But where or whither? The country is well-wooded, but there are plenty of sheep in it. Judging from Sable's pig-fighting qualities, I felt sure she would not starve, if she chose to feed on sheep. But one sheep a day, even for a week, would make a hole in my quarter's half-pay, and I shuddered to think of the little bill Sable might in a very short time run me up. No one had seen Sable. So days passed; then came a rumour that some school children had been frightened nearly out of their little wits by the appearance of an enormous bear, in a wood some miles from our cottage.

My hopes rose; the bear must be Sable. So an expedition was organised to go in search of her. The rank and file of this expedition consisted of schoolboys. I myself was captain, and Theodore Nero, the Newfoundland, was first lieutenant.

We were successful. My heart jumped for joy as I saw the great dog in the distance. But she would not suffer any one to come near her. That was not her form. I must walk on and whistle, and she would follow. I was glad enough to close with the offer, and gladder still when we reached home before she changed her mind and went off again.

Chaining now became imperative until Sable became reconciled to her situation in life, until I had succeeded in taming her by kindness.

This was by no means an easy task. For weeks she never responded to either kind word or caress, but one day Sable walked up to me as I sat writing, and, much to my surprise, offered me her great paw.

"Shake hands," she seemed to say as she wagged her tail, "Shake hands. You're not half such a bad fellow as I first took you for."

My friend, Captain D – , was delighted, and we must needs write at once to Sable's old master to inform him of the unprecedented event.

Sable became every day more friendly and loving in her own gentle undemonstrative and quiet fashion. But as yet she had never barked.

One day, however, on throwing a stick to Nero, she too ran after it, and on making pretence to throw it again, Sable began to caper. Not gracefully perhaps, but still it was capering, and finally she barked.

When I told friend Frank he was as much overjoyed as I was. I suggested writing at once to Ireland and making the tidings known.

"A letter, Gordon," said my friend emphatically, "will not meet the requirements of the case. Let us telegraph. Let us wire, thus – '*Sable has barked*.'"

The good dog's former master was much pleased at the receipt of the information.

"She will do now," he wrote; "and I'm quite easy in my mind about her."

Now all this may appear very trivial to some of my readers, but there really was for a time, a probability that Sable would die of sheer grief, as, poor dog, she eventually succumbed to consumption.

We were, if possible, kinder to Sable, or Aileen Aroon, as she was now called, than ever. She became the constant companion of all our walks and rambles, and developed more and more excellences every week. Without being what might be called brilliant, Aileen was clever and most teachable. She never had been a trained or educated dog. Theodore Nero had, and whether he took pity on his wife's ignorance or not, I cannot say, but he taught her a very great deal she never knew anything about before.

Here is a proof that Aileen's reasoning powers were of no mean order. When Master Nero wanted a tit-bit he was in the habit of making a bow for it. The bow consisted in a graceful inclination or lowering of the chest and head between the outstretched fore-paws. Well, Aileen was not long in perceiving that the performing of this little ceremony always procured for her husband a morsel of something nice to eat, that "To boo, and to boo, and to boo," was the best of policies.

She therefore took to it without any tuition, and to see those "twa dogs," standing in front of me when a biscuit or two were on the board, and booing, and booing, and booing, was a sight to have made a dray-horse smile.

I am sure that Nero soon grew exceedingly fond of his new companion, and she of him in her quiet way.

I may state here parenthetically, that Master Nero had had a companion before Aileen. His previous experience of the married state, however, had not been a happy one. His wife, "Bessie" to name, had taken to habits of intemperance. She had been used to one glass of beer a day before she came to me, and it was thought it might injure her to stop it. If she had kept to this, it would not have mattered, but she used to run away in the evenings, and go to a public-house, where she would always find people willing to treat her for the mere curiosity of seeing a dog drink. When she came home she was not always so steady as she might be, but foolishly affectionate. She would sit down by me and insist upon shaking hands about fifteen times every minute, or she would annoy Nero by pawing him till he growled at her, and told her, or seemed to tell her, she ought to be ashamed of herself for being in the state she was. She was very fat, and after drinking beer used to take Nero's bed from him and sleep on her back snoring, much to his disgust. This dog was afterwards sold to Mr Montgomery,

of Oxford, who stopped her allowance for some months, after which she would neither look at ale nor gin-and-water, of which latter she used to be passionately fond.

Aileen and Nero used to be coupled together in the street with a short chain attached to their collars. But not always; they used to walk together jowl to jowl, whether they were coupled or not, and these two splendid black dogs were the wonder and admiration of all who beheld them. Whatever one did the other did, they worked in couple. When I gave my stick to Nero to carry, Aileen must have one end of it. When we went shopping they carried the stick thus between them, with a bag or basket slung between, and their steadiness could be depended on.

They used to spring into the river or into the sea from a boat both together, and both together bring out whatever was thrown to them. Their immense heads above the water both in friendly juxta-position, were very pretty to look at.

They were in the habit of hunting rats or rabbits in couples, one going up one side of the hedge, the other along the other side.

I am sorry to say they used at times, for the mere fun of the thing, and out of no real spirit of ill-nature, to hunt horses as well as rabbits, one at one side of the horse the other at the other, and likewise bicyclists; this was great fun for the dogs, but the bicyclists looked at the matter from quite another point of view. But I never managed to break them altogether of these evil habits.

It has often seemed to me surprising how one dog will encourage another in doing mischief. A few dogs together will conceive and execute deeds of daring, that an animal by himself would never even dream of attempting.

As I travelled a good deal by train at that time, and always took my two dogs with me, it was more convenient to go into the guard's van with my pets, than take a first or second class carriage by storm. I shall never forget being put one day with the two dogs into a large almost empty van. It was almost empty, but not quite. There was a ram tied up at the far end of it.

Now if this ram had chosen to behave himself, as a ram in respectable society ought to, it would have saved me a deal of trouble, and the ram some danger. But no sooner had the train started than the obstreperous brute began to bob his head and stamp his feet at me and my companions in the most ominous way.

Luckily the dogs were coupled; I could thus more easily command them. But no sooner had the ram begun to stamp and bob, than both dogs commenced to growl, and wanted to fly straight at him. "Let us kill that insolent ram," said Nero, "who dares to stamp and nod at us."

"Yes," cried Aileen, "happy thought! let us kill him."

I was ten minutes in that van before the train pulled up, ten minutes during which I had to exercise all the tact of a great general in order to keep the peace. Had the ram, who was just as eager for the fray as the dogs, succeeded in breaking his fastenings, hostilities would have commenced instantly, and I would have been powerless.

By good luck the train stopped in time to prevent a catastrophe, and we got out, but for nearly a week, as a result of my struggle with the dogs, I ached all over and felt as limp as a stranded jelly-fish.

Chapter Three.
Containing the Story of One of Aileen's Friends

"The straw-thatched cottage, or the desert air,
To him's a palace if his master's there."

Just eighteen months after the events mentioned in last chapter, as novelists say, things took a turn for the better, and we retired a little farther into the country into a larger house. A bigger house, though certainly not a mansion; but here are gardens and lawn and paddock, kennels for dogs, home for cats, and aviaries for birds, many a shady nook in which to hang a hammock in the summer months, and a garden wigwam, which makes a cool study even in hot weather, bedraped as it is in evergreens, and looks a cosy wee room in winter, when the fire is lighted and the curtains are drawn. "Ah! Gordon," dear old Frank used to say – and there was probably a grain of truth in the remark – "there is something about the quiet contented life you lead in your cottage, with its pleasant surroundings, that reminds me forcibly of the idyllic existence of your favourite bard, Horace, in his home by the banks of the Anio.

"'Beatus ille qui procul negotiis,
Ut prisca gens mortalium,
Patenta rure bubus exercet suis
Solutus omni fenore,
Neque excitatur classico miles truci
Neque horret iratum mare.'"

"True, Frank," I replied, "at sea I often thought I would dearly love a country life. My ambition – and I believe I represent quite a large majority of my class – used to be, that one day I might be able to retire on a comfortable allowance – half-pay, for instance – take a house with a morsel of land, and keep a cow and a pony, and go in for rearing poultry, fruit, and all that sort of thing. Such was my dream.

"There were six of us in our mess in the saucy little 'Pen-gun.'

"It was hot out there on the East Coast of Africa, where we were stationed, and we did our best to make it hotter – for the dhows which we captured, at all events, because we burned them. Nearly all day, and every day, we were in chase, mostly of slave dhows, but sometimes of jolly three-masters.

"Away out in the broad channel of the blue Mozambique, with never a cloud in the sky, nor a ripple on the ocean's breast, tearing along at the rate of twelve knots an hour, with the chase two miles ahead, and happy in the thoughts of quite a haul of prize-money, it wasn't half bad fun, I can assure you. Then we could whistle 'A sailor's life is the life for me,' and feel the mariner all over.

"But, when the chase turned out to be no prize, but only a legitimate trader, when the night closed in dark and stormy, with a roaring wind and a chopping sea, then, it must be confessed, things did not look quite so much *couleur de rose*, dot a mariner's life so merry-o!

"On nights like these, when the fiddles were shipped across the table to keep things straight – for a lively lass was the saucy 'Pen-gun,' and thought no more of breaking half-a-dozen wine-glasses, than she did of going stem first in under a wave she was too lazy to mount – when the fiddles were shipped, when we had wedged ourselves into all sorts of corners, so as we shouldn't slip about and fall, when the steward had brought the coffee and the biscuits called ships', then it was our wont to sit and sip and talk and build our castles in the air.

"'It's all very fine,' one of us would say, 'to talk of the pleasures of a sailor's life, it's all very well in songs; but, if I could only get on shore now, on retired pay – '

"'Why, what would you do?' – a chorus.

"'Why, go in for the wine trade like a shot,' from the first speaker. 'That's the way to make money. Derogatory, is it? Well, I don't see it; I'd take to tea – '

"Chorus again: 'Oh! come, I say!'

"Some one, more seriously and thoughtfully: 'No; but wouldn't you like to be a farmer?' The ship kicks, a green sea breaks over her. We are used to it, but don't like it, even although we do take the cigars from our lips, as we complacently view the water pouring down the hatchway and rising around our chairs' legs.

"'A farmer, you know, somewhere in the midland counties; green fields and lowing kine; a nice stream, meandering – no not meandering, but —

> "'Chattering over stony ways,
> In little sharps and trebles,
> Bubbling into eddying bays.
> Babbling o'er the pebbles;
> Winding about, and in and out,
> With here a blossom sailing,
> And here and there a lusty trout,
> And here and there a grayling.'

"'Yes,' from another fellow, 'and of course a comfortable house of solid English masonry, and hounds not very far off, so as one could cut away to a hunt whenever he liked.'

"'And of course balls and parties, and a good dinner *every* day.'

"'And picnics often, and the seaside in season, and shooting all the year round.'

"'And I'd go in for bees.'

"'Oh! yes, I think every fellow would go in for bees.'

"'And have a field of Scottish heather planted on purpose for them: fancy how nice that would look in summer!'

"'And I'd have a rose garden.'

"'Certainly; nothing could be done without a rose garden.'

"'Then one could go in for poultry, and grow one's own eggs.'

"'Hear the fellow! – fancy *growing* eggs!'

"'Well, lay them, then – it's all the same. I'm not so green as to imagine eggs grow on trees.'

"'And think of the fruit one might have.'

"'And the mushroom beds.'

"'And brew one's own beer and cider.'

"'And of course one could go in for dogs.'

"'Oh! la! yes – have them all about the place. Elegant Irish setters, dainty greyhounds, cobby wee fox-terriers, a noble Newfoundland or two, and a princely bloodhound at each side of the hall-door.'

"'That's the style!'

"'Now, give us a song, Pelham!'

"'What shall it be – Dibdin?'

"'No, Pelham, give us, "Sweet Jessie, the Flower o' Dumblane," or something in that style. Let us fancy we are farmers. Doesn't she pitch and roll, though! Dibdin and Russell are all very well on shore, or sitting under an awning in fine weather when homeward bound. We're not homeward bound – worse luck! – so heave round with the "Flower o' Dumblane."'

"My dream has in some measure been fulfilled, my good friend Frank; I can sit now under my own vine and my own fig-tree, but still look back with a certain degree of pleasure to many a night spent on board that heaving, pitching, saucy, wee ship."

Our new home nestles among trees not far from a very primitive wee town indeed. We have only to descend along the hill-side through the pine-trees, wind some way round the knoll, and there at our feet lies *our* village – Fernydale, to wit. It might just as well be called Sleepy Hollow, such a dreamy little spot it is. Not very far from a great line of rails – just far enough to subdue the roar of the trains, that night and day go whirling past in a drowsy monotone, like the distant sound of falling water. Everything and everybody about our little village looks quiet and drowsy; the little church itself, that nestles among the wealth of foliage, looks the picture of drowsiness, and the very smoke seems as if it preferred lingering in Fernydale to ascending upwards and joining the clouds. We have a mill here – oh! such a drowsy old mill! No one was ever known to be able to pass that mill without nodding. Intoxicated lieges, who have lain down to rest opposite that mill, have been known to sleep the sleep that knows no waking; and if at any time you stop your horse for a moment on the road, while you talk to the miller, the animal soon begins to nod; and he nods, and nods, and nid-nid-nods, and finally goes to sleep entirely, and it takes no end of trouble to start him off again.

Our very birds are drowsy. The larks don't care to sing a bit more than suffices for conjugal felicity, and the starlings are constantly tumbling down our bedroom chimney, and making such a row that we think the burglars have come.

The bees are drowsy; they don't gather honey with any degree of activity; they don't seem to care whether they gather it or not. They are often too lazy to fly back to hive, and don't go home till morning; and if you were to take a walk along our road at early dawn – say 11:45 a.m. – you would often find these bees sitting limp-winged and half asleep on fragrant thistle-tops, and if you poked at them with a stalk of hay, and tried to reason with them, they would just lift one lazy fore-leg and beckon you off, as much as to say, peevishly —

"Oh! what was I born for? *Can't* you leave a poor fellow alone? What do ye come pottering around here at midnight for?"

Such is the hum-drum drowsiness of little Fernydale.

But bonny is our cottage in spring and summer, when the pink-eyed chestnuts are all ablaze at the foot of the lawn, when flowers bloom white on the scented rowans, when the yellow gorse on the knoll beyond glints through the green of the trees, when the merlin sings among the drooping limes, and the croodling pigeons make soft-eyed love on the eaves; and there is beauty about it, too, even in winter, when the world is robed in snow, when the leafless branches point to leaden skies, and the robin, tired of his sweet little song, taps on the panes with his tiny bill, for the crumbs he has never to ask for in vain.

It was one winter's evening in the year eighteen hundred and seventy something, that Frank stood holding our parlour-door in his hand, while he gazed with a pleased smile at the group around the fire. It wasn't a large group. There were Dot and Ida knitting: and my humble self sitting, book in hand and pipe in mouth. Then there were the Newfoundland dogs on the hearth, and pussy singing on the footstool, singing a duet with the kettle on the hob. And I must not forget to mention "Poll," the parrot. Nobody knew how old Polly was, but with her extreme wisdom you couldn't help associating age. She didn't speak much at a time; like many another sage, she went in for being laconic, pithy, and to the point. I think, however, that some day or other Polly will tell us quite a long story, for she often clears her throat and says, "*Now*," in quite an emphatic manner; then she cocks her head, and says "Are you listening?"

"We are all attention, Polly," we reply. So Polly begins again with her decided "*Now*;" but up to this date she has not succeeded in advancing one single sentence farther towards the completion of her story.

Well, upon the winter's evening in question Frank stood there, holding the door and smiling to himself, and any one could see at a glance that Frank was pregnant with an idea.

"I've been thinking," said Frank, "that there is nothing needed to complete the happiness of the delightful evenings we spend here, except a story-teller."

"No one better able than yourself, Frank, to fill the post," I remarked.

"Well, now," said Frank, "for that piece of arrant flattery, I fine you a story."

"Read us that little sketch about 'Dandie,'" my wife said.

"Yes, do," cried Ida, looking up from her work.

If a man is asked to do anything like this he ought to do it heartily.

Dandie, I may premise, is, or rather was, a contemporary of Aileen Aroon.

Our Dandie

A very long doggie is Dandie, with little short bits of legs, nice close hanging ears, hair as strong and rough as the brush you use for your hair, and a face – well, some say it is ugly; I myself, and all my friends, think it is most engaging. To be sure, it is partially hidden with bonnie soft locks of an ambery or golden hue; but push those locks aside, and you will see nothing in those beautiful dark hazel eyes but love and fun. For Dandie is fall of fun. Oh! doesn't she enjoy a run out with the children! On the road she goes feathering, here, there, and everywhere. Her legs are hardly straight, you must understand – the legs of very few Dandies are, for they are so accustomed to go down drains, and all sorts of holes, and go scraping here, and scraping there, that their feet and fore-legs turn at last something like a mole's.

Dandie wasn't always the gentle loving creature she is now, and this is the reason I am writing her story. Here, then, is how I came by Dandie.

I was sitting in my study one morning, writing as usual, when a carriage stopped at the door, and presently a friend was announced.

"Why, Dawson, my boy!" I cried, getting up to greet him, "what wind blew you all the way here?"

"Not a good one, by any means," said Dawson; "I came to see you."

"Well, well, sit down, and tell me all about it. I sincerely hope Miss Hall is well."

"Well! yes," he replied abstractedly. "I think I've done all for the best; though that policeman nearly had her. But she left her mark on him. Ha! ha!"

I began to think my friend was going out of his mind.

"Dawson," I said, "what have you done with her?"

"She's outside in the carriage," replied Dawson.

I jumped up to ring the bell, saying, "Why, Dawson, pray have the young lady in. It is cruel to leave her by herself."

Dawson jumped up too, and placing his hand on my arm, prevented me from touching the bell-rope.

"Nay, nay!" he cried, almost wildly, I thought; "pray do not think of it. She would bite you, tear you, rend you. Oh, she is a *vixen*!" This last word he pronounced with great emphasis, and sinking once more into the chair, and gazing abstractedly at the fire, he added, "And still I love her, good little thing!"

I now felt quite sorry for Dawson. A moment ago I merely *thought* he was out of his mind, now I felt perfectly sure of it.

There was a few minutes' silence; and then suddenly my friend rushed to the window, exclaiming —

"There, there! She's at it again! She has got the cabby by the coat-tails, and she'll eat her way through him in five minutes, if I don't go."

And out he ran; and I followed, more mystified than ever; and there in the carriage was no young lady at all, but only the dear little Dandie whose story I am writing. She was most earnestly engaged in tearing the driver's blue coat into the narrowest strips, and growling all the while most vigorously.

She quieted down, however, immediately on perceiving her master, jumped into his arms, and began to lick his face.

So the mystery was cleared up; and half an hour afterwards I was persuaded to become the owner of that savage Dandie, and Dawson had kissed her, and left lighter in heart than when he had come.

I set aside one of the best barrel kennels for her, had a quantity of nice dry straw placed therein, and gave her two dishes, one to be filled daily with pure clean water – without which, remember, no dog can be healthy – and the other to hold her food.

Now, I am not afraid of any dog. I have owned many scores in my time, and by treating them gently and firmly, I always managed to subdue even the most vicious among them, and get them to love me. But I must confess that this Dandie was the most savage animal that I had ever yet met.

When I went to take her dish away next morning, to wash and replenish it, only my own celerity in beating a retreat prevented my legs from being viciously bitten. I then endeavoured to remove the dish with the stable besom. Alas for the besom! Howling and growling with passion, with scintillating eyes and flashing teeth, she tore that broom to atoms, and then attacked the handle. But I succeeded in feeding her, after which she was quieter.

Now, dogs, to keep them in health, need daily exercise, and I determined Dandie should not want that, wild though she seemed to be. There was another scene when I went to unloose her; and I found the only chance of doing so was to treat her as they do wild bulls in some parts of the country. I got a hook and attached it to the end of a pole the same length as the chain. I could then keep her at a safe distance. And thus for a whole week I had to lead her out for exercise. I lost no opportunity of making friends with her, and in about a fortnight's time I could both take her dish away without a broom and lead her out without the pole.

She was still the vixen, however, which her former master had called her. When she was presented with a biscuit, she wouldn't think of eating it, before she had had her own peculiar game with it. She would lay it first against the back of the barrel, and for a time pretend not to see it, then suddenly she would look round, next fly at it, growling and yelping with rage, and shake it as she would a rat. Into such a perfect fury and frenzy did she work herself during her battle with the biscuit, that sometimes on hearing her chain rattle she would turn round and seize and shake it viciously. I have often, too, at these times seen her bite her tail because it dared to wag – bite it till the blood sprang, then with a howl of pain bite and bite it again and again. At last I made up my mind to feed her only on soil food, and that resolution I have since stuck to.

Poor Dandie had now been with us many months, and upon the whole her life, being almost constantly on the chain, was by no means a very happy one. Her hair, too, got matted, and she looked altogether morose and dirty, and it was then that the thought occurred to my wife and me that she would be much better *dead*. I considered the matter in all its bearings for fully half an hour, and it was then I suddenly jumped up from my chair.

"What *are* you going to do?" asked my wife.

"I'm going to wash Dandie; wash her, comb out all her mats, dry her, and brush her, for, do you know, I feel quite guilty in having neglected her."

My wife, in terror of the consequences of washing so vicious a dog, tried to dissuade me. But my mind was made up, and shortly after so was Dandie's bed – of clean dry straw in a warm loft above the stable. "Firmly and kindly does it," I had said to myself, as I seized the vixen by the nape of the neck, and in spite of her efforts to rend any part of my person she could lay hold of, I popped her into the tub.

Vixen, did I say? She was popped into the tub a vixen, sure enough, but I soon found out I had "tamed the shrew," and after she was rinsed in cold water, well dried, combed, and brushed, the poor little thing jumped on my knee and kissed me. Then I took her for a run – a thing one ought never to neglect after washing a dog. And you wouldn't have known Dandie now, so beautiful did she look.

Dandie is still alive, and lies at my feet as I write, a living example of the power of kindness. She loves us all, and will let my sister, wife, or little niece do anything with her, but she is still most viciously savage to nearly all strangers. She is the best guard-dog that I ever possessed, and a terror to tramps. She is very wise too, this Dandie of mine, for when out walking with any one of my relations, she is as gentle as a lamb, and will let anybody fondle her. She may thus be taken along with us with impunity when making calls upon friends, but very few indeed of those friends dare go near her when in her own garden or kennel. We have been well rewarded for our kindness to Dandie, for although her usual residence by day is her own barrel, and by night she has a share of the straw with the other dogs, she is often taken into the house, and in spite of our residence being in a somewhat lonely situation, whenever I go from home for the night she becomes a parlour boarder, and I feel quite easy in my mind because *Dandie is in the house*.

"Well," said Frank, when I had finished, "if that little story proves anything, it proves, I think, that almost any dog can be won by kindness."

"Or any animal of almost any kind," I added.

"Ah!" cried Frank, laughing, "but you failed with your hyaena. Didn't you?"

"Gratitude," I replied, smiling, "does not occupy a very large corner in a hyaena's heart, Frank."

Note. Since writing the above, poor Dandie has gone to her little grave in the orchard.

Chapter Four.
Dedicated to Girls and Boys Only

"A little maiden, frank and fair,
With rosy lips apart,
And sunbeams glinting in her hair,
And sunshine at her heart."

In my last chapter I mentioned the name of Ida. Ida Graham was my little niece. Alas! she no longer brightens our home with the sunshine of her smile. Poor child, she was very beautiful. We all thought so, and every one else who saw her. I have but to close my eyes for a moment and I see her again knitting quietly by the fire on a winter's evening, or reading by the open window in the cool of a summer's day; or, reticule in hand, tripping across the clovery lea, the two great dogs, Aileen and Nero, bounding in front of her; or blithely singing as she feeds her canaries; or out in the yard beyond, surrounded by hens and cocks, pigeons, ducks, and geese, laughing gaily as she scatters the barley she carries in her little apron.

It was not a bit strange that every creature loved Ida Graham, from the dogs to the bees. We lost her one day, I remember, in summer-time, and found her at last sound asleep by the foot of a tree, with deer browsing quietly near her, a hare washing its face within a yard of her, and wild birds hopping around and on her.

Such was Ida. It is no wonder, then, that we miss the dear child.

Very often I would have Ida all to myself for a whole day, when my wife was in town or visiting, and Frank was gardening or had the gout, for he suffered at times from that aristocratic but tantalising ailment.

On these occasions, when the weather was fine, we always took the dogs and went off to spend an hour or two in the woods. If it rained we stayed indoors, seated by the open window in order to be near the birds. But wet day or fine, Ida generally managed to get a story from me. It was in the wood, and seated beneath the old pine-tree, that I told her the following. I called it —

Puff: The Autobiography of a Persian Pussy

I am one of seven. Very much to the grief and sorrow of my poor patient mother, all the rest of my little brothers and sisters met with a watery grave. I did not know what mother meant when she told me this, with tears in her eyes. I was too young then, but I think I know now. But I was left to comfort my parent's heart. This was humane at least in my mistress, because, although it seems the fate of us poor pussies that very many of us come into the world to be speedily drowned, it is cruel, for many reasons, to destroy all a mother's darlings at once.

Well, the very earliest thing that I can remember is being taken up in the arms of a pretty young lady. I was two months old then, and had been playing with a ball of worsted, which I had succeeded in getting entangled among the chair-legs.

"Oh, what a dear, beautiful, wee puss!" said this young miss, holding me round, so that she might look at my face. "And, oh!" she added, "it has such lovely eyes, and such a nice long coat."

"You may have it, Laura dear," said my mistress, "if you will be kind to it."

"Thank you so very much," said Laura, "and I know I shall be fond of it always."

And I do not doubt for a moment that Laura meant what she said. Her fault, however, and my misfortune lay, as you shall see, in the fact that she did not know a bit how to treat a pussy in order to make it happy.

Laura liked me, and romped with me morning and night, it is true; but although cats are ever so fond of attention and of romps, they cannot live upon either, and often and often I have gone hungry to my saucer and found it empty, which made me feel very cold and sad and dispirited. Yet, in spite of this, I grew to be very fond indeed of my new mistress, and as I sometimes managed to catch a mouse I was not so very badly off after all.

When I gazed at Miss Laura's gentle face and her sweet eyes – they were just like my own – I could not help thinking that if she only knew how hungry and cold I often was, she would surely feed me twice a day at least. But my crowning sorrow was to come; and this was nothing less than the loss, I fear entirely, of my mistress's affection.

My grief was all the more bitter in that I was in some measure to blame for it myself. You see, I was a growing cat, and every day the pangs of hunger seemed more difficult to bear; so one day, when left by myself in the kitchen, I found out a way to open the cupboard, and – pray do not blame me; I do think if you had seen all the nice things therein, and felt as hungry as I felt, you would have tasted them too.

One little sin begets another, and before two months were over I was known in the kitchen as "that thief of a cat." I do not think Miss Laura knew of my depredations downstairs, for I was always honest in the parlour, and she would, I feel certain, have forgiven me even if she had known. As I could not be trusted in the kitchen, I was nearly always tamed out-of-doors of a night. This was exceedingly unkind, for it was often dark and rainy and cold, and I could find but little shelter. On dry moonlight nights I did not mind being out, for there was fun to be got – fun and field-mice. Alas! I wish now I had kept to fun and field-mice; but I met with evil company, vagrant outdoor cats, who took a delight in mewing beneath the windows of nervous invalids; who despised indoor life, looked upon theft as a fine art, and robbed pigeon-lofts right and left.

Is it any wonder, then, that I soon turned as reckless as any of them? I always came home at the time the milk arrived in the morning, however; and even now, had my young mistress only fed me, I would have changed my evil courses at once. But she did not.

Now this constant stopping out in all weathers began to tell on my beautiful coat; it was no longer silky and beautiful. It became matted and harsh, and did show the dirt, so much so that I was quite ashamed to look in the glass. And always, too, I was so tired, all through my wanderings, when I returned of a morning, that I did nothing all day but nod drowsily over the fire. No wonder Miss Laura said one day —

"Oh, pussy, pussy! you do look dirty and disreputable. You are no longer the lovely creature you once were; I cannot care for such a cat as you have grown."

But I still loved her, and a kind word from her lips, or a casual caress was sure to make me happy, even in my dullest of moods.

The end came sooner than I expected, for one day Miss Laura went from home very early in the morning. As soon as she was gone, Mary Jane, the servant, seized me rudely by the neck. I thought she was going to kill me outright.

"I'll take good care, my lady," she said, "that you don't steal anything, at any rate for four-and-twenty hours to come."

Then she marched upstairs with me, popped me into my mistress's bedroom, locked the door, and went away chuckling. There was no one else in the room, only just myself and the canary. And all that long day no one ever came near me with so much as a drop of milk. When night came I tried to sleep on Miss Laura's bed, but the pangs of hunger effectually banished slumber. When day broke I felt certain somebody would come to the door. But no. I thought this was so cruel of Mary Jane,

especially as I had no language in which to tell my mistress, on her return, of my sufferings. Towards the afternoon I felt famishing, and then my eyes fell upon the canary.

"Poor little thing!" said I; "you, too, are neglected and starving."

"Tweet, tweet!" said the bird, looking down at me with one eye.

"Now, dicky," I continued, "I'm going to do you a great kindness. If you were a very, very large bird, I should ask you to eat me and put me out of all this misery."

"Tweet, tweet!" said the bird very knowingly, as much as to say, "I would do it without the slightest hesitation."

"Well," said I, "I mean to perform the same good office for you. I cannot see you starving there without trying to ease your sufferings, and so – "

Here I sprang at the cage. I draw a veil over what followed.

And now my appetite was appeased, but my conscience was awakened. How ever should I be able to face my mistress again? Hark! what is that? It is Miss Laura's footstep on the stair. She is singing as sweetly as only Laura can. She approaches the door; her hand is on the latch. I can stand it no longer. With one bound, with one wild cry, I dash through a pane of glass, and drop almost senseless on to the lawn beneath the window.

It was sad enough to have to leave my dear mistress and my dear old home, which, despite all I had endured, I had learned to love, as only we poor pussies can love our homes. But my mind was made up. I had eaten Miss Laura's pet canary, and I dare never, never look her in the face again.

Till this time I had lived in the sweet green country, but I now wandered on and on, caring little where I went or what became of me. By day I hid myself in burrows and rat-haunted drains, and at night came forth to seek for food and continue my wanderings. So long as the grass and trees were all around me, I was never in want of anything to eat; but in time all this changed, and gradually I found myself caning nearer and nearer to some great city or town. First, rows upon rows of neatly-built villas and cottages came into view, and by-and-by these gave place to long streets where never a green thing grew, and I passed lofty, many-windowed workshops, from which issued smoke and steam, and much noise and confusion. I met with many cats in this city, who, like myself, seemed to be outcasts, and had never known the pleasures of home and love. They told me they lived entirely by stealing, at which they were great adepts, and on such food as they picked out of the gutter. They listened attentively to my tales of the far-off country, where many a rippling stream meandered through meadows green, in which the daisies and the yellow cowslips grew; of beautiful flowers, and of birds in every bush. Very much of what I told them was so very new to them that they could not understand it; but they listened attentively, nevertheless, and many a night kept me talking to them until I was so tired I felt ready to drop. In return for my stories they taught me – or rather, tried to teach me – to steal cleverly, not clumsily, as country cats do. But, alas! I could not learn, and do as I would I barely picked up a living; then my sufferings were increased by the cruelty of boys, who often pelted me with stones and set wild wicked dogs to chase me. I got so thin at last that I could barely totter along.

One evening a large black tom-cat who was a great favourite of mine, and often brought me tit-bits, said to me, "There's a few of us going out shopping to-night; will you come?"

"I'll try," I answered feebly, "for I do feel faint and sick and hungry."

We tried some fishmongers' shops first, and were very successful; then we went to another shop. Ill as I was, I could not help admiring the nimble way my Tom, as I called him, sprang on to a counter and helped himself to a whole string of delicious sausages. I tried to emulate Tom's agility, but oh, dear! I missed my footing and fell down into the very jaws of a terrible dog.

How I got away I never could tell, but I did; and wounded and bleeding sorely, I managed to drag myself down a quiet street and into a garden, and there, under a bush, I lay down to die. It was pitilessly cold, and the rain beat heavily down, and the great drops fell through the bush and drenched me to the skin. Then the cold and pain seemed all at once to leave me. I had fallen into an uneasy doze, and I was being chased once more by dogs with large eyes and faces, up and down in long wet

streets where the gas flickered, through many a muddy pool. Then I thought I found myself once again in the fields near my own home, with the sun brightly shining and the birds making the air ring with their music. Then I heard a gentle voice saying —

"Now, Mary, I think that will do. The cheese-box and cushion make such a fine bed for her; and when she awakes give the poor thing that drop of warm milk and sugar."

I did awake, and was as much surprised as pleased to find myself in a nice snug room, and lying not far from the fire. A neatly-dressed servant-girl was kneeling near me, and not far off a lady dressed in black sat sewing.

This, then, was my new mistress, and —*I was saved*. How different she was from poor Miss Laura, who, you know, did not *mean* to be cruel to me. This lady was very, very kind to me, though she made but little fuss about it. Her thoughtfulness for all my comforts and her quiet caresses soon wooed me back again to life, and now I feel sure I am one of the happiest cats alive. I am not dirty and disreputable now, nor is my fur matted. I am no longer a thief, for I do not need to steal. My mistress has a canary, but I would not touch it for worlds – indeed, I love to hear it sing, although its music is not half so sweet to me as that of the teakettle. Of an evening when the gas is lighted, and a bright fire burning in the grate, we all sing together – that is, the kettle, canary, and myself. They say I am very beautiful, and I believe they are right, for I have twice taken a prize at a cat show, and hope to win another. And if you go to the next great exhibition of cats, be sure to look for me. I am gentle in face and short in ears, my fur is long, and soft, and silky, and my eyes are as blue as the sea in summer. So you are sure to know me.

Ida sat silent, but evidently thinking, for some time after I had finished.

"That is quite a child's story, isn't it?" she said at last.

"Yes," I replied; "but don't you like it?"

"Oh yes, I do," she said – "I like all your stories; so now just tell me one more."

"No, no," I cried, "it is quite time we returned; your auntie will be back, and dinner waiting; besides, we have about three miles to walk."

"Just one little, little tale," she pleaded.

"Well," I replied, "it must be a very little, little one, and then we'll have to run. I shall call the story – "

Lost; or, Little Nellie's Favourite

"It was a bitterly cold morning in the month of February, several years ago. How the time does fly, to be sure! Snow had been lying on the ground for weeks, and more had fallen during the night; the wind, too, blew high from the east, and the few passengers who were abroad made the best of their way along the street, I can assure you, and looked as though they would rather be at home and at the fireside. I myself was out in the cold from force of habit. It had long been my custom to take a short walk before breakfast, and as the post-office of our village was only half a mile from my residence, going down for the letters that arrived by the first mail afforded me just sufficient excuse for my early ramble. But on this particular morning, as I was returning homewards, I was very much surprised to find my little friend Nellie May standing at her gate bare-headed, and with her pretty auburn hair blowing hither and thither in the wind.

"'Why, Nellie, dear!' I exclaimed, 'what can have sent you out of the house so early? It is hardly eight o'clock, and the cold will kill you, child.'

"'I was watching for you, sir,' said Nellie, looking as serious as a little judge. 'Do come and tell me what I shall do with this poor dog. He was out in the snow, looking so unhappy, and has now taken up his abode in the shed, and neither Miss Smith nor I can entice him out, or get him to go away. And we are afraid to go near him.'

"I followed Nellie readily enough, and there, lying on a sack, which he had taken possession of, was the dog in question. To all intents and purposes he was of a very common kind. Nobody in his senses would have given sixpence for him, except perhaps his owner, and who that might be was at present a mystery.

"'Will you turn him out and send him away?' asked Nellie.

"The dog looked in my face, oh, so pleadingly!

"'Kind sir,' he seemed to say, 'do speak a word for me; I'm so tired, my feet are sore, I've wandered far from home, and I am full of grief.'

"'Send him away?' I replied to Nellie. 'No, dear; you wouldn't, would you, if you thought he was weary, hungry, and in sorrow for his lost mistress? Look how thin he is.'

"'Oh!' cried Nellie, her eyes filling with tears, 'I'll run and bring him part of my own breakfast.'

"'Nellie,' I said, as we parted, 'be kind to that poor dog; he may bring you good fortune.'

"I do not know even now why I should have made that remark, but events proved that my words were almost prophetic. It was evident that the dog had travelled a very long way; but under Nellie's tender care he soon recovered health and strength and spirits as well, and from that day for three long years you never would have met the girl unaccompanied by 'Tray,' as we called him.

"Now it came to pass that a certain young nobleman came of age, and a great fête was given to his tenantry at P – Park, and people came from quite a long distance to join in it. I saw Nellie the same evening. It had been a day of sorrow for her. Tray had found his long lost mistress.

"'And, oh, such an ugly little old woman!' said Nellie almost spitefully, through her tears. 'Oh, my poor Tray, I'll never, never see him more!'

"Facts are stranger than fiction, however, and the little old lady whom Nellie thought so ugly adopted her (for she was an orphan), and Nellie became in time very fond of her. The dog Tray, whose real name by the way was Jumbo, had something to do with this fondness, no doubt.

"The old lady is not alive now; but Nellie has been left all she possessed, Jumbo included. He is by this time very, very old; his lips are white with age, he is stiff too, and his back seems all one bone. As to his temper – well, the less I say about that the better, but he is always cross with everybody – except Nellie."

Chapter Five.
Embodying a Little Tale and a Little Adventure

"Reason raise o'er instinct as you can —
In this 'tis Heaven directs, in that 'tis man."

If ever two days passed by without my seeing the portly form of my friend Captain D – , that is Frank, heaving in sight about twelve o'clock noon, round the corner of the road that led towards our cottage, then I at once concluded that Frank either had the gout or was gardening, and whether it were the fit of the gout or merely a fit of gardening, I felt it incumbent upon me to walk over to his house, a distance of little more than two miles, and see him.

Welcome? Yes; I never saw the man yet who could give one a heartier welcome than poor Frank did. He was passionately fond of my two dogs, Nero and Aileen Aroon, and the love was mutual.

But Frank had a dog of his own, "Meg Merrilees" to name, a beautiful and kind-hearted Scotch collie. Most jealous though she was of her master's affections, she never begrudged the pat and the caress Nero and Aileen had, and, indeed, she used to bound across the lawn to meet and be the first to welcome the three of us.

On the occasion of my visits to Frank, I always stopped and dined with him, spending the evening in merry chatter, and tales of "auld lang syne," until it was time for me to start off on the return journey.

When I had written anything for the magazines during the day, I made a practice of taking it with me, and reading over the manuscript to my friend, and a most attentive and amused listener he used to be. The following is a little *jeu d'esprit* which I insert here, for no other reason in the world than that Frank liked it, so I think there *must* be a little, *little* bit of humour in it. It is, as will be readily seen, a kind of burlesque upon the show-points and properties of the Skye-terrier. I called the sketch —

"That Skye-Terrier." – A Burlesque

"He's a good bred 'un, sir." This is the somewhat unclassical English with which "Wasp's" Yorkshire master introduced the puppy to me as he consigned it to my care, in return for which I crossed his hand five times with yellow gold. "And," he added, "he's a game 'un besides."

I knew the former of these statements was quite correct from young Wasp's pedigree, and of the latter I was so convinced, before a week was over, that I consented to sell him to a parson for the same money I gave for him – and glad enough to get rid of him even then. At this time the youthful Wasp was a mere bundle of black fluff, with wicked blue eyes, and flashing teeth of unusually piercing properties. He dwelt in a distant corner of the parson's kitchen, in a little square basket or creel, and a servant was told off to attend upon him; and, indeed, that servant had about enough to do. Wasp seemed to know that Annie was his own particular "slavey," and insisted on her being constantly within hail of him. If she dared to go upstairs, or even to attend the door-bell, Wasp let all the house hear of it, and the poor good-natured girl was glad to run back for peace' sake. Another thing he insisted on was being conveyed, basket and all, to Annie's bedroom when she retired for the night. He also intimated to her that he preferred eating the first of his breakfasts at three o'clock every morning sharp, upon pain of waking the parson; his second at four; third at five, and so on until further notice.

I was sorry for Annie.

From the back of his little basket, where he had formed a fortress, garrisoned by Wasp himself, and provisioned with bones, boots, and slippers enough to stand a siege of any length of time, he

used to be always making raids and forays on something. Even at this early age the whole aim of his existence seemed to be doing mischief. If he wasn't tearing Annie's Sunday boots, it was because he was dissecting the footstool; footstool failing, it was the cat. The poor cat hadn't a dog's life with him. He didn't mind pussy's claws a bit; he had a way of his own of backing stern on to her which defied her and saved his eyes. When close up he would seize her by the paw, and shake it till she screamed with pain.

I was sorry for the cat.

If you lifted Wasp up in your arms to have a look at him, he flashed his alabaster teeth in your face one moment, and fleshed them in your nose the next. He never looked you straight in the face, but aslant, from the corners of his wicked wee eyes.

In course of time – not Pollok's – Wasp's black puppy-hair fell off, and discovered underneath the most beautiful silvery-blue coat ever you saw in your life; but his puppy-manners did not mend in the least. In his case the puppy was the father of the dog, and if anything the son was worse than the father.

Talk of growing, oh! he did grow: not to the height – don't make any mistake, please; Wasp calculated he was plenty high enough already – but to the length, if you like. And every day when I went down to see him Annie would innocently ask me —

"See any odds on him this morning, doctor?"

"Well, Annie," I would say, "he really does seem to get a little longer about every second day."

"La! yes, sir, he do grow," Annie would reply – "'specially when I puts him before the fire awhile."

Indeed, Annie assured me she could see him grow, and that the little blanket with which she covered him of a night would never fit in the morning, so that she had to keep putting pieces to it.

As he got older, Wasp used to make a flying visit upstairs to see the parson, but generally came flying down again; for the parson isn't blessed with the best of tempers, anyhow. Quickly as he returned, Wasp was never down in time to avoid a kick from the clergyman's boot, for the simple reason that when Wasp's fore-feet were at the kitchen-door his hindquarters were never much more than half-way down the stairs.

N.B. – I forgot to say that this story may be taken with a grain of salt, if not found spicy enough to the taste.

There was a stove-pipe that lay in a back room; the pipe was about two yards long, more or less. Wasp used to amuse himself by running in at one end of it and out at the other. Well, one day he was amusing himself in this sort of way, when just as he entered one end for the second time, what should he perceive but the hindquarters of a pure-bred Skye just disappearing at the other. (You will please to remember that the stove-pipe was two yards long, more or less.) Day after day Wasp set himself to pursue this phantom Skye, through the pipe and through the pipe, for Wasp couldn't for the life of him make out why the animal always managed to keep just a *little* way ahead of him. Still he was happy to think that day after day he was gaining on his foe, so he kept the pot a-boiling. And one day, to his intense joy, he actually caught the phantom by the tail, in the pipe. Joy, did I say? I ought to have said sorrow, for the tail was his own; but, being a game 'un, he wouldn't give in, but hung on like grim death until the plumber came and split the pipe and relieved him. (Don't forget the length of the pipe, please.) Even after he *was* clear he spun round and round like a Saint Catherine's wheel, until he had to give in from sheer exhaustion. Yes, he was a long dog.

And it came to pass, or was always coming to pass, that he grew, and he grew, and he grew, and the more he grew, the longer and thicker his hair grew, till, when he had grown his full length – and I shouldn't like to say how long that was – you couldn't have told which was his head and which was his tail till he barked; and even Annie confessed that she frequently placed his dish down at the wrong end of him. It was funny. If you take half a dozen goat-skins and roll them separately, in cylinders, with the hairy side out, and place them end to end on the floor, you will have about as good an idea of

Wasp's shape and appearance as any I can think about. You know those circular sweeping-machines with which they clean the mud off the country roads? Well, Wasp would have done excellently well as the roller of one of those; and indeed, he just looked like one of them – especially when he was returning from a walk on a muddy morning. It was funny, too, that any time he was particularly wet and dirty, he always came to the front door, and made it a point of duty always to visit the drawing-room to have a roll on the carpet previously to being kicked downstairs.

Getting kicked downstairs was Wasp's usual method of going below. I believe he came at last to prefer it – it saved time.

Wasp's virtues as a house-dog were of a very high order: he always barked at the postman, to begin with; he robbed the milkman and the butcher, and bit a half-pound piece out of the baker's leg. No policeman was safe who dared to live within a hundred yards of him. One day he caught one of the servants of the gas company stooping down taking the state of the metre. This man departed in a very great hurry to buy sticking-plaster and visit his tailor.

I lost sight of Wasp for about six months. At the end of that time I paid the parson a visit. When I inquired after my longitudinal friend, that clergyman looked very grave indeed. He did not answer me immediately, but took two or three vigorous draws at his meerschaum, allowing the smoke to curl upwards towards the roof of his study, and following it thoughtfully with his eyes; then he slowly rose and extracted a long sheet of blue foolscap from his desk, and I imagined he was going to read me a sermon or something.

"Ahem!" said the parson. "I'll read you one or two casual items of Wasp's bill, and then you can judge for yourself how he is getting on."

Wasp's Little Bill.

To three pairs of slippers, at 10/-	£1	10	
Tearing surplice and gown	0	15	0
Demolishing a flowerpot-stand	1	5	0
Ditto hardware	0	10	6
Killing fowls (minus salvage)	0	10	0
Killing a neighbour's cat	1	1	0
New Sunday's bonnet for Annie	0	15	0
Pair of Sunday's boots for Annie	0	12	0
New muff for Annie	0	7	6
Sundries for Annie	0	5	6
Solatium to a father for his bitten brat ..	2	2	0
License for Wasp	0	5	0
Total	£9	18	6

There is no mistake about it —

Wasp was a "well bred 'un and a game 'un." At the same time, I was sorry for the parson.

"I am really vexed that it is so dark and wet," said Frank that night, as he came to the lawn-gate to say good-bye. "I wish I could walk in with you, but my naughty toe forbids; or, I wish I could ask you to stay, but I know your wife and Ida would feel anxious."

"Indeed they would," I replied; "they would both be out here in the pony and trap. Good-night; I'll find my way, and I've been wet before to-night."

"Good-night; God bless you," from Frank.

Now the lanes of Berkshire are most confusing even by daylight, and cabmen who have known them for years often go astray after dark, and experience considerable difficulty in finding their way to their destination. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that I, almost a stranger to them, should have lost myself on so dark a night.

Aileen Aroon and Nero were coupled together, and from the centre of the short chain depended a small bicycle lamp, which rendered the darkness visible if it did nothing else.

I led the dogs with a leathern strap.

"It is the fourth turning to the right, then the second to the left, and second to the right again; so you are not going that way."

I made this remark to the dogs, who had stopped at a turning, and wanted to drag me in what I considered the wrong direction.

"The fourth turning, Aileen," I repeated, forcing them to come with me.

The night seemed to get darker, and the rain heavier every moment, and that fourth turning seemed to have been spirited away. I found it at last, or thought I had done so, then the second to the left, and finally the second to the right.

By this time the lights of the station should have appeared.

They did not. We were lost, and evidently long miles from home. Lost, and it was near midnight. We were cold and wet and weary; at least I was, and I naturally concluded the poor dogs were so likewise.

We tried back, but I very wisely left it to the two Newfoundlands now to find the way if they could.

"Go home," I cried, getting behind them; and off they went willingly, and at a very rapid pace too.

Over and over again, I felt sure that the poor animals were bewildered, and were going farther and farther astray.

Well, at all events, I was bewildered, and felt still more so when I found myself on the brow of a hill, looking down towards station lights on the right instead of on the left, they ought to have been. They were our station lights, nevertheless, and a quarter of an hour afterwards we were all having supper together, the Newfoundlands having been previously carefully dried with towels. Did ever dogs deserve supper more? I hardly think so.

Chapter Six.
Aileen and Nero – A Dog's Receipt for Keeping Well – Dog's in the Snow in Greenland – The Life-Story of Aileen's Pet, "Fairy Mary."

"Give me a look, give me a face,
That makes simplicity a grace."

Simplicity was one of the most prominent traits of Aileen's character. In some matters she really was so simple and innocent, that she could hardly take her own part. Indeed, in the matter of food, her own part was often taken from her, for any of the cats, or the smaller dogs, thought nothing of helping the noble creature to drink her drop of milk of a morning.

Aileen, when they came to her assistance in this way, would raise her own head from the dish, and look down at them for a time in her kindly way.

"You appear to be very hungry," she would seem to say, "perhaps more so than I am, and so I'll leave you to drink it all."

Then Aileen would walk gently away, and throw herself down beneath the table with a sigh.

There was a time when illness prevented me from leaving my room for many days, but as I had some serials going on in magazines, I could not afford to leave off working; I used, therefore, to write in my bedroom. As soon as she got up of a morning, often and often before she had her breakfast, Aileen would come slowly upstairs. I knew her quiet but heavy footsteps. Presently she would open the door about half-way, and look in. If I said nothing she would make a low and apologetic bow, and when I smiled she advanced.

"I'm not sure if my feet be over clean," she would seem to say as she put her head on my lap with the usual deep-drawn sigh, "but I really could not help coming upstairs to see how you were this morning."

Presently I would hear more padded footsteps on the stairs. This was the saucy champion Theodore Nero himself, there could be no mistake about that. He came upstairs two or three steps at a time, and flung the half-open door wide against the wall, then bounded into the room like a June thunderstorm. He would give one quick glance at Aileen.

"Hallo!" he would say, talking with eyes and tail, "you're here, are you, old girl? Keeping the master company, eh? Well, I'm not very jealous. How goes it this morning, master?"

Nero always brought into the sick-room about a hundredweight at least of jollity, sprightliness, life, and love. It used to make me better to see him, and make me long to be up and about, and out in the dear old pine woods again.

"You always seem to be well and happy, Nero," I said to him one day; "how do you manage it?"

"Wait," said Nero, "till I've finished this chop bone, and I'll tell you what you should do in order to be always the same as I am now."

As there is some good in master Nero's receipt, I give it here in fall.

A Dog's Receipt for Keeping Well

"Get up in the morning as soon as the birds begin to sing, and if you're not on chain, take a good run round the garden. Always sleep in the open air. Don't eat more breakfast than is good for you, and take the same amount of dinner. Don't eat at all if you're not hungry. Eat plenty of grass,

or green vegetables, if you like that better. Take plenty of exercise. Running is best; but if you don't run, walk, and walk, and walk till you're tired; you will sleep all the better for it. One hour's sleep after exercise is deeper, and sweeter, and sounder, and more refreshing than five hours induced by port-wine negus. Don't neglect the bath; I never do. Whenever I see a hole with water in it, I just jump in and swim around, then come out and dance myself dry. Do good whenever you can; I always do. Be brave, yet peaceful. Be generous, charitable, and honest. Never refuse a bit to a beggar, and never steal a bone from a butcher; so shall you live healthfully and happy, and die of the only disease anybody has any right to die of – sheer old age."

I never saw a dog appreciate a joke better than did poor Nero. He had that habit of showing his teeth in a broad smile, which is common to the Newfoundland and collie.

Here is a little joke that Nero once unintentionally perpetrated. He had a habit of throwing up the gravel with his two immense hinder paws, quite regardless of consequences. A poor little innocent mite of a terrier happened one day to be behind master Nero, when he commenced to scrape. The shower of stones and gravel came like the discharge from a *mitrailleuse* on the little dog, and fairly threw him on his back. Nero happened to look about at the same time, and noticed what he had done.

"Oh!" he seemed to say as he broke into a broad grin, "this is really too ridiculous, too utterly absurd."

Then bounding across a ditch and through a hedge, he got into a green field, where he at once commenced his usual plan of working off steam, when anything extra-amusing tickled him, namely, that of running round and round and round in a wide circle. Many dogs race like this, no doubt for this reason: they can by so doing enjoy all the advantages of a good ran, without going any appreciable distance away from where master is. *Apropos* of dogs gambolling and racing for the evident purpose of getting rid of an extra amount of animal electricity, I give an extract here from a recent book of mine[2]. The sketch is painted from real life.

Dogs in the Snow in Greenland

"The exuberance of great 'Oscar's' joy when out with his master for a walk was very comical to witness. Out for a *walk* did I say? Nay, that word but poorly expresses the nature of Oscar's pedal progression. It was not a walk, but a glorious compound of dance, scamper, race, gallop, and gambol. Had you been ever so old it would have made you feel young again to behold him. He knew while Allan was dressing that he meant to go out, and began at once to exhibit signs of impatience. He would yawn and stretch himself, and wriggle and shake; then he would open his mouth, and try to round a sentence in real verbal English, and tailing in this, fall back upon dog language, pure and simple, or he would stand looking at Allan with his beautiful head turned on one side, and his mouth a little open, just sufficiently so to show the tip of his bright pink tongue, and his brown eyes would speak to his master. 'Couldn't you,' the dog would seem to ask – 'couldn't you get on your coat a little – oh, *ever* so little – faster? What can you want with a muffler? *I* don't wear a muffler. And now you are looking for your fur cap, and there it is right before your very eyes!'

"'And,' the dog would add, 'I daresay we are off at last,' and he would hardly give his master time to open the companion door for him.

"But once over the side, 'Hurrah!' he would seem to say, then away he would bound, and away, and away, and away, straight ahead as crow could fly, through the snow and through the snow, which rose around him in feathery clouds, till he appeared but a little dark speck in the distance. This race straight ahead was meant to get rid of his super-extra steam. Having expended this, back he would come with a rush, and a run, make pretence to jump his master down, but dive past him at the last moment. Then he would gambol in front of his master in such a daft and comical fashion that made

[2] "The Cruise of the *Snowbird*" published by Messrs Hodder and Stoughton, Paternoster Row.

Allan laugh aloud; and, seeing his master laughing, Oscar would laugh too, showing such a double regiment of white, flashing, pearly teeth, that, with the quickness of the dog's motions, they seemed to begin at his lips and go right away down both sides of him as far as the tail.

"Hurroosh! hurroosh! Each exclamation, reader, is meant to represent a kind of a double-somersault, which I verily believe Oscar invented himself. He performed it by leaping off the ground, bending sideways, and going right round like a top, without touching the snow, with a spring like that of a five-year-old salmon getting over a weir.

"Hurroosh! hurroosh!

"Then Allan would make a grab at his tail.

"'Oh, that's your game!' Oscar would say; 'then down *you* go!'

"And down Allan would roll, half buried in the powdery snow, and not be able to get up again for laughing; then away Oscar would rush wildly round and round in a complete circle, having a radius of some fifty yards, with Allan McGregor on his broad back for a centre."

Theodore Nero was as full of sauciness and *chique* as ever was an Eton boy home for the holidays, or a midshipman on shore for a cruise. The following anecdote will illustrate his merry sauciness and Aileen's good-natured simplicity at the same time.

Nero was much quicker in all his motions than Aileen, so that although she never failed to run after my walking-stick, she was never quick enough to find first. Now one day in throwing my stick it fell among a bed of nettles. Nero sprang after it as light as a cork, and brought it out; but having done so, he was fain to put it down on the road till he should rub his nose and sneeze, for the nettles had stung him in a tender part. To see what he would do, I threw the stick again among the nettles. But mark the slyness of the dog: he pretended not to see where it had fallen, and to look for it in quite another place, until poor simple Aileen had found it and fetched it. As soon as she got on to the road she must needs put down the stick to rub her nose, when, laughing all over, he bounded on it and brought it back to me. I repeated the experiment several times, with precisely the same result. Aileen was too simple and too good-natured to refuse to fetch the stick from the nettle-bed.

About five minutes afterwards the fun was over. Nero happened to look at Aileen, who had stopped once more to rub her still stinging nose. Then the whole humour of the joke seemed to burst upon his imagination. Simply to smile was not enough; he must needs burst through a hedge, and get into a field, and it took ten minutes good racing round and round, as hard as his four legs could carry him, to restore this saucy rascal's mental equilibrium.

Aileen Aroon was as fond of the lower animals, pet mice, cats, and rats, as any dog could be. Our pet rats used to eat out of her dish, run all over her, sit on her head while washing their faces, and go asleep under her chin.

I saw her one day looking quite unhappy. She wanted to get up from the place where she was lying, but two piebald rats had gone to sleep in the bend of her forearm, and she was afraid to move, either for fear of hurting the little pets or of offending me.

Seeing the situation, I at once took the rats away and put them in the cage; then Aileen got up, made a low and grateful bow, and walked out.

The following is the life-story of one of Aileen's especial favourites: —

"Fairy Mary."

My Mary is a rat. It is just as well to state this much at the outset. Candour, indeed, necessitates my doing so, because I know the very name of "rat" carries with it feelings which are far from pleasing to many. And now, having broken the ice, I may tell you that Mary is not an ordinary black or brown rat, but a rat of high, high caste indeed, having come from a far-away Oriental clime – Java, to wit. If you had never seen one of the same breed before, you would hardly take Mary to be a rat at all. Children are exceedingly fond of her; gentlemen admire her; old ladies dote on her, and young ones

love her. I think even my black tom-cat is especially fond of her, judging from the notice he takes of her; he will sit for hours, and hardly ever take his green eyes off her cage.

Black Tom once paid Mary a domiciliary visit, by way of appearing neighbourly. It was a grand spring, but missed by an inch, so Tom returned, looking inglorious.

Having so far introduced my Mary, and confident you will like her better as you read on, let me try to describe the winsome wee thing. Mary – my rodent, let me call her – is smaller than a rat, and not quite the same in shape, for Mary's symmetry is elegance itself. Her eyes round, protrusive, but loving withal, are living burning garnets – garnets that speak. Her whole body is covered with long snowy fur, far richer than the finest ermine, and with an almost imperceptible golden tint at the tips, this tint being only seen in certain lights. Her tail is perhaps one of her principal points of beauty – long, sweeping, and graceful; she positively seems to talk with it. The forearms are very short and delicate, the hind-legs strong and muscular. Sitting on one end is Mary's almost constant position – kangaroo-like; then she holds up her little hands beseechingly before her. These latter are almost human in shape, and when she gives you her delicate, cold, transparent paw, you might easily fancy you were shaking hands with a fairy; and thus she is often called "Fairy Mary." Mary's hands are bare and pink, and the wrists are covered with very short downy fur, after which the coat suddenly elongates, so much so, that when she stands on end to watch a fly on the ceiling, you would imagine she wore a gown tight at the wrist, and with drooping sleeves.

Now Mary is not only beautiful, but she is winning and graceful as well, for every one says so who sees her. And in under her soft fur Mary's skin is as clean and white and pure as mother-of-pearl. It only remains to say of this little pet, that in all her ways and manners she is as cleanly as the best-bred Persian cat, and her fur has not the faintest odour, musky or otherwise.

Fairy Mary was originally one of three which came to me as a present. Alas for the fate of Mary's twin sister and only brother! A vagrant cat one evening in summer, while I was absent, entered by the open window, broke into the cage, and Mary alone was left alive. For a long time after this Mary was missing. She was seen at times, of an evening, flitting ghost-like across the kitchen floor, but she persistently refused to return to her desolated cage-home. She much preferred leading a free and easy vagrant kind of life between the cellar, the pantry, and the kitchen. She came out at times, however, and took her food when she thought nobody was looking, and she was known to have taken up her abode in one corner of the pantry, where once a mouse had lived. When she took this new house, I suppose she found it hardly large enough for her needs, because she speedily took to cleaning it out, and judging from the shovelfuls of rags, paper, shavings, and litter of all sorts, very industrious indeed must have been the lives of the "wee, tim'rous, cowerin' beasties" who formerly lived there. Then Mary built unto herself a new home in that sweet retirement, and very happy she seemed to be.

Not happening to possess a cat just then, the mice had it all their own way; they increased and multiplied, if they didn't replenish the kitchen, and Mary reigned among them – a Bohemian princess, a gipsy queen. I used to leave a lamp burning in the kitchen on purpose to watch their antics, and before going to bed, and when all the house was still, I used to go and peep carefully through a little hole in the door. And there Fairy Mary would be, sure enough, racing round and round the kitchen like a mad thing, chased by at least a dozen mice, and every one of them squeaking with glee. But if I did but laugh – which, for the life of me, I could not sometimes help – off bolted the mice, leaving Fairy Mary to do an attitude wherever she might be. Then Mary would sniff the air, and listen, and so, scenting danger, hop off, kangaroo fashion, to her home in the pantry corner.

It really did seem a pity to break up this pleasant existence of Mary's, but it had to be done. Mice eat so much, and destroy more. My mice, with Mary at their head, were perfect sappers and miners. They thought nothing of gutting a loaf one night, and holding a ball in it the next. So, eventually, Mary was captured, and once more confined to her cage, which she insisted upon having hung up in our sitting-room, where she could see all that went on. Here she never attempted, even once, to nibble her cage, but if hung out in the kitchen nothing could keep her in.

At this stage of her existence, the arrangements for Mary's comfort were as follows: she dwelt in a nice roomy cage, with two perches in it, which she very much enjoyed. She had a glass dish for her food, and another for her milk, and the floor of the cage was covered with pine shavings, regularly changed once in two days, and among which Mary built her nest.

Now, Fairy Mary has a very strong resemblance to a miniature polar bear, that is, she has all the motions of one, and does all his attitudes – in fact, acts the part of Bruin to perfection. This first gave me the notion – which I can highly recommend to the reader – of making Mary not only amusing, but ornamental to our sitting-room as well, for it must be confessed that a plain wooden cage in one's room is neither graceful nor pretty, however lovely the inmate may be. And here is how I managed it. At the back of our sitting-room is the kitchen, the two apartments being separated by a brick wall. Right through this wall a hole or tunnel was drilled big enough for Mary to run through with ease. The kitchen end of this tunnel was closed by means of a little door, which was so constructed that by merely touching an unseen spring in the sitting-room, it could be opened at will. Against the kitchen end of the tunnel a cage for Mary was hung. This was to be her dining-room, her nest, and sleeping-berth. Now, for the sitting-room end of the tunnel, I had a painting made on a sheet of glass, over two feet long by eighteen inches high. The scene represented is from a sketch in North Greenland, which I myself had made, a scene in the frozen sea – the usual blue sky which you always find over the ice, an expanse of snow, a bear in the distance, and a ship frozen in and lying nearly on her beam ends. A dreary enough look-out, in all conscience, but true to nature.

There was a hole cut in the lower end of this glass picture, to match the diameter of the tunnel, and the picture was then fastened close against the wall. So far you will have followed me. The next thing was to frame this glass picture in a kind of cage, nine inches deep; the peculiarity of this cage being, that the front of it was a sheet of clear white glass, the sides only being of brass wire; the floor and top were of wood, the former being painted white, like the snow, and the latter blue, to form a continuation of the sky; a few imitation icebergs were glued on here and there, and one of these completely hides the entrance to the tunnel, forming a kind of rude cave – Fairy Mary's cave.

In the centre of this cage was raised a small bear's pole steps and all complete. We call it the North Pole. The whole forms a very pretty ornament indeed, especially when Mary is acting on this little Greenland stage.

Mary knows her name, and never fails to come to call, and indeed she knows a very great deal that is said to her. Whenever she pops through her tunnel, the little door at the kitchen end closes behind her, and she is a prisoner in Greenland until I choose to send her off. If she is in her kitchen cage, and I wish her to come north, and disport herself to the amusement of myself or friends – one touch to the spring, one cabalistic word, and there comes the little performer, all alive and full of fun.

Now I wish the reader to remember that Fairy Mary is not only the very essence of cleanliness, but the pink of politeness as well. Hence, Mary is sometimes permitted to come to table. And Mary is an honest rat. She has been taught to look at everything, but handle nothing. Therefore there cannot be the slightest possible objection to her either sitting on my shoulder on one end, and gazing wonderingly around her, or examining my ear, or making a nest of my beard, or running down my arm, and having a dance over the tablecloth. I think I said Mary was an honest rat, but she has just one tiny failing in the way of honesty, which, as her biographer, I am bound to mention. She can't quite resist the temptation of a bit of butter. But she helps herself to just one little handful, and does it, too, with such a graceful air, that, for the life of me, I couldn't be angry with her.

Well, except a morsel of butter, Mary will touch nothing on the table, nor will she take anything from your hand, if you offer it to her ever so coaxingly. She prefers to eat her meals in Greenland, or on the North Pole itself.

Mary's tastes as regards food are various. She is partial to a bit of cheese, but would not touch bacon for the world. This is rather strange, because it was exactly the other way with her brother and sister.

The great treat of the twenty-four hours with Mary is to get down in the evening, when the lamps are lighted, to have a scamper on the table. Her cage is brought in from the kitchen, and set down, and the door of it thrown open. This cage thus becomes Mary's harbour of refuge, from which she can sally forth and play tricks. Anything you place on the table is seized forthwith, and carried inside. She will carry an apple nearly as big as herself, and there will not be much of it left in the morning; for one of Mary's chief delights is to have a little feast all to herself, when the lights are out. Lettuce leaves she is partial to, and will carry them to her cage as fast as you can throw them down to her. She rummages the work-basket, and hops off with every thimble she can find.

After Fairy Mary's private establishment was broken up in the kitchen, it became necessary to clean up the corner of the pantry where she had dwelt. Then was Mary's frugality and prudence as a housewife made clear to the light of day I could hardly be supposed to tell you everything she had stored up, but I remember there were crusts of bread, bits of cheese, lumps of dog-biscuit, halves of apples, small potatoes, and crumbs of sugar, and candle ends, and bones and herrings' heads, besides one pair of gold sleeve-links, an odd shirt-stud, a glass stopper from a scent-bottle, brass buttons, and, to crown the lot, one silver threepenny-piece of the sterling coin of the realm.

And that is the story of my rat; and I'm sure if you knew her you, too, would like her. She is such a funny, wee, sweet little *mite* of a Mary.

Chapter Seven.
Only a Dog

"Old dog, you are dead – we must all of us die —
You are gone, and gone whither? Can any one say?
I trust you may live again, somewhat as I,
And haply, 'go on to perfection' – some way!"

Tupper.

Poor little Fairy Mary, the favourite pet of Aileen Aroon, went the way of all rats at last. She was not killed. No cat took her. Our own cats were better-mannered than to touch a pet. But we all went away on a summer holiday, and as it was not convenient to take every one of our pets with us, Mary was left at home in charge of the servants. When we returned she was gone, dead and buried. She had succumbed to a tumour in the head which was commencing ere we started.

I think Aileen missed her very much, for she used to lie and watch the empty cage for an hour at a time, thinking no doubt that by-and-by Fairy Mary would pop out of some of her usual haunts.

"Dolls" was one of Aileen's contemporaries, and one that she had no small regard for. Dolls was a dog, and a very independent little fellow he was, as his story which I here give will show.

Dolls: His Little Story

There was a look in the dark-brown eyes of Dolls that was very captivating when you saw it. I say when you saw it, because it wasn't always you could see it, for Dolls' face was so covered with his dishevelled locks, that the only wonder was that he could find his way about at all.

Dolls was a Scotch terrier – a *real* Scotch terrier. Reddish or sandy was he all over – in fact, he was just about the colour of gravel in the gloaming; I am quite sure of this, because when he went out with me about the twilight hour, I couldn't see him any more than if he wasn't in existence; when it grew a little darker, strange to say, Dolls became visible once more.

Plenty of coat had Dolls too. You could have hidden a glove under his mane, and nobody been a bit the wiser. When he sat on one end, gazing steadfastly up into a tree, from which some independent pussy stared saucily down upon him, Dolls looked for all the world like a doggie image draped in a little blanket.

Dolls had a habit of treeing pussies. This, indeed, was about the only bad trait in Dolls' character. He hated a pussy more than sour milk, and nobody knew this better than the pussies themselves. Probably, indeed, they were partly to blame for maintaining the warfare. I've seen a cat in a tree, apparently trying her very best to mesmerise poor Dolls – Dolls blinking funnily up at her, she gazing cunningly down. There they would sit and sit, till suddenly down to the ground would spring pussy, and with a warlike and startling "Fuss!" that quite took the doggie's breath away, and made all his hair stand on end, clout Master Dolls in the face, and before that queer wee specimen of caninity could recover his equanimity, disappear through a neighbouring hedgerow.

Now cats have a good deal more patience than dogs. Sometimes on coming trotting home of an evening, Dolls would find a cat perched up in the pear-tree sparrow-expectant.

"Oh! *you're* there, are you?" Dolls would say. "Well, I'm not in any particular hurry, I can easily wait a bit." And down he would sit, with his head in the air.

"All right, Dolls, my doggie," Pussy would reply. "I've just eaten a sparrow, and not long ago I had a fine fat mouse, and, milk with it, and now I'll have a nap. Nice evening, isn't it?"

Well, Master Dolls would watch there, maybe for one hour and maybe for two, by which time his patience would become completely exhausted.

"You're not worth a wag of my tail," Dolls would say. "So good-night." Then off he would trot.

But Dolls wasn't a beauty, by any manner of means. I don't think anybody who wasn't an admirer of doormats, and a connoisseur in heather besoms could have found much about Dolls to go into raptures over, but, somehow or other, the little chap always managed to find friends wherever he went.

Dolls was a safe doggie with children, that is, with well-dressed, clean-looking children, but with the gutter portion of the population Dolls waged continual warfare. Doubtless, because they teased him, and made believe to throw pebbles at him, though I don't think they ever did in reality.

Dolls was a great believer in the virtues of fresh air, and spent much of his time out of doors. He had three or four houses, too, in the village which he used to visit regularly once, and sometimes twice, a day. He would trot into a kitchen with a friendly wag or two of his little tail, which said, plainly enough, "Isn't it wet, though?" or "Here is jolly weather just!"

"Come away, Dolls," was his usual greeting.

Thus welcomed, Dolls would toddle farther in, and seat himself by the fire, and gaze dreamily in through the bars at the burning coals, looking all the while as serious as possible.

I've often wondered, and other people used to wonder too, what Dolls could have been thinking about as he sat thus. Perhaps – like many a wiser head – he was building little morsels of castles in the air, castles that would have just the same silly ending as yours or mine, reader – wondering what he should do if he came to be a great big bouncing dog like Wolf the mastiff; how all the little doggies would crouch before him, and how dignified he would look as he strode haughtily away from them; and so on, and so forth. But perhaps, after all, Dolls was merely warming his mite of a nose, and not giving himself up to any line of thought in particular.

Now, it wasn't with human beings alone that this doggie was a favourite; and what I am now going to mention is rather strange, if not funny. You see, Dolls always got out early in the morning. There was a great number of other little dogs in the village besides himself – poodles, Pomeranians, and Skyes, doggies of every denomination and all shades of colour, and many of these got up early too. There is no doubt early morn is the best time for small dogs, because little boys are not yet up, and so can't molest them. Well, it did seem that each of these doggies, almost every morning, made up its mind to come and visit Dolls. At all events, most of them *did* come, and, therefore, Dolls was wont to hold quite a tiny *levée* on the lawn shortly after sunrise.

After making obeisance to General Dolls, these doggies would form themselves into a *conversazione*, and go promenading round the rose-trees in twos and twos.

Goodness only knows what they talked about; but I must tell you that these meetings were nearly always of a peaceable, amicable nature. Only once do I remember a *conversazione* ending in a general conflict.

"Well," said Dolls, "if it *is* going to be a free fight, I'm in with you." Then Dolls threw himself into it heart and soul.

But to draw the story of Dolls to a conclusion, there came to live near my cottage home an old sailor, one of Frank's friends. This ancient mariner was one of the Tom Bowling type, for the darling of many a crew he had been in his time, without doubt. There was good-nature, combined with pluck, in every lineament of his manly, well-worn, red and rosy countenance, and his hair was whitened – not by the snows of well-nigh sixty winters, for I rather fancy it was the summers that did it, the summers' heat, and the *bearing of* the brunt of many a tempest, and the anxiety inseparable from a merchant skipper's pillow. There was a merry twinkle in his eyes, that put you mightily in mind of the monks of old. And when he gave you his hand, it was none of your half-and-half shakes, let me tell you; that there was honesty in every throb of that man's heart you could tell from that very grasp.

Yes, he was a jolly old tar, and a good old tar; and he hadn't seen Dolls and been in his company for two hours, before he fell in love with the dog downright, and, says he, "Doctor, you want a good

home for Dolls; there is something in the little man's eye that I a sort of like. As long as he sails with me, he'll never want a good bed, nor a good dinner; so, if you'll give him to me, I'll be glad to take him."

We shook hands.

Now this was to be the last voyage that ever that ancient mariner meant to make, until he made that long voyage which we all must do one of these days. And it *was* his last too; not, however, in the way you generally read of in stories, for the ship didn't go down, and he wasn't drowned, neither was Dolls. On the contrary, my friend returned, looking as hale and hearty as ever, and took a cottage in the country, meaning to live happily and comfortably ever after. And almost the first intimation I received of his return was carried by the doggie himself, for going out one fine morning, I found Dolls on the lawn, surrounded as usual, by about a dozen other wee doggies, to whom, from their spellbound look, I haven't a doubt he was telling the story of his wonderful adventures by sea and by land, for, mind you, Dolls had been all the way to Calcutta. And Dolls was so happy to see me again, and the lawn, and the rose-trees, and vagrant pussies, and no change in anything, that he was fain to throw himself at my feet and weep in the exuberance of his joy.

Dolls' new home was at H – , just three miles from mine; and this is somewhat strange – regularly, once a month the little fellow would trot over, all by himself, and see me. He remained in the garden one whole day, and slept on the doormat one whole night, but could never be induced either to *enter the house or to partake of food*. So no one could accuse Dolls of cupboard love. When the twenty-four hours which he allotted to himself for the visit were over, Dolls simply trotted home again, but, as sure as the moon, he returned again in another month.

A bitter, bitter winter followed quickly on the heels of that pleasant summer of 187 – . The snow fell fast, and the cold was intense, thermometer at times sinking below zero. You could ran the thrushes down, and catch them by hand, so lifeless were they; and I could show you the bushes any day where blackbirds dropped lifeless on their perches. Even rooks came on to the lawn to beg; they said there wasn't a hip nor a haw to be found in all the countryside. And robin said he couldn't sing at all on his usual perch, the frost and the wind quite took his breath away; so he came inside to warm his toes.

One wild stormy night, I had retired a full hour sooner to rest, for the wind had kept moaning so, as it does around a country house. The wind moaned, and fiercely shook the windows, and the powdery snow sifted in under the hall-door, in spite of every arrangement to prevent it. I must have been nearly asleep, but I opened my eyes and started at *that*– a plaintive cry, rising high over the voice of the wind, and dying away again in mournful cadence. Twice it was repeated, then I heard no more. It must have been the wind whistling through the keyhole, I thought, as I sunk to sleep. Perhaps it was, reader; but early next morning I found poor wee Dolls dead on the doorstep.

Chapter Eight.
A Tale Told by the Old Pine-Tree

"Dumb innocents, often too cruelly treated,
May well for their patience find future reward."

Tupper.

Bonnie Berkshire! It is an expression we often make use of. Bonnie Berks – bonnie even in winter, when the fields are robed in starry snow; bonnie in spring-time, when the fields are rolling clouds of tenderest green, when the young wheat is peeping through the brown earth, when primroses cluster beneath the hedgerows, and everything is so gay and so happy and hopeful that one's very soul soars heavenwards with the lark.

But Berks I thought never looked more bonnie than it did one lovely autumn morning, when Ida and I and the dogs walked up the hill towards our favourite seat in the old pine wood. It was bright and cool and clear. The hedges alone were a sight, for blackthorn and brambles had taken leave of their senses in summer-time, and gone trailing here and climbing there, and playing all sorts of fantastic tricks, and now with the autumn tints upon them, they formed the prettiest patches of light and shade imaginable; and though few were the flowers that still peeped through the green moss as if determined to see the last of the sunshine, who could miss them with such gorgeous colour on thorn and tree? The leaves were still on the trees; only whenever a light gust of wind swept through the tall hedge with a sound like ocean shells, Ida and I were quite lost for a time, in a shower as of scented yellow snow.

My niece put her soft little hand in mine, as she said – "You haven't forgotten the manuscript, have you?"

"Oh! no," I said, smiling, "I haven't forgotten it."

"Because," she added, "I do like you to tell me a story when we are all by ourselves."

"Thank you," said I, "but this story, Ida, is one I'm going to tell to Aileen, because it is all about a Newfoundland dog."

"Oh! never mind," she cried, "Nero and I shall sit and listen, and it will be all the same."

"Well, Ida," I said, when we were seated at last, "I shall call my tale – "

Blucher: The Story of a Newfoundland

"We usually speak of four-in-hands rattling along the road. There was no rattling about the mail-coach, however, that morning, as she seemed to glide along towards the granite city, as fast as the steaming horses could tool her. For the snow lay deep on the ground, and but for the rattle of harness, and champing of bits, you might have taken her for one of Dickens's phantom mails. It was a bitter winter's morning. The driver's face was buried to the eyes in the upturned neck of his fear-nothing coat; the passengers snoozed and hibernated behind the folds of their tartan plaids; the guard, poor man! had to look abroad on the desolate scene and his face was like a parboiled lobster in appearance. He stamped in his seat to keep his feet warm, although it was merely by reasoning from analogy that he could get himself to believe that he had any feet at all, for, as far as feeling went, his body seemed to end suddenly just below the knees, and when he attempted to emit some cheering notes from the bugle, the very notes seemed to freeze in the instrument. Presently, the coach pulled up at the eighth-milehouse to change horses, and every one was glad to come down if only for a few moments.

"The landlord, – remember, reader, I'm speaking of the far north, where mail-coaches are still extant, and the landlords of hostelries still visible to the naked eye. The landlord was there himself to welcome the coach, and he rubbed his hands and hastened to tell everybody that it was a stormy morning, that there would, no doubt, be a fresh fall ere long, and that there was a roaring fire in the room, and oceans of mulled porter. Few were able to resist hints like these, and orders for mulled porter and soft biscuits became general.

"Big flakes of snow began to fall slowly earthward, as the coach once more resumed its journey, and before long so thick and fast did it come down that nothing could be seen a single yard before the horses' heads.

"Well, there was something or other down there in the road that didn't seem to mind the snow a bit, something large, and round, and black, feathering round and round the coach, and under the horses' noses – here, there, and everywhere. But its gambols, whatever it was, came to a very sudden termination, as that howl of anguish fully testified. The driver was a humane man, and pulled up at once.

"'I've driven over a bairn, or a dog, or some o' that fraternity,' he said; 'some o' them's continually gettin' in the road at the wrang time. Gang doon, guard, and see aboot it. It howls for a' the warld like a young warlock.'

"Down went the guard, and presently remounted, holding in his arms the recipient of the accident. It was a jet-black Newfoundland puppy, who was whining in a most mournful manner, for one of his paws had been badly crushed.

"'Now,' cried the guard, 'I'll sell the wee warlock cheap. Wha'll gie an auld sang for him? He is onybody's dog for a gill of whuskey.'

"'I'll gie ye twa gills for him, and chance it,' said a quiet-looking farmer in one of the hinder seats. The puppy was handed over at once, and both seemed pleased with the transfer. The farmer nursed his purchase inside a fold of his plaid until the coach drew up before the door of the city hotel, when he ordered warm water, and bathed the little creature's wounded paw.

"Little did the farmer then know how intimately connected that dog was yet to be, with one of the darkest periods of his life's history.

"Taken home with the farmer to the country, carefully nursed and tended, and regularly fed, 'Blucher,' as he was called, soon grew up into a very fine dog, although always more celebrated for his extreme fidelity to his master, than for any large amount of good looks.

"One day the farmer's shepherd brought in a poor little lamb, wrapped up in the corner of his plaid. He had found it in a distant nook of a field, apparently quite deserted by its mother. The lamb was brought up on the bottle by the farmer's little daughter, and as time wore on grew quite a handsome fellow.

"The lamb was Blucher's only companion. The lamb used to follow Blucher wherever he went, romped and played with him, and at night the two companions used to sleep together in the kitchen; the lamb's head pillowed on the dog's neck, or *vice versa*, just as the case might be. Blucher and his friend used to take long rambles together over the country; they always came back safe enough, and looking pleased and happy, but for a considerable time nobody was able to tell where they had been to. It all came out in good time, however. Blucher, it seems, in his capacity of *chaperon* to his young friend, led the poor lamb into mischief. It was proved, beyond a doubt, that Blucher was in the daily habit of leading 'Bonny' to different cabbage gardens, showing him how to break through, and evidently rejoicing to see the lamb enjoying himself. I do not believe that poor Blucher knew that he was doing any injury or committing a crime. 'At all events,' he might reason with himself, 'it isn't I who eat the cabbage, and why shouldn't poor Bonny have a morsel when he seems to like it so much?'

"But Blucher suffered indirectly from his kindness to Bonny, for complaints from the neighbours of the depredations committed in their gardens by the 'twa thieves,' as they were called, became so numerous, that at last poor Bonny had to pay the penalty for his crimes with his life.

He became mutton. A very disconsolate dog now was poor Blucher, moaning mournfully about the place, and refusing his food, and, in a word, just behaving as you and I would, reader, if we lost the only one we loved. But I should not say the only one that Blucher loved, for he still had his master, the farmer, and to him he seemed to attach himself more than ever, since the death of the lamb; he would hardly ever leave him, especially when the farmer's calling took him anywhere abroad.

"About one year after Bonny's demise, the farmer began to notice a peculiar numbness in the limbs, but paid little attention to it, thinking that no doubt time – the poor man's physician – would cure it. Supper among the peasantry of these northern latitudes is generally laid about half-past six. Well, one dark December's day, at the accustomed hour, both the dog and his master were missed from the table. For some time little notice was taken of this, but as time flew by, and the night grew darker, his family began to get exceedingly anxious.

"'Here comes father at last,' cried little Mary, the farmer's daughter.

"Her remark was occasioned by hearing Blucher scraping at the door, and demanding admittance. Little Mary opened the door, and there stood Blucher, sure enough; but although the night was clear and starlight, there wasn't a sign of father. The strange conduct of Blucher now attracted Mary's attention. He never had much affection for her, or for any one save his master, but now he was speaking to her, as plain as a dog could speak. He was running round her, barking in loud sharp tones, as he gazed into her face, and after every bark pointing out into the night, and vehemently wagging his tail. There was no mistaking such language. Any one could understand his meaning. Even one of those *strange people, who hate dogs*, would have understood him. Mary did, anyhow, and followed Blucher at once. On trotted the honest fellow, keeping Mary trotting too, and many an anxious glance he cast over his shoulder to her, saying plainly enough, 'Don't you think you could manage to run just a *leetle* faster?' Through many a devious path he led her, and Mary was getting very tired, yet fear for her father kept her up. After a walk, or rather run, of fully half an hour, honest Blucher brought the daughter to the father's side.

"He was lying on the cold ground, insensible and helpless, struck down by that dreadful disease – paralysis. But for the sagacity and intelligence of his faithful dog, death from cold and exposure would certainly have ended his sufferings ere morning dawned. But Blucher's work was not yet over for the night, for no sooner did he see Mary kneeling down by her father's side, than he started off home again at full speed, and in less than half an hour was back once more, accompanied by two of the servants.

"The rest of this dog's history can be told in very few words, and I am sorry it had so tragic an ending.

"During all the illness which supervened on the paralysis, Blucher could seldom, if ever, be prevailed on to leave his master's bedside, and every one who approached the patient was eyed with extreme suspicion. I think I have already mentioned that Mary was no great favourite with Blucher, and Mary, if she reads these lines, must excuse me for saying, I believe it was her own fault, for if you are half frightened at a dog he always thinks you harbour some ill-will to him, and would do him an injury if you could. However, one day poor Mary came running in great haste to her father's bedside. Most incautious haste as it turned out, for the dog sprang up at once and bit her in the leg. For this, honest Blucher was *condemned to death*. I think, taking into consideration his former services, and the great love he bore to his afflicted master, he might have been forgiven just for this once.

"That his friends afterwards repented of their rashness I do not doubt, for they have erected a monument over his grave. This monument tells how faithfully he served his master, and how he loved him, and saved his life, and although fifty years have passed since its erection, it still stands to mark the spot where faithful Blucher lies."

Chapter Nine.
Tea on the Lawn, and the Story of a Starling

"Thy spangled breast bright sprinkled specks adorn,
Each plume imbibes the rosy-tinted morn."

"Sit down, Frank," said I; "my wife and Ida will be here presently. It is so pleasant to have tea out of doors."

"Yes," said Frank, "especially such tea as this. But," he added, fishing a flower-spray from his cup with his spoon, "I do not want jasmine in mine."

"Good wine needs no bush," I remarked.

"Nor good tea no scent," said my friend.

"Although, Frank, the Chinese do scent some of their Souchongs with jasmine, the *Jasminum Sambuc*."

"Oh! dear uncle," cried Ida, "don't talk Latin. Maggie the magpie will be doing it next."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the pie called Maggie, who was very busy in the bottom of her cage. I never, by the way, heard any bird or human being laugh in such a cuttingly tantalising way as that magpie did.

It was a sneering laugh, which made you feel that the remark you had just made previously was ridiculously absurd. As she laughed she kept on pegging away at whatever she was doing.

"Go on," she seemed to say. "I am listening to all you are saying, but I really can't help laughing, even with my mouth full. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Well, Ida dear," I said, "I certainly shall not talk Latin if there be the slightest chance of that impudent bird catching it up. Is this better?

"'My slight and slender jasmine tree,
That bloomest on my border tower,
Thou art more dearly loved by me
Than all the wealth of fairy bower.
I ask not, while I near thee dwell,
Arabia's spice or Syria's rose;
Thy light festoons more freshly smell,
Thy virgin white more freshly glows.'"

"And now," said my wife, "what about the story?"

"Yes, tea and a tale," cried Frank.

"Do you know," I replied, "that the starling is the best of all talking pets? And I do wonder why people don't keep them more often than they do?"

"They are difficult to rear, are they not?"

"Somewhat, Frank, when young, as my story will show."

"These," I continued, "are some kindly directions I have written about the treatment of these charming birds."

"Dear me!" cried the magpie.

"Hold your tongue, Maggie," I said, "or you'll go into the house, cage and all."

Maggie laughed sneeringly, and all throughout the story she kept interrupting me with impudent remarks, which quite spoiled the effect of my eloquence.

The Starling's Cage. – This should be as large and as roomy as possible, or else the bird will break his tail and lose other feathers, to the great detriment of his plumage and beauty. The cage may be a wicker-work one, or simply wire, but the bars must not be too wide. However much liberty you allow Master Dick in your presence, during your absence it will generally be as well to have him inside his dwelling-place; let the fastening of its door, then, be one which he cannot pick. Any ordinary wire fastening is of no use; the starling will find the cue to it in a single day. Tin dishes for the bird's food will be found best, and they must be well shipped, or else he will speedily tear them down. A large porcelain water fountain should be placed outside the cage; he will try to bathe even in this, and I hardly know how it can be prevented. Starlings are very fond of splashing about in the water, and ought to have a bath on the kitchen floor every day, unless you give them a proper bathing cage. After the bath place him in the sun or near the fire to dry and preen himself.

Cleanliness. – This is most essential. The cage and his feeding and drinking utensils should be washed every day. The drawers beneath must be taken out, cleaned, washed, and *dried* before being put back, and a little rough gravel scattered over the bottom of it. If you would wish your bird to enjoy proper health – and without that he will never be a good speaker or musician – keep all his surroundings dry and sweet, and never leave yesterday's food for to-day's consumption.

Food. – Do not give the bird salt food, but a little of anything else that is going can always be allowed him. Perhaps bread soaked in water, the water squeezed out, and a little new milk poured over, forms the best staple of diet. But, in addition to this, shreds of raw meat should be given, garden worms, slugs, etc. Carry him round the room on your finger, stopping when you see a fly on the wall or a picture-frame, and holding the starling near it. He will thus soon learn to catch his own flies, and take such delight in this kind of stalking that, as soon as he can speak, he will pester you with his importunities to be thus carried round.

White fish these birds are very fond of, and also fresh salmon. Fruit should be given to them now and then, a fig being considered by them an especial delicacy. A little chickweed or other green food is also relished. This may be placed on the top of the cage. Finally starlings, no matter how well you feed them, will not thrive without plenty of exercise. The male bird is the better talker, and more active and saucy, as well as more beautiful and graceful in shape and plumage. Be assured the bird is very young before purchasing it.

My Starling "Dick."

I feel very lonely now since my starling is gone. I could not bear to look upon his empty cage, his bath and playthings, so I have had them all stowed away; but the bird will dwell in my memory for many a day. The way in which that starling managed to insinuate itself into my heart and entwine its affections with mine, I can never rightly tell; and it is only now when it is gone that I really know how much it is possible for a human creature to love a little bird. The creature was nearly always with me, talking to me, whistling to me, or even doing mischief in a small way, to amuse me; and to throw down my pen, straighten my back, and have a romp with "Dick," was often the best relaxation I could have had.

The rearing of a nest of starlings is always a very difficult task, and I found it peculiarly so. In fact, one young starling would require half-a-dozen servants at least to attend it. I was not master of those starlings, not a bit of it; they were masters of me. I had to get out of bed and stuff them with food at three o'clock every morning. They lived in a bandbox in a closet off my bedroom. I had to get up again at four o'clock to feed them, again at five, and again at six; in fact, I saw more sunrises during the infancy of that nest of starlings than ever I did before or since. By day, and all day long, I stuffed them, and at intervals the servant relieved me of that duty. In fact, it was pretty near all stuffing; but even then they were not satisfied, and made several ineffectual attempts to swallow my finger as well. At length – and how happy I felt! – they could both feed themselves and fly. This last

accomplishment, however, was anything but agreeable to me, for no sooner did I open their door than out they would all come, one after the other, and seat themselves on my head and shoulders, each one trying to make more noise than all the rest and outdo his brothers in din.

I got so tired of this sort of thing at last, that one day I determined to set them all at liberty. I accordingly hung their cage outside the window and opened their door, and out they all flew, but back they came into the room again, and settled on me as usual. "Then," said I, "I'm going gardening." By the way they clung to me it was evident their answer was: "And so are we." And so they did. And as soon as I commenced operations with the spade they commenced operations too, by searching for and eating every worm I turned up, evidently thinking I was merely working for their benefit and pleasure. I got tired of this. "O bother you all!" I cried; "I'm sick of you." I threw down my spade in disgust; and before they could divine my intention, I had leaped the fence and disappeared in the plantation beyond.

"Now," said I to myself, as I entered the garden that evening after my return, and could see no signs of starlings, "I'm rid of you plagues at last;" and I smiled with satisfaction. It was short-lived, for just at that moment "Skraigh, skraigh, skraigh" sounded from the trees adjoining; and before I could turn foot, my tormentors, seemingly mad with joy, were all sitting on me as usual. Two of them died about a week after this; and the others, being cock and hen, I resolved to keep.

Both Dick and his wife soon grew to be very fine birds. I procured them a large roomy cage, with plenty of sand and a layer of straw in the bottom of it, a dish or two, a bath, a drinking fountain, and always a supply of fresh green weeds on the roof of their domicile. Besides their usual food of soaked bread, etc, they had slugs occasionally, and flies, and earthworms. Once a day the cage-door was thrown open, and out they both would fly with joyful "skraigh" to enjoy the luxury of a bath on the kitchen floor. One would have imagined that, being only two, they would not have stood on the order of their going; but they did, at least Dick did, for he insisted upon using the bath first, and his wife had to wait patiently until his lordship had finished. This was part of Dick's domestic discipline. When they were both thoroughly wet and draggled, and everything within a radius of two yards was in the same condition, their next move was to hop on to the fender, and flatter and gaze pensively into the fire; and two more melancholy-looking, ragged wretches you never saw. When they began to dry, then they began to dress, and in a few minutes "Richard was himself again," and so was his wife.

Starlings have their own natural song, and a strange noise they make too. Their great faculty, however, is the gift of imitation, which they have in a wonderful degree of perfection. The first thing that Dick learned to imitate was the rumbling of carts and carriages on the street, and very proud he was of the accomplishment. Then he learned to pronounce his own name, with the prefix "Pretty," which he never omitted, and to which he was justly entitled. Except when sitting on their perch singing or piping, these two little pets were never tired engineering about their cage, and everything was minutely examined. They were perfect adepts at boring holes; by inserting the bill closed, and opening it like a pair of scissors, lo! the thing was done. Dick's rule of conduct was that he himself should have the first of everything, and be allowed to examine first into everything, to have the highest perch and all the tit-bits; in a word, to rule, king and priest, in his own cage. I don't suppose he hated his wife, but he kept her in a state of inglorious subjection to his royal will and pleasure. "Hezekiah" was the name he gave his wife. I don't know why, but I am sure no one taught him this, for he first used the name himself, and then I merely corrected his pronunciation.

Sometimes Dick would sit himself down to sing a song; and presently his wife would join in with a few simple notes of melody; upon which Dick would stop singing instantly, and look round at her with indignation. "Hezekiah! Hezekiah!" he would say, which being interpreted, clearly meant: "Hezekiah, my dear, how can you so far forget yourself as to presume to interrupt your lord and master, with that cracked and quavering voice of yours?" Then he would commence anew; and Hezekiah being so good-natured, would soon forget her scolding and again join in. This was too much for Dick's temper; and Hezekiah was accordingly chased round and round the cage and soundly

thrashed. His conduct altogether as a husband, I am sorry to say, was very far from satisfactory. I have said he always retained the highest perch for himself; but sometimes he would turn one eye downwards, and seeing Hezekiah sitting so cosily and contentedly on her humble perch, would at once conclude that her seat was more comfortable than his; so down he would hop and send her off at once.

It was Dick's orders that Hezekiah should only eat at meal-times; that meant at all times when he chose to feed, *after he was done*. But I suppose his poor wife was often a little hungry in the interim, for she would watch till she got Dick fairly into the middle of a song and quite oblivions of surrounding circumstances, then she would hop down and snatch a meal on the sly. But dire was the punishment far the deceit if Dick found her out. Sometimes I think she used to long for a little love and affection, and at such times she would jump up on the perch beside her husband, and with a fond cry sidle close to him.

"Hezekiah! Hezekiah!" he would exclaim; and if she didn't take that hint, she was soon knocked to the bottom of the cage. In fact, Dick was a domestic tyrant, but in all other respects a dear affectionate little pet.

One morning Dick got out of his cage by undoing the fastening, and flew through the open window, determined to see what the world was like, leaving Hezekiah to mourn. It was before five on a summer's morning that he escaped; and I saw no more of him until, coming out of church that day, the people were greatly astonished to see a bird fly down from the steeple and alight upon my shoulder. He retained his perch all the way home. He got so well up to opening the fastening of his cage-door that I had to get a small spring padlock, which defied him, although he studied it for months, and finally gave it up, as being one of those things which no fellow could understand.

Dick soon began to talk, and before long had quite a large vocabulary of words, which he was never tired using. As he grew very tame, he was allowed to live either out of his cage or in it all day long as he pleased. Often he would be out in the garden all alone for hours together, running about catching flies, or sitting up in a tree repeating his lessons to himself, both verbal and musical. The cat and her kittens were his especial favourites, although he used to play with the dogs as well, and often go to sleep on their backs. He took his lessons with great regularity, was an arduous student, and soon learned to pipe "Duncan Grey" and "The Sprig of Shillelah" without a single wrong note. I used to whistle these tunes over to him, and it was quite amusing to mark his air of rapt attention as he crouched down to listen. When I had finished, he did not at once begin to try the tune himself, but sat quiet and still for some time, evidently thinking it over in his own mind. In piping it, if he forgot a part of the air, he would cry: "Doctor, doctor!" and repeat the last note once or twice, as much as to say: "What comes after that?" and I would finish the tune for him.

"Tse! tse! tse!" was a favourite exclamation of his, indicative of surprise. When I played a tune on the fiddle to him, he would crouch down with breathless attention. Sometimes when he saw me take up the fiddle, he would go at once and peck at Hezekiah. I don't know why he did so, unless to secure her keeping quiet. As soon as I had finished he would say "Bravo!" with three distinct intonations of the word, thus: "Bravo! doctor; br-r-ravo! bra-vo!"

Dick was extremely inquisitive and must see into everything. He used to annoy the cat very much by opening out her toes, or even her nostrils, to examine; and at times pussy used to lose patience, and pat him on the back.

"Eh?" he would say. "What is it? You rascal!" If two people were talking together underneath his cage, he would cock his head, lengthen his neck, and looking down quizzingly, say: "Eh? *What* is it? *What* do you say?"

He frequently began a sentence with the verb, "Is," putting great emphasis on it. "Is?" he would say musingly.

"Is what, Dick?" I would ask.

"Is," he would repeat – "Is the darling starling a pretty pet?"

"No question about it," I would answer.

He certainly made the best of his vocabulary, for he trotted out all his nouns and all his adjectives time about in pairs, and formed a hundred curious combinations.

"*Is*," he asked one day, "the darling doctor a rascal?"

"Just as you think," I replied.

"Tse! tse! tse! Whew! whew! whew!" said Dick; and finished off with "Duncan Grey" and the first half of "The Sprig of Shillelah."

"Love is the soul of a nate Irishman," he had been taught to say; but it was as frequently, "Love is the soul of a nate Irish starling;" or, "*Is* love the soul of a darling pretty Dick?" and so on.

One curious thing is worth noting: he never pronounced my dog's name – Theodore Nero – once while awake; but he often startled us at night by calling the dog in clear ringing tones – talking in his sleep. He used to be chattering and singing without intermission all day long; and if ever he was silent then I knew he was doing mischief; and if I went quietly into the kitchen, I was sure to find him either tracing patterns on a bar of soap, or examining and tearing to pieces a parcel of newly-arrived groceries. He was very fond of wines and spirits, but knew when he had enough. He was not permitted to come into the parlour without his cage; but sometimes at dinner, if the door were left ajar, he would silently enter like a little thief; when once fairly in, he would fly on to the table, scream, and defy me. He was very fond of a pretty child that used to come to see me. If Matty was lying on the sofa reading, Dick would come and sing on her head; then he would go through all the motions of washing and bathing on Matty's bonnie hair; which was, I thought, paying her a very pretty compliment.

When the sun shone in at my study window, I used to hang Dick's cage there, as a treat to him. Dick would remain quiet for perhaps twenty minutes, then the stillness would feel irksome to him, and presently he would stretch his head down towards me in a confidential sort of way, and begin to pester me with his silly questions.

"Doctor," he would commence, "*is* it, is it a nate Irish pet?"

"Silence, and go asleep," I would make answer. "I want to write."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.