

D O G S.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

Learned Dog and Show-woman—Education of Sporting Dogs—Hereditary Instinct of Dogs—Their thievish propensities descend to their offspring—Bad-tempered Dogs—Breaking of Dogs—Their jealousies—Their Hunting alliances—Attachment of a Dog to his Master—Dog-eating reprobated—Bloodhounds—Skye Terriers—Dogs combining against a common enemy—Old Dogs—Singular instance of sagacity in one.

ALTHOUGH I am perfectly content with witnessing the sagacity and instinct displayed by my own dogs in their every-day employments and proceedings, and am, generally speaking, unwilling to countenance the trickery of what are called “learned dogs,” yet the other day, to please my children, I allowed a woman, who sent up a most dirty-faced card, announcing herself as the possessor of “THE MOST ASTONISHING LEARNED DOG EVER KNOWN,” to exhibit the animal in our front hall.

The woman herself was a small sharp-looking personage, with the sodden and hard expression of

feature peculiar to that class who travel in caravans, and exhibit dwarfs, giants, and suchlike vamped-up wonders. The dog was a well-fed, comfortable-looking kind of bull-terrier, slightly rough about the muzzle ; but, notwithstanding his quiet and sedate look, there was a certain expression of low cunning and blackguardism about his face which would have stamped him anywhere as the associate of vile and dissolute company ; and, although he wagged his stumpy tail, and pretended to look amiable at his equally cunning-looking mistress, his attempts at amiability seemed to be rather the effects of kicks and blows than of genuine attachment. He received her caresses, too, with a kind of uncertain appearance of pleasure, as if he did not much value them, but of the two rather preferred them to her kicks.

On entering the hall he cast a kind of hasty look round him, much as you would expect a rogue to do on entering a shop from which he intended to purloin something ; however, on the woman producing certain dirty cards, with their corners all worn round by constant use, and marked with numbers, letters, etc., the dog prepared himself for action, with a preparatory lick at his lips and a suspicious look at his mistress. The tricks consisted of the usual routine of adding up figures,

spelling short words, and finding the first letter of any town named by one of the company. This last trick was very cleverly done, and puzzled us very much, as we—*i.e.* the grown-up part of his audience—were most intently watching, not him, but his mistress, in order to discover what signs she made to guide him in his choice of the cards; but we could not perceive that she moved hand or foot, or made any signal whatever. Indeed, the dog seemed to pay little regard to her, but to receive his orders direct from any one who gave them. In fact, his teaching must have been perfect, and his intellect wonderful.

Now, I daresay I shall be laughed at for introducing an anecdote of a *learned* dog, and told that it was “all trick.” No doubt it was “all trick;” but it was a *very* clever one, and showed how capable of education dogs are—far more so than we imagine. For here was a dog performing tricks so cleverly that not one out of four or five persons who were most attentively watching him could find out how he was assisted by his mistress. The dog, too, as the woman said, was by no means of the kind easiest to teach. She told us that a poodle or spaniel would be far quicker in learning than a terrier: but I strongly suspect that neither of these kinds would have courage sufficient to

stand the corrections necessary to complete their education, without becoming too shy to perform their part well.

The woman, though clever enough in her way and well spoken, was a melancholy specimen of a peculiar class. Sold by her parents, if she ever had any decided relatives of that kind, at an early age to the leader of some itinerant party of rope-dancers, or walkers on stilts—when she had mastered these respectable sciences she acted in the capacity of rope-dancer, or fifth-rate figurante, in some fifth-rate theatre. Disabled by an accident—a broken ankle—from following these employments, she was reduced at last to travelling to country fairs and markets in a painted caravan, the ill-used companion of some whiskered ruffian, arrayed in a fur cap, red plush waistcoat, corduroy breeches, white stockings, and ankle boots—the invariable dress of all masters of show-caravans. And now the poor woman, ruined in health and mind by hardship and dissipation, earns a precarious living by wandering through the country, and exhibiting her learned dogs, and her unlearned children, who, by dint of beating and starving, had been initiated into the mysteries of their respective callings. She assured me, with great professional energy, that one of my dogs, a large poodle, would make a first-rate

pupil, and I saw her more than once looking at him with a longing eye.

Dogs, indeed, will learn almost anything ; but, in teaching sporting dogs, much attention should be paid to the qualities and education of their forefathers. I am no advocate at all for crossing pointers with foxhounds, etc., to increase the strength and endurance of the animal ; all dogs so bred will invariably give great trouble in their education from an hereditary inclination to act the hound instead of the pointer. There is quite variety enough in the present breed of pointers to improve your kennel, if you want any addition of bone, speed, or courage.

I have seen a young pointer, who was only just able to run out alone, point, and indeed back, as steadily, and with as much certainty, as an old dog ; but this undoubtedly would not be the case had there been any cross whatsoever in his breeding. The late Mr. Andrew Knight, than whom a more practical and acute naturalist did not exist, paid much attention to what he termed “ the *hereditary instinct* ” of dogs. His woodcock spaniels were chosen from puppies whose ancestors had been most famous for woodcock-hunting ; and his rabbit dogs from those whose parents had shown most skill in rabbit-hunting. Some years ago I spent many a

pleasant half-hour in listening to his amusing and enthusiastic descriptions of the "hereditary instincts" of his favourite dogs.

There is certainly no class of dog in which this faculty is more decidedly shown than in retrievers. Although a retriever is frequently of a cross-breed, yet if his ancestors for one or two generations back have been well educated, and have had much practice in retrieving, he invariably requires little if any teaching, and appears to understand the whole of his business instinctively. I am convinced that I have seen this inherited skill exemplified in one of my retrievers, a curious kind of rough animal, who resembles a Russian poodle more than any other dog. I bought him of a man who lived by poaching, and other similar arts, when the dog was six months old, and before he could have acquired any very bad habits. The dog invariably showed, and still shows, the most determined propensity to steal meat and other eatables. Neither flogging nor good feeding prevents him, and he carries on his operations in so cunning and systematic a manner, that I dread taking him to any friend's house without instantly fastening him up. As long as any person is looking at him, he remains in a state of apparently the most innocent quietude; but the moment no eye is on him, *abiiit, evasit*; and to a

certainly some joint of meat has vanished with him, but whither, or how, no one knows.

Sometimes he manages not even to be suspected. On one occasion five pounds of beefsteak suddenly disappears. Every dog about the place is suspected excepting Gripp, and he, "poor brute!" the cook affirms, "cannot be the thief; for he never moved from the fire, where he was drying himself, and he is the quietest dog in the world:" so says my friend's cook, at the very time that the poor good dog is suffering the most painful indigestion from having swallowed so much raw meat in addition to his regular meals, and the extra scraps that he has inveigled out of the cook by his unsophisticated innocence. The next day half a haunch of roebuck is gone: but Gripp still keeps his place in the good graces of everybody. "It couldn't be Gripp," is the universal cry; "he wouldn't do such a thing!" At last Mr. Gripp is caught in the very act of swallowing the remains of a pound of butter, struggling in vain to bolt it at once; but the slippery lump will not go down. Then comes a long train of circumstantial evidence, and a dozen recent robberies are brought home to him.

Now the beast was always well fed, and was only impelled to steal by an hereditary irresistible impulse, handed down to him from his grandfather

and father, who both belonged to a race of poachers in a country town, and had been taught to find their own living. Beyond a question, Gripp inherited his system of morality from his respectable ancestors, to whom also he bore the strongest personal resemblance.

By the same rule, never keep the puppies of a notorious sheep-killing dog, nor of a bad-tempered dog: they are sure to have the same inclinations and tempers as their parents; and you will find it most difficult, if not impossible, to cure them of these faults. The breeders and teachers of dogs would much facilitate their own labours did they pay more attention to the dispositions and habits of the parents of the puppies whom they take in hand.

Dogs have quite as different dispositions and tempers as their masters. For my own part, I would never take the trouble to bring up and educate puppies who showed either a sulky or a very timid disposition. Neither of these faults can be so completely got rid of as to make them satisfactory assistants or companions. I say *companions*, for I have so much regard for these animals, that I like them as companions, and care little for dogs who have only been taught to obey and hunt for the gamekeeper. I am very far from intending to

disparage a kennel of well-broken pointers or setters, and I delight to see them do their work correctly, and with all their beautiful display of instinct, although under the command of the game-keeper only, and scarcely knowing their own master's voice or whistle. Three or four brace of perfectly-broken dogs pointing and backing without fault is a sight that must interest and amuse every person, whether sportsman or not: yet I far prefer hunting my own brace of dogs, and seeing them look to myself wholly for direction and approbation instead of to my servant. Every dog, with an average share of good sense and good temper, is so eager for his master's approbation, that he will exert himself to the utmost to obtain it; and if this fact were constantly kept in mind, the breaker-in of dogs need seldom have recourse to flogging. Indeed, I have no hesitation in saying that five dogs out of six may be completely broken in without a blow, and that, generally speaking, *quiet, patient* reasoning with a dog is all that is requisite to secure his obedience and attention. I know that this is quite contrary to the opinion of most dog-breakers, who think that nothing can be done without a heavy whip and loud rating. But one thing at least is certain, that when you *do* flog a dog, you should do it soundly, and only when you catch him

“red hand”—*in flagrante delicto*. He cannot then mistake *why* you flog him. Intelligent as this animal is, still it cannot be expected that he should know why he is flogged, if any time has elapsed since the fault was committed.

Dogs have also a great deal of jealousy in their dispositions ; and even *this* may be made to assist in their education, as it makes them strive to outdo each other. Every clever dog is especially unwilling that any of his companions should possess a greater share of his master's favour than himself. One of my dogs could not be induced to hunt in company with another, of whose advances in my good graces he was peculiarly jealous. There was no other ground of quarrel between them. When Rover saw that a certain young dog was to accompany me, he invariably refused to go out ; and, although at other times one of the most eager dogs for sport that I ever possessed, nothing would induce him to go out with his young rival. He also showed his jealousy by flying at him and biting him on every possible occasion where he could do so unobserved. At last, however, when the young dog had grown older, and discovered that his own strength was superior to that of his tyrant, he flew upon poor Rover, and amply revenged all the ill-treatment which he had received at his hands. From that

day he was constantly on the look-out to renew his attacks ; but having soon established his superiority, he thenceforth contented himself with striking down the old dog, and, after standing over him for a minute or two, with teeth bared ready for action, he suffered him to sneak quietly away, for Rover was too old a soldier to resist when he found himself overmatched. At last the poor old fellow got so bullied by this dog, and by two or three others whom I am afraid he had tyrannised over when they were puppies, that he never left the front-door steps, or went round the corner of the house, before he had well reconnoitred the ground, and was sure that none of his enemies were near him ; and yet, in his battles with vermin or with strange dogs, he was one of the most courageous animals I ever had.

Although dogs form such strong attachments to man, they seldom appear to feel any great degree of friendship for each other. Occasionally, however, a couple of dogs will enter into a kind of compact to assist each other in hunting. For instance, I have known an old terrier who formed an alliance of this sort with a greyhound, and they used constantly to go out poaching together. The terrier would hunt the bushes, whilst the greyhound stationed herself quietly outside, ready to spring on

any rabbit or hare that was started; and she always took the side of the bush opposite to that by which the terrier had entered it. On losing his companion, the terrier, who was becoming old in years and cunning, entered into confederacy with a younger terrier. In all their hunting excursions the old dog laid himself quietly down at some likely-looking meuse or run, and, sending his younger companion to hunt the bushes, he waited patiently and silently for any rabbit that might come in his way. Their proceedings showed a degree of instinct which almost amounted to reason.

So many stories have been told of the strong attachment of dogs to their masters, that to enlarge upon the subject would be superfluous. I must, however, relate one anecdote which was told me lately. A minister of a parish in this neighbourhood having died, his favourite dog followed his body to the grave, and no inducement could persuade the faithful animal to leave the place. Night and day, bad weather and good, did the dog remain stretched on the grave. The people of the neighbourhood, finding all their endeavours to entice him away fruitless, and respecting his fidelity, fed and protected him. This continued for several weeks—indeed until some time after the manse was tenanted by a new minister, whose wife, from some

wretched feeling of superstition, caused the dog to be killed. May the mourners over her own grave be better treated! The source from which I received this anecdote leaves no doubt upon my mind as to its truth. I must own, indeed, that I am greatly inclined to believe all stories which exemplify the reasoning powers or the fidelity of dogs. However marvellous they may be, my own experience leads me to think that, although they may not be *probable*, at least they are *possible*.

The dog is peculiarly the friend and companion of man. In every country this is the case, and it has been so in every age. There is one use, however, to which they are put, the propriety of which I cannot admit, namely, that of being eaten. Being decidedly a carnivorous animal, the dog can never have been intended for our food; and those nations who eat dog's flesh, as the Chinese and certain of the American Indian tribes, appear to me to be guilty of a sort of cannibalism almost as bad as if they ate each other. Yet we read accounts of their being occasionally eaten in those countries by our own countrymen, and actually relished. Hunger, we all know, is a good sauce; and perhaps a young puppy may not be bad, though in all probability those travellers would have found an infant still more relishing. I confess that I

have as little inclination to try the one experiment as the other.

There are two kinds of dogs which have been bred in much greater numbers since the rage for Highland shooting and deer-forests has become so strong—I mean the Highland deerhound and the old bloodhound. The former is immortalised in so many of Landseer's pictures that, although deer-stalking may be given up, the dog will for centuries be remembered; but the bloodhound is not so generally used for this sport as it might be. If greater trouble was taken in training bloodhounds to the tracking of wounded deer, this species of dog would be invaluable to the sportsman. But to effect this, it is absolutely necessary that they should be taught to track quietly whilst led. Almost every bloodhound pulls and strains on the collar, panting and struggling to get forward on the scent, until at last he becomes as blown and distressed as if he had run full speed all the time: and, indeed, more so. Besides which, as perfect silence is a *sine quâ non* in following up a wounded stag, your object will very probably be defeated. Train the bloodhound to keep pace with his leader, and to track silently and slowly, "*pari passu*," whatever scent he is put on, and he is then invaluable. Many instances of the extraordinary powers of

scent displayed by this dog in following wounded animals have come under my observation, some of which would appear incredible.

A bloodhound is easily taught to follow the track of any stranger whose path he may come across on the mountain or elsewhere. This faculty alone makes this dog worthy of far more pains than are ever bestowed on him. Keepers seem to think that because he is called a bloodhound, and because bloodhounds, in former days, were used for tracking robbers and fugitives, that he requires no teaching to enable him to follow any track which he is set upon; and masters generally leave these things to their keepers, trusting implicitly to their verdict as to the capabilities of the dog. But this opinion is altogether erroneous. The bloodhound, to perform his duty perfectly, requires education, like every other dog. With a due degree of care, and frequent practice when young, a well-bred bloodhound will soon learn to track a man with unerring correctness.

An extraordinary instance of this faculty in a young bloodhound occurred some fifteen or sixteen years back in Worcestershire, for the truth of which I can vouch. At the house of a lady in the country, where a young full-grown bloodhound was kept, the harness-room was robbed during the night.

Some of the grooms, who found out the robbery at an early hour in the morning, having heard that bloodhounds would hunt men, took the dog out, and put him on the footsteps, which at that hour were plainly visible on the dewy grass. The dog immediately took up the scent, the servants followed, and, after a run of twelve miles, came to a cottage, where both the thieves and the harness were discovered. It appeared that the thieves had waded through a tolerably broad but shallow stream: the dog scarcely came to a check here, the scent appearing to remain in the morning mists, which were still hanging on the surface of the water. He went straight across, and at once took up the scent on the opposite side of the river.

One of the most singular uses to which dogs are put is truffle-hunting. I well remember, in my younger days, a curious old fellow in Sussex who gained his living, *ostensibly*, by this pursuit. Accompanied by four or five quaint-looking currish poodles of a small size, he used to follow his trade, and generally hunted out a considerable number of these mysterious but excellent roots.

The Skye terrier, though so much prized by our English visitors, has by no means the determined blind courage of the English bull-terrier. Nevertheless there is much quiet intelligence and charac-

ter in this dog, and if well entered at vermin when young they are useful enough. Like all terriers, though eager hunters, they do not appear to hunt so much to *find* as to *kill*; and when in company with spaniels they are apt to leave the latter to search for the game, while they wait about the runs and outside the bushes, ready to spring upon whatever is started by the spaniels. I have always found this to be the case with my own Skye terriers, and have observed it in others. These dogs generally take the water freely and well, though I have had smooth bull-terriers better swimmers and divers than any rough dog I ever possessed.

Though dogs often disagree, and are jealous of each other at home, they generally make common cause against a stranger. Two of my dogs, who were such enemies and fought so constantly that I could not keep them in the same kennel, seemed to have compared notes, and to have found out that they had both of them been bullied by a large, powerful watch-dog belonging to a farmer in the neighbourhood. They suspended their own hostilities, and formed an alliance, and then they together assaulted the common enemy; and so well assisted each other that, although he was far stronger than both my dogs put together, he was so fairly beaten and bullied that he never

again annoyed them or me by rushing out upon them as we passed by the place, as he had always been in the habit of doing before he received his drubbing.

Unluckily, dogs, like men, will grow old and deaf, and become a burthen to themselves and others. Life is then no longer a matter of enjoyment to them ; and the most merciful thing to do is to have the poor animal shot. But we do not always practice what we preach ; and, although I am quite convinced that having a dog killed when old, infirm, and rheumatic is doing him a kindness, I could never bring myself to order the execution of any of my old canine friends.

Hanging a dog is barbarous ; but when shot he can feel but little pain, and he will be in the paradise — the “ happy hunting-grounds ” — of dogs before he hears the report of the gun which sends him there, and he can have no anticipation, or only for a moment, of what is about to be done to him. I must admit, however, that I was once told, and by a credible person, an anecdote which went to impugn this theory. His dog having been convicted of sheep-killing, he told a man to shoot him the following morning. The dog was lying in the room at the time, and apparently listening to the conversation. Whether he understood it or not

I will not pretend to determine ; but the very first time the door was open he bolted out, and never again came within reach of his old master. This seems rather a stretch of canine intelligence, but it was told me as a true story ; and I am convinced that the relater, who was the master of the dog, believed it himself.

But I must close my chapter on this subject, or I shall become insufferably prolix.

