

WHY I HATE DOGS

By G. L. WYNDHAM

A WEEK or two ago I returned from a trip to New York City. It is a time, I am told, of serious food shortage. But I do not suppose that the average of nineteen visible dogs per block which I counted on a Sunday morning in the mid-town area of my hotel — dogs being walked by doormen, dogs being walked by silver-foxed dowagers and wedgied misses, dogs just wandering loose while policemen clucked and beamed at them, dogs of every nature and description — I do not suppose, I say, that all these tons of dogs were subsisting on air. Indeed, I can be quite sure of it. The copious and steaming evidences of hearty feeding and of subsequent metabolism were everywhere in evidence.

There is said to be a last straw. It is a true saying. I have experienced that straw. The details do not matter; enough that they impel me finally to put on paper

sentiments that I have long suppressed. Briefly, they come to this: that the dog is man's worst friend. Indeed, the dog is not a friend at all. It is a debased and degraded animal, of a craven, crawling and lickspittish spirit, scarcely any brains whatever, and a general oafishness and offensiveness which make its presence in civilized society an intolerable atrocity.

There can be no doubt that many fellow citizens will disagree with me upon this thesis. But I cannot believe that even in a world as dog-infatuated as this one, there will not be some readers who have long entertained in their secret souls just such sentiments as my own, and have feared to speak lest they incur the abuse of those legions of collie-worshippers, terrier-cultists and wolfhound-fetishists who, as the late G. K. Chesterton has well said, are committed to the indecent belief that the

G. L. WYNDHAM in this article speaks for a tiny minority only. His views on "man's best friend" are unlikely to make friends and influence dog-lovers. But ordinary democracy demands that on a subject so close to the popular heart the tiniest minority be heard. Reader comment is invited.

name Dog should be spelled backwards. To my silent fellow sufferers, salute! I wish we might form a society.

It was Darwin, if I am not mistaken, who once said of the sheep, that "by long association with mankind it has lost all its natural intelligence." Similar sentiments clearly must be held with regard to the dog. The witless toady which, in various sizes and shapes, now infests and fouls our streets, is doubtless a far cry from its ancestor which once roamed in the wilderness.

Historically, the picture is clear. Primitive man originally tamed a wild animal — probably a wolf — with the thought that he might train it to hunt for him. In this rôle, the creature was a success, being used much as the cheetah is used in India today. However, man soon discovered that this animal's spirit could be "broken" to a unique degree. The beast not merely could be trained: it could be cowed, awed, and threatened into a condition of abject and whimpering submission. It could be made to fawn and grovel. If a man beat it, the beast, instead of flying at his throat, would slink on its belly for a while and then come creeping with wagging tail to The Master's feet. If a hand were then casually extended to it, it would go

mad with an ecstasy of gratefulness and adoration. Here was indeed a wonderful discovery: an animal that could make its master perpetually feel like God. So man took a pair of dogs into his house (or hut or cave, as it doubtless was at that time); and there was started the endless line of animals which primitive man's successors have bred into a variety of shapes and sizes, and which continue today to be a subject of slobbering sentimentality for the simple reason, as aforesaid, that they minister uniquely to the vanity of human incompetents who have no valid reason for self-esteem.

II

People love dogs for one reason: because their dogs make them feel important. But, as in all cases of deceptional sentimentality, this real reason is masked behind numerous ostensible reasons which are untrue. It is said that the dog is intelligent. It is said that the dog is loyal. It is said that the dog is a cleanly and wholesome household companion. Allegement is made that the dog is a hero. (Accounts of dogs waking their owners, to save them from midnight fires, are apparently obligatory at three-month intervals throughout the

press.) There is presented, as an Ideal Picture, a man who sits before a fireplace, nursing his pipe and musing, while his faithful Rover or Spot lies dozing away the hours beside his chair.

The evident falsity of all this should be apparent instantly to any mind that has not been turned to a mush of dog-worship. Consider the matter coolly.

The dog is not intelligent. It can be taught a few simple tricks and associational responses — (so can fish) — but beyond this it shows very little gleam of wit and plenty of evidence of nincompooery. It readily gets lost; it starts into a frenzy of surprise, terror or bewilderment over sights or sounds that it has seen and heard every day for years; it frequently bites people without reason; it will gnaw unrestrainedly on a simple insect-bite on its skin until it turns it into an open ulcer; it has substantially no discrimination at all in the matter of what it ought or ought not to eat, or where or when; and so on and so on, indefinitely. The eminent experimental psychologist, W. F. Hamilton, in a simple test involving ability to learn the door-layout of a room, found that the stupidest monkey was better at it than the smartest dog. Drs. Maier and Schneirla, in their classic handbook

on animal psychology, use a phrase which describes the intelligence of the dog with scientific precision. The words are “rudimentary and unstable.”

The “loyalty” of the dog? It is true that a dog, though habitually kicked or otherwise mistreated, will remain slavishly faithful to the abuser. It is true that dogs sometimes pine over a master’s death (whether the master had been a good or bad one) until they die. But this is not loyalty, in any allowable sense of that word. It is insanity. It is but a further evidence that the domestic dog’s devotion to The Master is a pathological and unhealthy thing, as wide of naturalness as The Master’s devotion to the dog.

It is palpably untrue that the dog is a healthy and wholesome household companion. Most dogs have something the matter with them. This is not surprising, considering how they have been overfed, over-pampered, over-fussed-over, for many generations. But, surprising or not, it is in any case a fact. The average dog’s breath has a feter as of a sewer. Since dogs ages ago gave up paying more than the most cursory attention to their toilet, their coats customarily harbor a variety of parasitic species which, though possibly of interest

to an entomologist, are unwelcome lodgers in a civilized home. I pass over very lightly the chronically runny eyes of many dog-breeds. I mention only *passim* the dog's proclivity for rolling in manure, rotted fish, or any other kind of offal. I pass as quickly as possible the subject of the internal worms from which few dogs are ever more than briefly free. I have no comment except to say that the canine preoccupation with anal itch seems to me a less than delightful parlor performance.

III

As to the dog heroes, that rouse The Master when fire comes in the night. A parrot will do as much. A dog, smelling smoke, will make a rumpus. Is there a sign of genius in it?

I have often meditated upon that Ideal Picture, so loved by calendar artists and so generally accepted as epitome of the wholesome and restful: the man fondling his pipe in happy reverie, the cheery hearth, the peaceful dog. The dog in the Ideal Picture, of course, is simply a fake. A dog does not lie tranquil, contributing to the comfortable dozing of an evening. Every ten minutes or so, the creature wants to go out. Or to be let

in again. Or it wants a drink of water. Or it hears the telephone ring, and bursts into deafening barks. Or it hears the doorbell and unlooses a whole inclusive pandemonium. Or perhaps, if no events occur to attract its attention, it just sits up and begins vigorously thump-thumping in an effort to allay its parasite-bites, or it contorts itself into a rough circle and investigates with intimate snuffings and lickings the fascination of its genitalia. After this last performance, of course, a dog customarily springs to its feet and desires to lick the faces of all the company. This smeary attack is known among dog-cultists as a "kiss." It is considered an honor.

Dog-worshippers, I make no doubt, will be indignant at what has been written in this article. Because of the morbid master-slave relationship (though it is more than that), which exists between a dog-adorer and a dog, the former resents any attack upon the latter as an attack upon his own personality. This is understandable; for in a subtle way it is quite true. It is for this same reason that an otherwise civilized person, who would not bring into one's home a Mongolian idiot child or an aged and ulcerous uncle, will forcefully thrust his dog upon one, and will

indeed insist upon an acknowledgment that Towser or Pipsy — however scrofulous or wormy the beast may be — is a booful, booful animal, no nuisance at all, and “doesn’t smell the least *bit* doggy, does he?” It would, of course, be intolerable to admit that the canine whose slavish devotion props one’s ego was but a bundle of servility, smell and stupidity.

The late Albert Payson Terhune made a fortune by glorification of the dog. I daresay that the piece

of lush rhetoric called, I believe, “Tribute to a Dog,” by a Senator-somebody, has been reprinted at least as often as The Lord’s Prayer. It is to be feared that the present article will be less widely esteemed. But it is possible, so large is this country, that these words may reach a few citizens of congenial opinion: a few who may agree with me that man’s hysterical devotion to the dog is as grotesque a perversion as, for example, the devotion in India to sacred cattle.



WIND IN THE TREES

BY ETHEL BARNETT DE VITO

WIND in the trees denies their will
 And bends them toward some little hill
 Mindless of how they stretch and labor
 To make the sky their nearest neighbor.
 And through the boughs his words are dinned:
 Trees were once seeds but wind is wind
 And ever was and so will be
 Blowing unchanged when earth’s last tree
 Goes down to earth with one last roar
 And one last silence, nothing more —
 And, holding power of start and end,
 May break the things that do not bend . . .