

GONE TO THE DOGS.

A VISIT TO THE "HOME FOR LOST DOGS."



MONEY was lost!

There was no longer a doubt about it, and a general feeling of regret pervaded the household, from the kitchen where our soft-hearted Mary shed tears, to the nursery where the young folks howled dis-

consolately. Money was lost, stolen, or strayed; for our Money was not gold, silver, or copper; in fact it had to be paid for at the rate of five shillings a year. It ran about on four legs and its value never changed. It often howled dolefully at nights, and it often troubled us by day—wanting to go out when it was in, and to come in when it was out. It annoyed the neighbours who had cats, and often irritated our friends, who would darkly threaten when we were not supposed to be near. Indeed we had ourselves often wished Money at Jericho, and yet now the little-valued creature appeared to have betaken itself to that remote part of the globe, we all wished it back again—praised its virtues and forgot its faults. "Such is life, Sairy," all the world over.

Its, or rather his, original name was Mona, being a native of Anglesey, born on the same day as our eldest hope, whose nurse, playmate, and guardian he had been for the nine years they had lived and frolicked together. Once he had dragged the child out of a pool and laid him, a wet bundle of petticoats, at his terrified mother's feet; another time he had followed and found him when he had wandered far away over the hills in determined pursuit of "that ikle star." In those days we felt comfortable about the child when Money was with him. Now that Arthur was at school, and grown beyond the need of his protection, the dog appeared to have transferred his affection and taken charge of small Tots. But Arthur's short letters were usually half filled, as far as they could be made out, with affectionate messages concerning his dear friend and companion, Money, whose allegiance he never doubted.

"Whatever will Arthur say when we send word he's lost?" cried my wife in some distress. "It will spoil the poor darling's holiday."

"It is very vexatious," I agreed, "but he must get over it. It seems to have been nobody's fault; the

dog has strayed from home in some unaccountable manner. Perhaps he may come back again yet."

"I wonder, if we were to offer a reward, put bills about, advertise in the *Times*—Charlie, would you mind?"

"Well, do as you like. I think bills would be the likeliest, as the kind of people who would keep Money would be scarcely likely to see the *Times*. I'm good for a couple of sovereigns, Bess; he's really not worth it, but if it's only to satisfy the boy and Tots here who looks so disconsolate and out of curl."

To tell the truth, I missed the old dog's bark of delight and welcome more than I cared to own. The very next day I saw our loss announced on large white papers in all the sleepy-looking shops about our new neighbourhood; I read of it on shiny white skins of lard; I saw it upside down on the solid-looking leathery tarts at the confectioner's. Wherever I turned my eyes I read that "two guineas reward would be given to any person finding a large, rough, black dog, with a white spot on his head, and answering to the name of 'Money,' or 'Mona,' and bringing him to the house of Dr. Griffith, at 24A, Sunshine Terrace, Bath Road."

This golden offer had the effect of raising many false hopes and alarms among our young people, and also of introducing many curious varieties of the canine tribe to our notice. The surgery bell was constantly being tugged at by all sorts of ragamuffins insisting on knowing if "this here was the dorg that Dr. Griffin was a-looking arter." In one hour I was called up to declare that a small, one-eyed lurcher; a tall, mangy, white nondescript; and a dirty, patchy mongrel, in no way resembled our lost favourite. At first this was amusing, but it soon grew tiresome, and when the third day I heard Tots shrieking with alarm at the sight of a colourless, bandy-legged "bull-tarrier," whose red eyes fixed themselves with a hungry stare on her rosy, chubby knees, while he pulled and tugged at the short chain by which he led, or appeared to lead, a bandy-legged, colourless man, to whom he seemed closely related, I declared that I would have the bills called in, and that for the future no more of such visitors were to be admitted into the garden on any pretence whatever.

A fortnight had passed away, and poor old Money began to be spoken of as a memory of the past, when one morning we were disturbed at our breakfast by the announcement that the garden wall had been invaded, and our trim little green-house stripped of every pot of rare and pretty flowers that my wife had been at the trouble and expense of collecting there. We all rushed to the place, which presented a touching aspect of damage and destruction. I was half speechless with dismay and vexation.

"Oh, dear me, Charlie!" cried mamma, "this never could have happened if that dear old dog had been here."

"He'd a eated them up, wouldn't he, ma?" said

Tots, peeping from behind, and staring about with wide-open eyes.

"To think of all your pretty flowerses being sold for old closes, mum," chimed in Mary, almost wringing her apron-strings off.

"Eh sure, mim, I sha'n't get a wink o' sleep to-night for thinking of them wicked thieves who may come and murder us all in our beds, and it's myself that's trimbling all over," chimed in Bridget, her face as white as dripping.

"Don't be ridiculous, cook; they're only paltry thieves. I'll speak to the policeman; I dare say that he'll find out all about the vagabonds."

Accordingly I introduced myself to an intelligent member of the force—43, XYZ—told him of our trouble and requested his advice and assistance.

"What am I to do? they'll come again for more before long, I suppose."

The policeman nodded affirmatively, then he said solemnly—

"Not if you have a dog, sir; them sort of light thieves, that are not exactly thieves, hate dogs like poison—worse than us policemen even."

"But we have lost ours, and really I have no time to go dog-hunting; besides, I have always heard that there's a deal of cheating if one does not understand them. I don't know what to do. We never had such a thing happen."

The policeman took off his warlike headpiece and stared into its recesses, evidently in search of an idea; and having discovered one, he wiped his forehead, slowly replaced the helmet, and remarked confidentially—

"If you're a-thinking of having another dog, sir, why don't you go to the Dogs' Home? there's lots and lots of 'em there, cheap as dirt; it's pick and choose, and glad to get 'em a new master."

"That's not a bad idea, policeman; I never thought of that; but I had some kind of idea that was only a place where stray dogs were taken to be owned or buried. I did not know they sold them."

"Oh yes, sir, there's an Act of Parliament passed on purpose. When a dog's took in it's kept three clear days, some of them as many weeks, and all the owner has to do is to claim him and pay for his keep; if no one turns up to claim him, he's sold for very little more than his bill."

"And the poor things that are neither claimed nor sold?" asked my wife pityingly.

"Oh, they are popped out of their troubles in a moment; no more starving and snapping in the streets for the ugliest cur in London."

"Can any one take a dog and leave it at this Home?"

"No, sir, no dog is taken from any one but a policeman; they may be given to us in the street or brought to the station, where they are forwarded on and receipted for. It was different at first, but it was found people took their own old dogs and left them to be looked after. They used to come to the first Home, in Holloway, by twos or threes a day; now they have between three or four hundred a week. But you go and see them for yourself, sir; you'll find it a queer

sight, and one as will make you think more of dogs than ever. It isn't far from the station of the London, Chatham, and Dover Line, York Road, and there you are, and there perhaps is your dog."

I took the man's advice and a ticket to York Road Station, Battersea Park, arrived at which platform I heard a distant storm of canine thunder, that assured me that the Home of which I was in search was somewhere handy, as indeed it was, for its open door adjoined that of the station, and all I had to do was to walk in—and wonder.

At the precise moment I entered, there reigned a comparative silence, for there happened to be no visitor to the place. A rosy-faced keeper was attending to a small triangle of garden, yellow with crocuses, while a mild young man was slowly pacing up and down, gazing dreamily on the long range of kennels, behind the iron railings of which were the latest arrivals, yesterday's wanderers. The instant my footstep sounded on the stones, but before they could see me, the whole place became alive with noise and clamour; by some strange freemasonry, the arrival of a stranger was instantly known and signalled from cage to cage. A possible master or friend had come; at the very thought over four hundred doggyish voices were raised in every variety of tone, yelling, screaming, squeaking, barking, "I'm here, I'm here in prison; oh! take me home, or I shall choke, fret, die; I—I—I'm the one you've come for; I can't get out, oh! I can't get out!" This they said as plainly as ever Sterne's starling said it.

As I walked by some cried and sobbed piteously, others shouted, bawled, called; but almost all rushed forward to get a sniff and a glance at the new-comer, and each eager face looked into mine with a pitiful blank expression that haunted me for hours. It may seem absurd, but it is not less true, that those anxious, straining eyes, all on the watch for some loved or familiar face, touched me with a kind of dull pain, such as I have felt on looking in those of a sick child longing for something I could not give it. I don't think I had even noticed the almost human intelligence in a dog's eye before, but I have noted it a good many times since, and wondered almost uneasily at its dumb intensity.

As I wandered on past the compartments in which the dogs were classed, I could not avoid noticing the striking differences of temper and character, as well as of species; the small dogs came first, and they of course raised the loudest outcry, being most of them mere baby-dogs, and behaving as such; now crying and whimpering as though broken-hearted, now blundering over each other in a thoughtless frolic, little heeding the trouble of older dogs around. I was surprised to see so many puppies, but the keeper told me the poor little things were mostly kept by thoughtless people who saved them to please children, and turned them out when it became a question of licence—a most cruel practice.

These and indeed most of the cages contained a great share of those long-tailed, ugly, mongrel street Arabs, that but a few years since were for ever humbly following at the heels of any one rash enough to give a

pitying look at their poor thin bodies : curs that stole, and starved, and went mad in our streets. But here they are side by side with dainty pets, whose necks still show remains of blue ribbons, but whose long curly coats are in dreadful need of the accustomed bath. As a rule I noticed that these showed teeth and temper under their adverse circumstances, and snapped at the still humble mongrels which misfortune had made their companions. Altogether it was evident that this assembly did not enjoy each other's society ; they had food, straw, comfort, but they wanted human society as only dogs can want it.

It was strange to watch how they pushed and elbowed each other out of the reach of a friendly pat, and how gratefully they received a few words of condolence.

"It don't do to notice them, sir, it puts them off their food for long enough," said the keeper as he heard me "poor-fellowing" an ugly mongrel that by a series of gymnastics had managed to reach and lick the hand I had rested against the rails. "That kind of dog is the most affectionate of all, and once taken to is never to be got rid of ; I'll be bound that he's hungry enough, but if I give him some biscuit he won't touch it for the next half-hour ; they can't stand pity, sir, it makes them miserable, they're that tender-hearted."

Not but what every now and then there was a sudden rush and riot, and a naughty quarrelsome dog was dragged out of a cage, appearing very much ashamed, and transferred with chiding words to another place, where he sneaked off to hide in the straw, looking much like some urchin in disgrace.

In the larger enclosures were other stray dogs—big, black, mild-eyed retrievers ; they did not bark and whine, but waited in silent, solemn composure ; two huge, sullen hounds, that scowled at me in a dignified manner, as much as to say, "*You* never owned such gentlemen as us ;" and several bull-dogs, suggestive of a muzzle, raw meat for dinner, and Bill Sykes for a master, besides many others to me of race unknown ; but I saw nothing of Money, or indeed any dog like him.

"Ain't found your dog, sir ?" asked the keeper, as I came to his green and yellow triangle again, and looked regretfully around.

"No," I said ; "I'm afraid it's a bad case ; I suppose I shall have to invest in another, but I should very much rather have had poor Money back again. You don't remember a black terrier with a round white spot on the top of his head—rather an odd-looking dog ?"

"Well, sir, we have so many odd-looking dogs here. Did you look in the infirmary ? There's two there." He

led me to a small separate building in a corner where, on masses of clean straw which each invalid enjoyed in undisturbed loneliness, lay two dogs : one a cream-coloured, black-muzzled ladies' pug, like a china ornament, valuable, quaint, and big-eyed ; the other, rolled up asleep in a dark corner, I could not quite make out, but he looked too small for our lost terrier.

"No," I said, "he's not here."

The poor ugly pet looked piteously at me, and never stirred ; but the mass of straw in the other cage was suddenly scattered, a rough black head poked out, and Money, our old Money, rolled moaning with delight over the hand I stretched out to him.

"I thought it might be him, sir ; but we always leave it to the dogs to recognise their own masters ; you see there's never no mistake about that, sir."

"Is he very ill ?" I asked anxiously, as, his excitement over, I noticed that the poor dog could scarcely stand on his feet, and was thin as a basket.

"Ay, sir ; he's fretted himself into a consumption wellnigh, which ain't uncommon, but if you take him home and nurse him up a bit he'll soon get well again, I have no doubt."

I did take him home, having settled the bill for his board, which was only two shillings a week, and he was tenderly received and welcomed. Tots almost smothered him with kisses, and cook gave him dainty messes. But somehow Money, after the first day's mad gladness, lay on the soft rug, languid and still, shivering in his sleep and often moaning softly in his waking hours ; no play, no rushing after "s'cats ;" the fact became evident, Money was dying. As a last chance I fetched a veterinary surgeon to look at our poor favourite, and that gentleman said—

"It's been too great a shock for his nerves ; another twenty-four hours and he would have been dead ; as it is—well, he may recover, but it will be a work of patience and time which some people would not care to give a dog. You had better send him over to me—it's only a lump of sugar business," he whispered over Tots' head.

"I will take any trouble over him if he can be made well again," said Arthur, just home from school.

The prescription was port wine and strong beef-tea, to be administered once every hour. At first Money totally refused to swallow the mixture, but having been coaxed and persuaded, took it for the sake of obliging his little master, then he took it because he liked it, and gradually grew stronger, left off shivering, and at last was able once more to run races with his nurse. Now I think he has almost recovered from his visit to the dogs.

