

III. CANINE GUESTS.

There is so much in this paper which must naturally seem incredible that I think it necessary to assure the reader how scrupulously I have endeavoured to narrate the facts simply as I saw them. On my honour, the narrative is, if not absolutely true, at least as true as I can make it by a comparison of what I observed myself, with the observation of a dozen other witnesses.

HAVING heard that two very wonderful dogs were performing within fifty miles of my house, I invited them to come and visit me. . . . They were invited to dine and spend the evening; and as the weather was very wet they stayed all night and breakfasted next morning, so that I had every opportunity of making their acquaintance.

Madame du Rouil informed me that her husband had been for ten years a teacher in a deaf-and-dumb institution, which had given him the idea of trying how far a similar method of education might develop the intelligence of dogs. He had also been a conjurer, and these two professions had prepared him for the one he at present exercised. When he began to train his first dog it was not with any idea of future profit, but simply out of curiosity to see the effects of the sort of education which seemed to him best adapted for establishing a close understanding between the human and canine minds. Seeing that the plan succeeded he began to take the dog with him to the entertainments he gave in Paris, and as the public were interested he went on educating his pupil. Since then he has educated two other dogs on the same principles, one of whom has completed her training, whilst the other is an advanced, but not yet a finished, student.

I had a good opportunity, at dinner, of observing the master himself. There was not the faintest trace of anything like charlatanism in his manner. A very quiet, grave, serious, even sad-looking old gentleman, dressed soberly in black, he talked about places he had visited and about the political news of the day. The impression he made upon us was altogether favourable. He reminded me most of some respectable old school-master or librarian, who had seen a good deal of the world and reflected on what he had seen, but whose thoughts were tinged with a deepening gravity, the result of narrowed fortune and weakened health. I learned afterwards that there were ample reasons for this sadness. M. du Rouil had had two sons killed in the Franco-Prussian war and another severely wounded, whilst his daughter, a pretty girl of eighteen, had been killed by a shell at Neuilly in the sanguinary days of the Commune. His house, too, had been sacked by the Communards, and a small business which his wife managed had been put an end to. The capital invested in that little business had been earned by the dog Bianca, of whom, and her daughter Lyda, it is time to give a description.

Bianca, or Blanche, as her master familiarly calls her, is a bitch of the pure *caniche* breed. I use the French word because although we have an English one, "poodle," I rather think that the word poodle does not distinguish between the real *caniche* and the *chien-mouton*, another very intelligent breed from which performing dogs are frequently taken. Of M. du Rouil's three pupils one is a pure *caniche*, the other (Lyda) is a cross between the *caniche* and the spaniel, whilst the third is a *chien-mouton*,

Commune refers to a rising of the people in Paris against the government after the Germans had besieged the city in 1871.

thoroughbred. The *caniche* is silky-haired and has often patches of brown about the face, but the white hair is like snow, whereas the *chien-mouton* approaches both in colour and texture much more nearly to the sheep, and never has



CHIEN-MOUTON.

any patches of brown. Only Blanche and Lyda came to my house; the other dog has begun to perform in public, but is not yet so accomplished as these two.

They behaved at dinner exactly like common dogs, but when I offered Blanche a piece of cheese and asked if she knew the

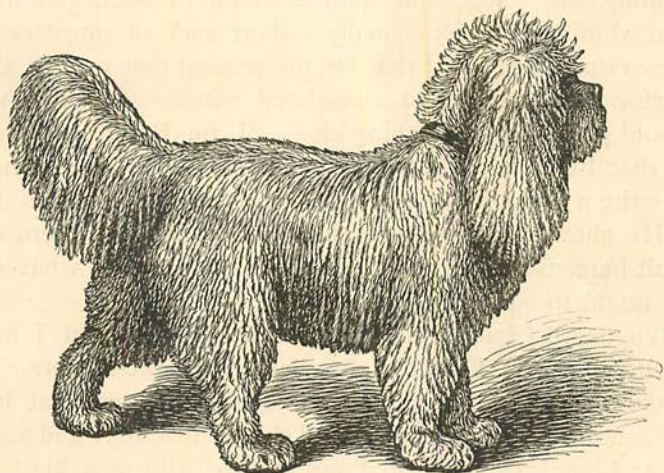
word for that substance, her master answered that she could spell it very correctly. I had invited a few friends to meet these learned animals, and when they were assembled in the drawing-room we made the little preparations which M. du Rouil said would be most convenient. A large octagonal library-table was put in the middle of the room with a cloth of one colour and a lamp in the centre. Round this table Madame du Rouil laid cards with all the letters of the alphabet, printed in large capitals. There was also a little hand-bell. At a sign from her master Blanche jumped upon the table and sat in an attitude of expectation.

Then M. du Rouil turned to me and said, "I promised you that the dog should spell *fromage* (cheese). Blanche, spell *fromage*."

Blanche immediately set about her work and brought an F, an R, and an O, then she hesitated.

"You have only given us three letters, and there are seven in the word."

On this, she soon found M, A, G, E, and the word was complete. The next task was a translation. We were invited to write upon a slate any Latin, German, or English



CHIEN-CANICHE.

word in which the same letter did not occur twice. Some one present wrote, in German hand-writing, the word *Pferd* (horse), and M. du Rouil showed the slate to Blanche. She either read it or pretended to read it, and made a sign that she understood by putting the slate down with her paw.

"Now give us the French for that word;" she immediately brought C, and then H, E, V, A, L.

"As you are spending the evening at an Englishman's house, Blanche, would you oblige him by translating that word into English?"

Without hesitation the dog gave me an H, and with very little hesitation the remaining letters, O, R, S, E.

Notwithstanding her success, the dog seemed to set about her work very unwillingly and it was evidently a great effort to her. The authority of the master, though very gently exercised, appeared to be irresistible, exactly like that of a mesmerist over his patient. Blanche complained audibly the whole time with a sound between growling and whining, and occasionally a short bark of uneasiness. Observing this, I said that for the present that part of the performance might be considered satisfactory, and we would pass on to something else. M. du Rouil then told us that Blanche could correct bad spelling, and invited me to write a word on the slate with an intentional fault in it.

He showed the slate to the dog, and said, "There's a fault here, Blanche; find it out, and show us first what letter ought to be effaced."

The word I had written was *maison* (house), but I had spelt it *mêson*. The dog immediately brought the letter E. Then M. du Rouil requested Blanche to show us what letters ought to be substituted, and she fetched an A and an I.

As Blanche seemed tired and worried with this kind of work I intervened on her behalf, and she was allowed to go and curl herself up in a corner, and eat cakes. Lyda took her place on the table, and a set of figures were substituted for the alphabet. Some arithmetical problems were written on the slate and she resolved them (or appeared to resolve them) without a single misake. A very pretty incident occurred at this period of the performance, for the master proposed a little mental arithmetic.

"Now, Lyda," he said, "I want to see whether you understand division. Suppose you had ten lumps of sugar, and you met ten Prussian dogs, how many lumps would

you, *une Française* (a French lady), give to each of the Prussians?"

Lyda very decidedly replied to this with a cipher.

"But now suppose that you divided your lumps of sugar with me, how many would you give me?" Lyda took up the figure 5, and presented it to her master.

This was pretty enough, but for reasons of my own I was much more interested in something that happened immediately afterwards.

M. du Rouil *quitted the room*, the door was closed after him, and he called out, "Which is the least valuable figure?"

Lyda brought me the cipher.

Then her master said, "Which is the most valuable figure?" the dog brought me the 9.

After this I asked for different figures, which the dog gave me without a single mistake.

It was Blanche's turn next, but this time instead of being surrounded with the letters of the alphabet she was surrounded with playing-cards. M. du Rouil had another pack in his hand, and told us to choose a card. "Blanche, what card has been chosen?" The dog always took up the right card in her teeth. Then she played a game with a young lady, and lost it, after which she rushed from her seat into the corner with an air of the deepest humiliation.

A very surprising thing followed the game of cards. M. du Rouil begged me to go into another room and leave a light on the floor with a pack of cards arranged all round it and close the doors as nearly as possible without shutting them. This being done, he begged any one present to whisper in the dog's ear the name of a card to be fetched by her from the other room. A lady whispered the "knave of hearts," if I remember rightly, but in so low a voice as to be inaudible even by the dog, which made a mistake,

and brought something else. She was then requested to bring the ace of spades, and she soon came back from the dining-room with the ace of spades in her teeth.

Both the dogs played a game of dominoes. This was managed as follows: the dogs sat on chairs opposite each other, and took up the domino that was wanted; but the master or mistress placed it, and kept announcing the state of the game. Their distress when they could not go on without drawing upon the bank was expressed in piteous whines, and amused us all immensely. Lyda was the loser, and she precipitately retreated to hide herself, with an evident consciousness of defeat.

I had not quite done with my literary examination of Bianca, so I had the alphabet replaced and began again. I asked her what was the English for *chien*, and she put the letters D, O, G, into my own hand. Then I asked her to spell *feu* (fire), for me, and she gave me the three letters F, E, U. Here an incident occurred which, notwithstanding the marvels we have witnessed, thrilled us all with new amazement. M. du Rouil interposed, and said, "Blanche, you have spelled the word correctly in the singular, but cannot you give the plural?" My readers may believe me or not, as they like, but the truth is, that she took up the letter X between her teeth and came to me and placed it in my hand. I asked her to give me the English for *feu*, and wrote it down and handed it to M. du Rouil, but he said she had not yet learned that word, and this deficit in her education could not be remedied at once.

During the whole of this entertainment my mind was intently occupied with a single problem, *What did the dogs really know?* I had been told a few days previously, by a gentleman who had very keen powers of observation, that a system of signals existed between M. du Rouil and his

dogs, by which he made them understand which card they ought to take, and this gentleman believed that he had detected the most important signal of all. "When M. du Rouil means *no* he advances towards the table, and when he means *yes* he retires from it." Another observer, younger and much less intelligent, had told me that M. du Rouil, having been a teacher of the deaf and dumb, simply used signs with his fingers, which the dogs had learned to read. These two theories may be disposed of very summarily. When the entertainment began with the literary examination of Bianca, M. du Rouil stood on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, and did not advance or retreat one inch; whilst at the conclusion, when she gave the plural to the word *feu*, I myself occupied M. du Rouil's place, and he was seated in an arm-chair, like the other spectators, and with his back to the table. It is clear, therefore, that the theory about advancing and retreating is not an explanation. Now, as for the other theory, that he communicates with the dogs by means of manual signs, like those used with the deaf and dumb, I need only observe that M. du Rouil's hands were as motionless as his feet. When we began with *fromage*, *pferd*, etc., he held a tray in his right hand, the arm being pendent by his side, whilst the left hand was behind his back, the fingers closed, and as motionless as those of a bronze Napoleon on a chimney-piece. He did not even reserve to himself such liberty of motion as might have been secured by taking the letters from the dog, for when I proposed to take the letters myself he made no objection whatever, but sat down quietly and let me do the showman's work. It is certain that the communication was not made by any motion of the body; this, at least, I can affirm quite positively. Was it done by the expression of the eyes? At first we thought that this might be just

possible; but the table was octagonal, and the dog found the letters when her back was turned to her master as easily as when she could look him in the face; besides, when M. du Rouil was seated, and I was the showman, he did not look towards the dogs at all, but at the fire. Whatever communication did take place must have been entirely by intonations of the voice, but we could hear these as well as the dogs could, and with all our listening we could detect nothing like a regularly recurring and easily recognisable signal. When he asked Blanche to turn *feu* into the plural, he did it exactly with the words and in the manner that you would use to a child at school. He often encouraged the dogs with such words as *Allons, allons! Cherchez, cherchez bien! Vite, vite, vite!* but he went on with these encouragements exactly in the same words and in the same tone after the word was completed to put the dog's knowledge to the test, and she went on seeking, and then whined and rang a bell to say that there were no more letters needed. I had been told that Blanche could, of course, spell any word that her master could spell, because she only took the letters he fixed upon, yet he said she could not spell *fire* for me. This, however, may have been a ruse on his part, and I do not insist upon it.

If the dogs had appeared to know rather less we should have believed that the knowledge was really theirs, but then they seemed to know too much. Lyda showed us some tricks with numbers, that are familiar to arithmeticians, but clearly beyond the canine comprehension. This satisfied me that some communication existed, and yet I was utterly unable to detect it. It is clear, therefore, that the dogs understood and acted upon a system of signalling which the intelligence of the human spectators was not

Allons . . . Vite. Go on, go on! fetch, fetch it! quick, quick, quick!

keen enough to discover. I had invited several intelligent friends, and told them previously that my object was to discover the secret of the confederacy between M. du Rouil and his dogs, begging their best assistance. They watched him as closely as I did, but could detect nothing.

Remembering an odd notion of Sydney Smith's, that people might be taught to read by odours, the idea occurred to me that M. du Rouil might contrive to touch the cards that the dogs selected, and curiously enough they certainly smelt them rather than looked at them. But how could such a supposition be reconcilable with the fact that M. du Rouil kept at a distance from the table, and could not possibly foresee the words that we asked for? I only mention this hypothesis of reading by odour to show to what straits we were reduced in our guessing.

As the dogs and their owner were to stay all night at my house, I determined to have a quiet talk with him when everybody else was gone, and get at the secret if I could. So when we were quite alone together I plied him with indiscreet questions, and he was frank enough up to a certain point, but beyond that point absolutely impenetrable.

He confessed at once that there was a secret, but he said, "*La ficelle est bien cachée*," as indeed it was. According to his account, which was probably quite true as far as it went, the dogs were like actors, who had not quite thoroughly mastered their parts, and he himself was like the prompter near the footlights. To begin with, Blanche really knew the letters of the alphabet and the playing-cards by their names, and Lyda really knew all the figures. In addition to this, he said that Blanche had studied about a hundred and fifty words in different languages, something like twenty in each language, words

La ficelle . . . cachée. The secret is well kept.

most likely to be called for, such as *chien*, dog, horse, cat, *pferd*, *canis*, etc., etc. The restriction to one set of letters simplified the business considerably. But M. du Rouil confessed quite frankly that she could not get through a word unless he were present. On the other hand he could not make her spell a word in public that she had not before practised with him in private. So it was with Lyda and the figures. She really knew the figures when isolated, and this had been satisfactorily demonstrated when he left the room, and she gave me the number asked for, up to 9. But he would not tell me the secret of the confederacy. I told him what guesses had been made on the subject, but he simply answered that I must have observed how impossible it was for him to make signs with hands or feet when he moved neither hand nor foot.

Would he give me some account of the earlier stages of training through which these dogs had passed? Yes, very willingly. The first thing was to teach a dog to fetch an object, the next to make him discriminate between one of two very different objects placed together, and bring one or the other as it was mentioned by its name. In beginning the alphabet he put two most dissimilar letters side by side to begin with, such as an O and an I, avoiding the confusion of similar ones, such as O and Q, or B and R. Gradually, the dog became observant enough to discriminate between letters in which the difference was not so marked. M. du Rouil told me that he had found the greatest difficulty in teaching Blanche to distinguish between the knaves and kings in playing-cards, but that she learned the aces very promptly. With regard to the time required for educating a dog sufficiently to perform in public, he said that an hour a day for eighteen months was the time required, and he preferred a single hour to a

longer lesson, because the dog's powers of attention were soon fatigued. He added, that it was impossible to educate a dog at any other time than the middle of the night, because the slightest sound disturbed it, and made it forget the work that had to be done. I inquired what, after his ten years' experience, was his opinion of the intelligence of dogs, and he answered, with great emphasis, "that it is infinite."

Beyond this he would tell nothing. The only supposition not immediately annihilated by the facts, is that the *tone of voice* used in uttering the words "*Allons, allons; Cherchez, cherchez bien; Cherchez encore; Vite, vite, vite,*" conveyed to the animal, "You are far from the card," "You are nearer the card," "That is the card you must take up;" but even here there were great difficulties, for M. du Rouil continued, as far as we could detect, in the same tone after the completion of the word, and yet the dog never brought a superfluous letter. The marvellousness of so perfect a confederacy may be better understood by supposing a human confederate in the dog's place. Such a human confederate, not knowing the words to be composed, would be very liable to make mistakes, and bring a wrong letter from time to time; but Blanche never made one mistake — never brought one wrong letter.

I certainly observed that when she got near the letter she always hesitated between it and its neighbours on each side, but she always finally took the letter that was wanted.

She got on much faster with one or two words than she did with the others, and seemed to need less encouragement. My conclusion was, that from long practice with certain familiar words (she had worked at the business daily for several years) she could compose those words

Cherchez encore. Seek it again.

with very little help. The last word, *feu*, and the X to make a plural of it, were given quickly, others not so quickly. The use of the X was clever, but not so surprising as it seemed to us at the moment, for with a dog so well trained as Blanche it would be easy, I should imagine, to associate the word "plural" with the image of the letter X. Very probably Blanche had been taught, in her private lessons, to fetch that letter whenever "*pluriel*" (plural) was asked for. As for the translation, without going so far in credulity as to fancy that the dog really translated, I may suggest that from long practice there would certainly arise in her mind an association of ideas between *cheval* and *horse*, *chien* and *dog*, since the words must have been asked for hundreds or thousands of times in that close connection, so that she would at least be better prepared to spell *dog*, after having just spelt *chien*.

An incident occurred in the course of the evening which showed some understanding of language. A little girl wanted Blanche to come to her, but the dog kept away, on which Madame du Rouil said, "Blanche, allez saluer la petite demoiselle." She immediately went up to the little girl and made a formal obeisance. A lady present, the daughter of a landowner in the Sologne, told us that on her father's estate the shepherd's dogs were taught to go in four directions at the word of command — *à droite*, *à gauche*, *en avant*, and *en arrière*.

The conclusion we arrived at was, that the performance resulted from an extremely clever combination of previous training with scarcely perceptible prompting, that the dogs were really wonderfully educated and knew a great deal, though not so much as they appeared to know. The game

à droite . . . *arrière*. Right, left, forward, backward.

Allez . . . *demoiselle*. Go and greet the little lady.

at dominoes was decidedly the prettiest instance of their real knowledge, for they took up the numbers just as they were asked for. It seems evident that an intelligent dog might be taught to know a considerable variety of objects by their names.

M. du Rouil told us an anecdote of Blanche which may be easily believed by any one who has made her acquaintance. He was going home one night from Paris to Neuilly, after a performance, and saw a man who was seeking for some object that he had lost. "What are you seeking?" he asked. The man answered that he had lost 280 francs. "Possibly my dog may be able to find them for you; have you any money left? If you have, show her a piece of gold. *Allez, cherchez, Blanche!*" The dog set out and fetched first one piece of gold and then another and then a banknote till the 280 francs were completed. Then followed many other anecdotes about dogs of which I select these. A lady said that she had known a dog that belonged to a celebrated publisher in Paris who had a country-house at Auteuil. Every Friday his family went to Auteuil, and always regularly found the dog there on their arrival. He went alone, through Paris, from the *Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie*, and he never made a mistake about the day. The family frequently went out on other days, but on these occasions the dog stayed contentedly at home. Another dog that she had also known had been bred in a strictly Catholic family, and would never touch meat on a Friday. Bets were made, and the greatest temptations used to overcome his conscientious scruples, but always in vain. He was shut up in a room during a whole Friday with meat in his reach, but preferred to suffer hunger rather than touch it. One of my friends

Allez, cherchez, Blanche! Go seek it, Blanche.

mentioned a dog that he knew quite well which lost its master three years ago from small-pox, and ever since then, in all weathers, has paid a daily visit to the cemetery, where it mourns upon his grave. The widow goes to the grave on Sundays after mass, the dog knows this, waits for her at the church-door, and accompanies her.

Lyda has one quality which would make her invaluable to an artist. Every painter who has attempted to draw dogs knows how provokingly restless they always are, and how impossible it is to study them as we do the human model. But Lyda *poses* as perfectly as any human model at the Royal Academy. I made a drawing of her the morning after the performance and was delighted. *Literally not a hair stirred during the whole time.* She had the stillness of a stuffed animal in a museum, with that perfection of living form which no taxidermist was ever yet able to imitate or preserve. A dog so perfectly trained as Lyda would be a priceless treasure for an animal-painter. Blanche *poses* fairly well, but she is not to be compared with Lyda. I wish I could give some notion of Lyda's eyes; they have the strangest half-human expression, as if there were half a soul behind them. Her master says that she looks at him with an intensity that is quite painful when she is trying with all her might to understand what he wishes her to learn. I declare that this creature's looks are enough to frighten you if you dwell upon them, it seems as if some unhappy child-soul had been imprisoned in that canine shape. Are these poor dogs happy in their strange, unnatural life? They are tenderly cared for, and their master says that whoever beats a dog gives evidence of his own personal stupidity, for a dog always tries his best to understand, and you can make things clearest to him by gentle teaching if you know how to teach at all.