

My Neighbours' Dogs.

BY ARTHUR MORRISON.



THE dog is the friend of man. That is what I used to read in my spelling-book. I do not wish to impeach the authority of the spelling book, but I wish my neighbours hadn't so many friends.

All my neighbours have friends of this sort; some miscreants have several. It is obviously a conspiracy. I am a quiet man, as a rule, but some day my neigh-

bours will find that they have carried their persecution a little too far. I have made a careful calculation, taking into consideration all the dogs at present hereabout, and allowing a fair percentage for occasional visits; and as nearly as I can determine I find that the reinforcement of one mastiff, two retrievers, and a terrier, or their equivalent in lap-dogs, to the ranks of my neighbours' "friends," will just carry me past my limit of endurance. Then this terrace will be found reduced to a heap of ruins by the agency of nitro-glycerine. Of my own life I am reckless. Judge what it is worth to me when I describe, as calmly and dispassionately as my natural feelings will allow, the behaviour of some of my neighbours' dogs.

In speaking of my recent calculation, I expressed the result in mastiffs, terriers, and retrievers, simply alluding to their equivalent in lap-dogs, without stating that one lap-dog, as a weapon of offence, is the equal of two mastiffs and a very dirty mongrel. This is a mathematical equation which cost me some little trouble in the preparation, but I regard it

with pride as trustworthy to the last decimal. In estimating the factors I had to consider the fact that what I may be pardoned for calling the entire cussedness of the lap-dog infects in a high degree its mistress and all about it. The Misses Pegram, next door on the right, keep two lap-dogs, a toy spaniel and a pug, which cause in me a constant change of opinion which in a mathematician is disagreeable. I always consider the spaniel absolutely the vilest creature in the animal kingdom until I meet the pug, than which I then decide nothing could be worse—until I see—or hear—the spaniel again; and so on. The Miss Pegram who owns the spaniel is one of the most implacable of my enemies. I deliberately assert that she *chases* me with that monkey-headed dog. I never venture out of doors but she bears down upon me—often from behind, so that I have no time to escape. She and the dog are connected by a length of ribbon, and it is their practice to manœuvre that ribbon between my legs if possible, and then wind it about me until I am upset, or until, in my efforts to escape, I tread upon



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"MISS PEGRAM'S SPANIEL."

the little beast sufficiently to afford it a pretext for howling and snapping at my calf. If I am only upset, the woman contents herself with glaring at me murderously, and perhaps muttering the word "Brute!" in an undertone. If I tread upon it (I often wish I weighed twenty stone) she screams, faints, and calls a policeman. Sometimes she personally assaults me. I solemnly aver that the last time I trod upon that canine imp, that—that Person (I will not call her an Old Frump)—struck at me with her parasol.

The pug is perhaps, on the whole, a little less irritating, because he is an invalid, with a chronic snuffle, and consequently takes only carriage exercise, wherefore his opportunities of mingling with and snapping at my legs are necessarily restricted. Personally I believe that what he chiefly suffers from is overfeeding; nevertheless I never see him in the company of the Miss Pegram who overfeeds him but that unattractive person scowls malignantly at me, plainly expressing her conviction that I am somehow responsible for the brute's ailments. I really wish I were. He shouldn't suffer from *that* ailment long, I promise him; I'd change it for a less pleasant one. There he goes as I write. The "brougham" (which is really a cab with no number) has been ordered out for him, and he is being held up to the window to enjoy the scenery. His bloated, dyspeptic face occupies a corner of the aperture, and his goggle eyes stand out from his head in a way that induces a momentary gleam of hope that he is being choked. Some day, in the course of the overfeeding, he may be, and the reflection gives me some comfort. Meantime I speculate upon the origin of the black mark on each of the cur's cheeks. These are called "kissing-spots," I am told. If that is

really where Miss Pegram kisses him, I don't wonder at the existence of those black spots.

Next door, on the other side, Blenkinsop keeps a different sort of dog. The exact

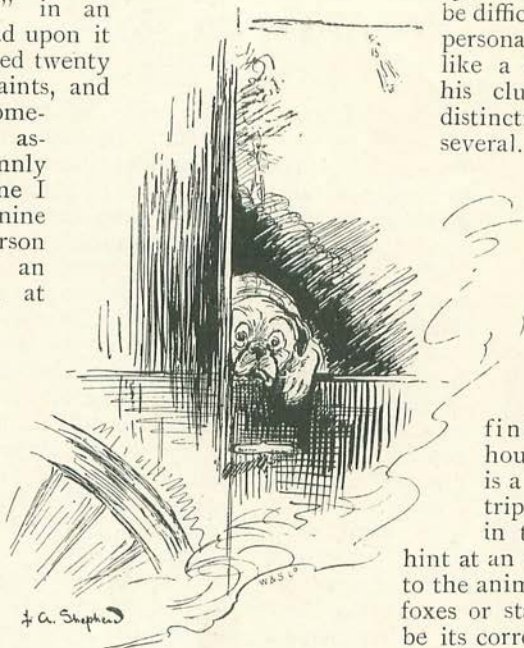
species of this dog it would be difficult to name, although personally I believe he is like a man of fashion with his clubs, and enjoys the distinction of belonging to several. Blenkinsop himself labours under a vague delusion that he is possessed of some sort of dog of the chase, although, whether a foxhound, a pointer, or a staghound, he never gives a definite

opinion. My housekeeper's son (who is a vulgar lad) calls it a tripe-hound, conveying in this name a delicate

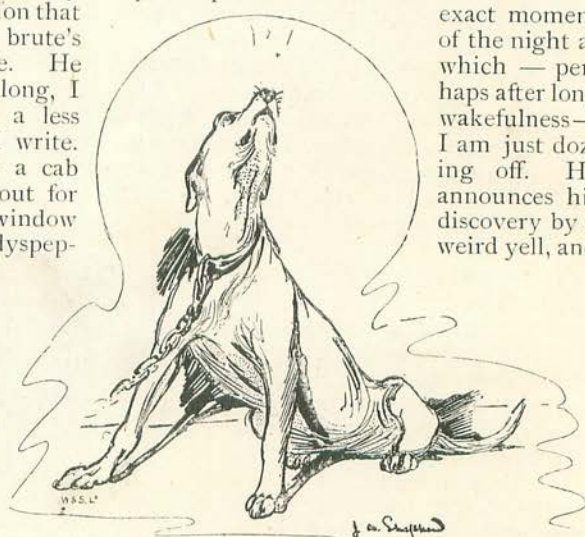
hint at an object of chase more to the animal's taste than either foxes or stags. Whatever may be its correct classification, it is certain that it embodies a very strong cross of some species of dog which never goes to sleep,

and conscientiously objects to any other creature doing so. It is, in one respect at any rate, a really wonderful dog. By some mystic operation of instinct he divines the

exact moment of the night at which — perhaps after long wakefulness — I am just dozing off. He announces his discovery by a weird yell, and



"MISS PEGRAM'S PUG."



"BLINKINSOP'S TRIBE HOUND."

promptly settles down to make a night of it. He makes a night of it. So do all my other neighbours' dogs, once this brute has reminded them that they have another means of annoying me beside those they are especially kept to inflict. Finally, in the morning, when I give up the game and wearily begin to dress, the fiend leaves off, by way of mockery; for well I know that if I get into bed again he will recommence. This dog, I am convinced, is kept not only as a tribulation to me, but as a source of profit to Blenkinsop. The hair-brushes, boot-jacks, shaving-pots, and lumps of coal which the creature attracts to himself during the nights of one month must constitute a very desirable income. It's all a part of the conspiracy against my peace, and if some of the other conspirators are driven to contribute boot-jacks and lumps of coal as well as I, why, it serves them right. Blenkinsop never seems to mind the din himself; it rather pleases him. He calls it "giving tongue." Personally I don't like tongue, and often myself give Blenkinsop some of it, consequently we are not good friends. Blenkinsop chains up this thing of evil out of reach of my garden wall, possibly fearing that I may poison it. He flatters my humanity; if I could get hold of the beast I would not poison it—I would drop it into a barrel of nitric acid and nail down the lid.

A mansomelittle way off, a perfect stranger, keeps a Danish boarhound of about the size of an ordinary donkey. This is a fine animal to look at—a long way off—but I do not like her muddy paws on my chest and her very large tongue in my face. She does this sort of thing under pretence of extravagant friendship. I don't want her friendship; I don't want her master's

friendship—I don't know him, and it is a gross liberty for his dog to lick my spectacles off my nose. I don't want anybody's friendship; I only want to be left alone. In my troubles with this dog, it is some consolation to know that I am not the only sufferer. A mild Eastern gentleman, with a dark complexion and a fez cap, lives further up the terrace. He is somewhat of an enigma among the neighbours, and, except that he has had some Mohammedan tracts printed in extraordinary English, which he furtively drops down areas to the scandalisation of the orthodox, there is no precise indication of his nationality. The Misses Pegram call him a "native"—as though he were an oyster. He is a small man, and is almost as much a victim of that boarhound's unwelcome attentions as I myself; not quite so much, of course, because, as I say, it is all a conspiracy. Five times out of six, when this gentle Oriental

passes my window, I observe as he approaches two (or more) immense muddy paw-marks on his otherwise well-brushed coat—it is a singular property of this dog that her paws are always muddy, in any weather. When I see these paw-marks I know at once that I have only to wait until he passes to see an immense muddy or dusty patch in the rear of that respectable "native"; he always goes down before the boarhound's onslaught. He told me so, once, himself. I had observed the dog approaching in an adjoining square,

and retired up a secluded turning; and the "native," from another side of the square, did the same. He understood our common motive, and said, "That canine tyke too much cheek got it; he put feet on shoulder, you sit down on thoroughfare."

There are other dogs whose annoyances



"EXTRAVAGANT FRIENDSHIP."

I chiefly feel in my goings forth. The latest additions to these are a Skye terrier and two dachshunds. Perhaps, on second thoughts, I ought to feel thankful that all this length of material is only cut up into three dogs instead of making a dozen, as it easily might. Yes, on the whole, I think I will be thankful, and say nothing

more about these just yet, although their caterpillar appearance offends my eye to the extent of outrage, and they cause me delay in the street, each dog being a procession in itself. Still they have not been here for long; no doubt they will find some new way of annoying me soon.

There is a raggy, nondescript sort of terrier about here which disturbs my nerves by futile attacks on cats. He is not a short-haired terrier, neither is he long-haired—his skin is not unanimous on the question. I believe he belongs to somebody in the mews at the back; but he chiefly lives and pursues his occupation of cat-chasing in front of the terrace. I never saw him catch a cat yet, although I have more than once seen a cat catch him. He is usually either in full chase, or barking and yelping noisily at bay, while the cat spits and dabs. There is a singular unanimity about the cats he demonstrates against; they all choose *my* area railings as a stockade from

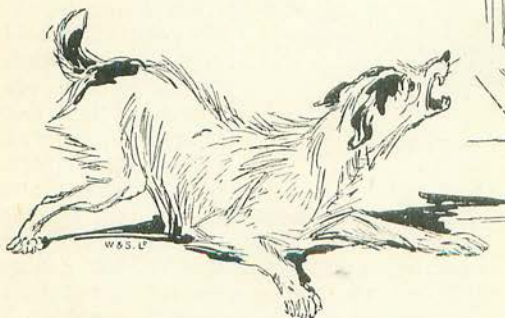


"I HAVE SEEN HIM ENDEAVOUR TO DEVOUR
A PRIVATE OMNIBUS."

behind which to breathe defiance, and reach for that terrier's eyes, what time he barks and yells agonisingly. Of course, I must suffer in particular; but that's part of the conspiracy.

A man a few doors off keeps a collie—a mad, untamed sort of thing, which has a constitutional antagonism to all motion on the part of his surroundings, living or dead. He has a conviction amounting to a sort of religious belief that his mission in this world is to arrest and punish in the full of its career anything whatever that

moves with any rapidity. If a handsome passes he flies like a thunderbolt at the horse, missing which, he bites the wheel savagely. Similarly he hurls himself at a cart, a bicycle, a horse, a running cat, or a bit of paper in the wind; I have even seen him endeavour to devour a private omnibus. When Blenkinsop's chimney was on fire, and several fire-engines came, his fury was indescribable, so that I quite hoped he would be run over; but he wasn't. I begin to fear he



"CAT CHASING."



never will be. Again and again I have calculated from the table of probabilities how long an ordinary dog might expect to live, making an average of only twenty-seven such rushes at vehicles a day, and the period has passed many times over without an accident. Men who push barrows know this dog, and slacken their pace as they near him. I myself daren't run to catch a train; he would take a piece out of my calf if I did; he growls menacingly at a sharp walk. And if I walk slowly he is apt to observe something else on the move, and take a short cut to it between my legs. He terrifies Miss Pegram and her pug in their brougham, which is a redeeming feature; and I will say that I never yet saw him rush at a boy on an errand, or a telegraph messenger.

I confess I was surprised and pained to find that my family solicitor had entered into the dog conspiracy. But, after all, he lets me off comparatively lightly. His dog is an immense St. Bernard, whose antagonism is chiefly of a passive kind, and is only offered when I visit the house. He has a habit of lying at full length across doorways, and pretends, in a sleepy sort of way, not to understand that he is causing an obstruction. If compelled to get up and make way, he first gives one a look of sorrowful reproach, and then slowly and resignedly gets upon his feet, all with an air of long-suffering martyrdom. Beyond this, and knocking me down two or three times, as well as shouldering a light table with loose

china and scalding tea bodily on to my knees, I have really very little to complain of in this dog. Perhaps I am prejudiced in his favour because of an encounter of his with Miss Pegram's toy spaniel. That wretched insect, secure in the presence of its mistress, made a furious snapping and yelping attack directed to the big dog's face, which it couldn't reach. This attack the majestic Bob (his name is Bob) loftily ignored, until it became an intolerable nuisance, whereupon he calmly *lay down* on the vile body of his tormentor, and suppressed it utterly. For this I feel grateful to Bob, although he was guilty of the weakness of allowing the cur to be rescued from under him with no broken bones.

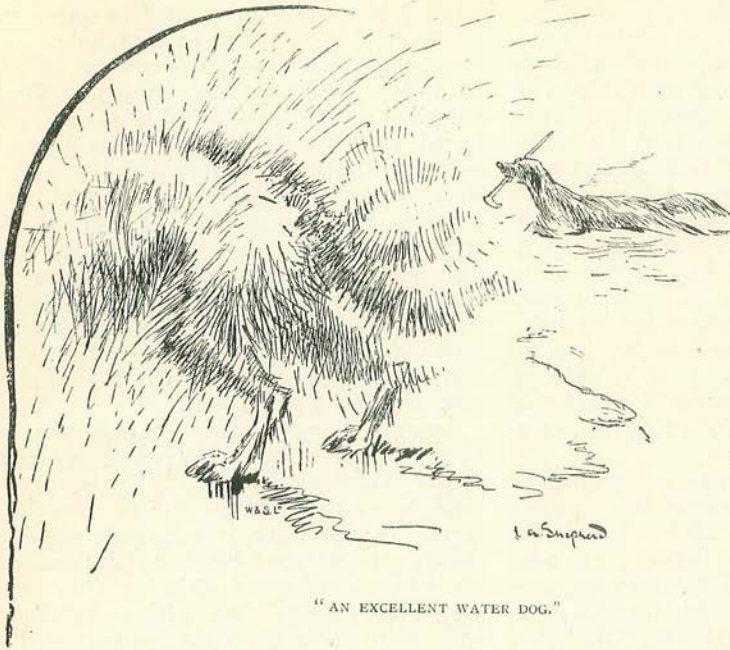
Several of my neighbours' dogs add to their other persecutions the outrage peculiar to the swimming dog. I can never take a walk near a pond, lake, canal, or any other body of water larger than a puddle without suffering from some brute which is called an "excellent water dog." They are usually long-haired dogs with coats which hold plenty of water; that is part of the scheme. A dog of this sort will swim about in a muddy pond after sticks and stones thrown in by malevolent idiots on the banks, and, when his coat is thoroughly and completely saturated, will crawl out carefully, taking pains to drop as little of the water as possible until the proper time. He will then look about him and select the best dressed person within easy reach; he will quietly sidle up to this person—from

behind, if possible—and, with a sudden jerk and shake of his hide (a movement acquired by long practice), he will discharge a shower of several quarts of dirty water over his victim, who is then expected to smile cheerfully, and pat him.

I myself am not usually a particularly well-dressed person, so that if I happen to be present this condition of the performance is varied—he always comes to me. No matter how many better dressed people may be temptingly within range, he invariably disregards them and comes to *me*.



"BOB."



"AN EXCELLENT WATER DOG."

It's part of the conspiracy. Now I ask, for whose benefit do the ponds of Highgate exist? For that of the British public. And am I not one of the British public? Of course I am. Then, I ask, sir, what about Magna Charta? What about my trousers? Are they a carpet, sir, or a flower bed, or a gravestone, that they should be drenched with the muddy tears of Highgate Ponds? Are my coat-tails the coat-tails of a free-born Englishman or not? Very well, then, sir——

Now there goes a dog which is a nuisance and terror to the whole neighbourhood. If he were an equal nuisance all round I wouldn't mind; I might extract satisfaction from the annoyance of the neighbours. But he isn't. Of course, it is invariably *my* doorstep upon which he sits to scratch himself, *my* housemaid or *my* visitors whom he snaps at when they attempt to pass, *my* area whence he steals food while the cook talks to the butcher, and *my* area in which he turns at bay when chased by indignant but dirty boys. He is a good-sized black dog, and attempts to pass himself off as a retriever on the strength of some very distant connection with the retriever

family on the part of a remote ancestor. He gets his living chiefly by stealing, but largely by deluding boys. He possesses them with the idea that he is a retriever, and will prove a useful acquisition on a sporting expedition—when they buy an old pistol for half-a-crown, for instance, and go out to shoot larks. He sponges on those boys and steals their lunch. He gets them into all sorts of scrapes, and finally turns and rends their trousers; for ever after which those boys pursue him with execrations and brickbats. I should not object to this, if none

of the brickbats came into my area and broke my windows, but they do. He tells other boys that he can swim, and they form a small party to witness his performance. He can't and won't swim, but he kills a fowl or steals something off a butcher's bench, and the boys have to cut and run. This sort of thing has gone on until almost every boy has found him out, and his enemies consequently are many. Every boy's hand, boot, stick, or tin kettle is against him, and every boy's corduroys are familiar in his mouth



"A NUISANCE."

as household scraps. Still he manages to find a few guileless boys now and again—new to London, I expect—who at first take him at his own valuation before passing over to the ranks of the bitten and hostile. They even take the vicious beast with them when they go fishing, with a bent pin and a tin can. I wonder why.

If anything were wanting further to illustrate the completeness of the plot against my peace of mind, it would be

him off. If I go into a house, he tries to follow me; and, if prevented, sits on the doorstep and waits till I come out. When at last I seek refuge in my own house, he sits on my doorstep all night and howls in response to Blenkinsop's tripe-hound. Finally, I have to bribe a boy to steal him from me.

But there is one dog about here which, I verily believe, has nothing to do with the conspiracy. He is a bull-dog, and I think comes from the mews. I never heard this dog bark or howl, and never heard of his hurting a soul. Nevertheless many ladies—including, I am glad to say, the

found in the stray mongrel machination. There is a kind of dog whom nobody ever owns—whom no reasonable person ever would think of owning; but all the dogs of this kind insist upon being owned by me. I scarcely go out but one of these miserable creatures follows me. He avoids attracting my attention at first, but trots quietly at my heels, probably being of the opinion that if only he keeps by me long enough I shall begin to believe after all that he really does belong to me, and has all his life. He always has a broken piece of string hanging from his neck, which leads me to believe that somebody has been trying to drown him, with a brick, and has failed. Nothing will shake

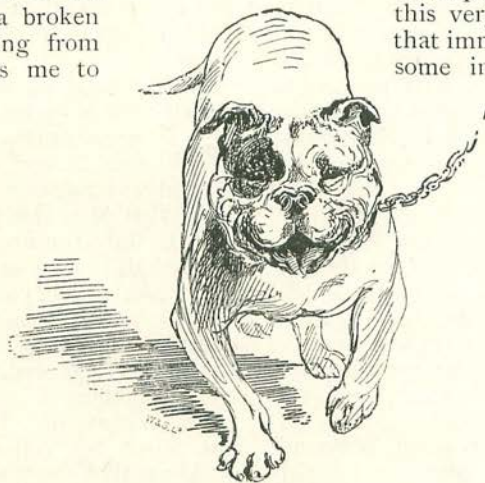
Misses Pegram—fall into fits of terror at his approach. He lumbers along at a stable-boy's heels, with the broadest and most amiable of grins, and other dogs keep out his way—the black dog vanishes entirely. It is just possible that that black dog snapped at him once, or perhaps attempted to take a sample of the stable-boy's trousers, and consequently feels an awkwardness about meeting him again. But who shall know the ways of dogs?

Perhaps, while I am praising this very bull-dog, he is filling that immense mouth of his from some inoffensive person's leg.

But, as the leg isn't mine, and I hate unreasonable grumbling, I won't grumble about that.



"THE STRAY MONGREL."



"THE MOST AMIABLE OF GRINS."