

That Imp of a Dog.

BY MRS. MOLESWORTH.

PART I.

If any of you who read this little story have ever had a dog whom you loved very dearly, very dearly—a dog that was almost a person, and quite a friend; a dog who flew rushing to welcome you every time you came in from a walk as if he had not seen you for years; whose little feathery tail drooped very low at the least word of reproof or even only a sharp tone of voice; a dog, whom you loved, in part at least, because you knew that he loved you with all, every bit of his heart and—I was nearly saying “soul”—with all his little being! And—if that dear faithful innocent creature has died, as even the darlings of dogs must—some day—you will, I think, understand that for a good while at least, your feelings to other dogs are very peculiar. You would much rather never see them—especially if they are at all like him, and yet if they are not the least like him, you feel as if there was something quite wrong about them.

We had a dog—it is of him I have been thinking—he was dearer to us than I can say, and I know we were very dear to him. We were his whole world. And he died—

It is not his history, however, that I am going to tell you. I have only spoken about him because I wanted to explain our state of mind towards dogs in general just after our dear little man's death.

We were staying in the country—my sister and I. We had settled down for some weeks in a place we had never been at before, and we were living there very quietly, for we were tired and had had a good deal of anxiety that year. It was late autumn, almost too late to be away from home, for whether “home” be town or country, it is the best place to be in, when the days are getting short and the weather chilly and the weeks before Christmas not so very many.

We lived a rather monotonous life. We went out for a walk in the morning, and another in the afternoon, and we read aloud and we worked and we thought we liked it all very much. But in reality I think we were beginning to be a little dull and lonely. We missed our dear four-footed friend terribly. We never went out-of-doors without a sigh; we never came in without a still deeper one. And though neither of us said so to the other, each knew what the other was thinking of, and sometimes a remark intended to be comforting would suddenly be made by one of us to the other without having been asked for, in a way that would have sounded very odd to anyone not behind the scenes of our thoughts.

“He was growing very rheumatic, this wintry weather would have tried him,” my sister would say, as we were setting out for a ramble.

Or: “I do think his little life was a very happy one, and it might have grown less so as he got very old,” I would observe abruptly after a silence.

But yet our hearts ached for him—they do still, for that matter, and I think they always will.

One thing that we liked at the place where we were staying was the absence of dogs—of pet dogs that is to say. We had no objection to great big fellows—yard-dogs whom we saw and heard now and then at the farms we often passed. But it was too late in the season for visitors, and the people about did not go in for useless—or so-called “useless,” pets, so our feelings were not so harrowed as they might have been in some places. There came a day, however—and this at last brings me to the beginning of my story.

We were walking quietly along a sheltered road—a sort of wide foot-path with trees at each side and beyond these again a good stretch of field, almost like park-land—which was a favourite stroll of ours. The trees were very bare already and the ground was thickly strewed with leaves of every shade of brown and yellow and red. All at once, some little way behind us, came a sound which made us start and look at each other and—I almost think my sister grew pale, and perhaps she thought the same of me. It

was so like—so very like the rush and whirl with which our dear little man used to come tearing after us in the garden at home when the paths were thick with rustling leaves in the autumn!

We stood still—and soon the sound was explained—a dog, the very ugliest dog I ever saw—ungainly, unkempt-looking, all black and yet not glossy—was rushing after us as fast as his lanky, ill-shapen legs would carry him, and before we had time for another word, there he was upon us—leaping up, pawing us, sniffing us with every demonstration of impish delight.

“Oh, the horrid creature,” I cried. “Shoo him away, Margie, shoo him away—do.”

Margie did her best and I joined her. We “get-away” ed, we “shooed,” we threatened to hit the creature—it was all no use—the fiercer we grew the more friendly he, till in despair we hurried on, walking as fast as we possibly could and pretending to take no notice of him. That seemed to satisfy him—he followed more quietly, evidently convinced that all the fuss we had made was expressive of delight and affection on our part. And after a little, some object on the road—a dead mouse or something equally horrible—attracted his attention and he stayed behind. Now was our time—a gate leading into the garden of a better class farm was at the end of the road—we rushed through it and hid ourselves behind some thick shrubs, and stood there with palpitating hearts.

Just then, “by good luck” we said to ourselves, two girls, or a girl and a lady, dressed in black as we were, appeared on the path coming the other way.

“Hush, Margie,” I whispered, “he’ll tack himself on to them and think they’re us.”

We watched with cruel glee. So he did! Two minutes later there he was, leaping and pawing and all the rest of it, to the evident consternation of the new-comers, one of whom seemed really frightened. I am afraid we did not care—we watched them out of the field, the imp gambling around them, and they hurrying just as we had done, their with lightened hearts we walked on.

“It seemed almost a shame,” I said, half laughing, “to turn him off on to those poor things. Didn’t you see how they looked back hoping we were still there and that he belonged to us?”

“But he didn’t belong to us,” said Margie, “we hadn’t the slightest reason for spoiling our walk with the ugly creature. And goodness only knows when we should have got rid of him. He would certainly have followed us home.”

“Oh dear,” said I, “that would have been too awful. I dare say these people will manage to get rid of him.”

“To think,” said Margie, “that he is the same kind of animal as our dear beauty! The term ‘dog’ is too general—I prefer to name our pet even in my thoughts as a Yorkshire terrier.”

“Though even among Yorkshire terriers, I am certain we could never find one like him,” I sighed.

But it was no use spoiling our walk by sad remembrances. It was all the fault of that odious mongrel. I began to talk of more cheerful subjects, and Margie understanding what I meant followed my lead. It was a lovely afternoon; the sunset promised to be beautiful.

“Let us go up the hill a little,” said my sister. For the road we had now come to ran steeply upwards on one side. “We shall have a nice view of the sun, even if we do not stay for the actual setting.”

I was pleased to do as she said, so we went on. Now you must understand that we were going in a perfectly different direction from the one we had been following hitherto, although directly opposite also from the road that must have been followed by the two ladies we had met. And we had turned more than once.

So how *did* it happen—how, except by magic had he managed it—that just as we stopped to take breath and admire the sky, where preparations for doing honour to His Majesty the sun’s departure were beginning to be seen—how *did* it come to pass that at that moment, on the short tufty hill-side grass where we stood, appeared, leaping, gambolling, ready to paw and lick and generally torment us—that black imp of a dog?

(Continued next week.)

HIDDEN TEXT AND CATECHISM.

CATECHISM.					TEXT.				
REVEALED	MAN	OR	WHICH	TO	TELL	TEACH	THE	ALL	WITHOUT
FOR	TO	FIRST	GOOD	KNOW	TEEN	FOLLOW	AND	WHICH	WITH
HIS	LAW	OBEDIENCE	WAS	THE M-AL	SHALL	MOLINESS	SEE	NO	MAN