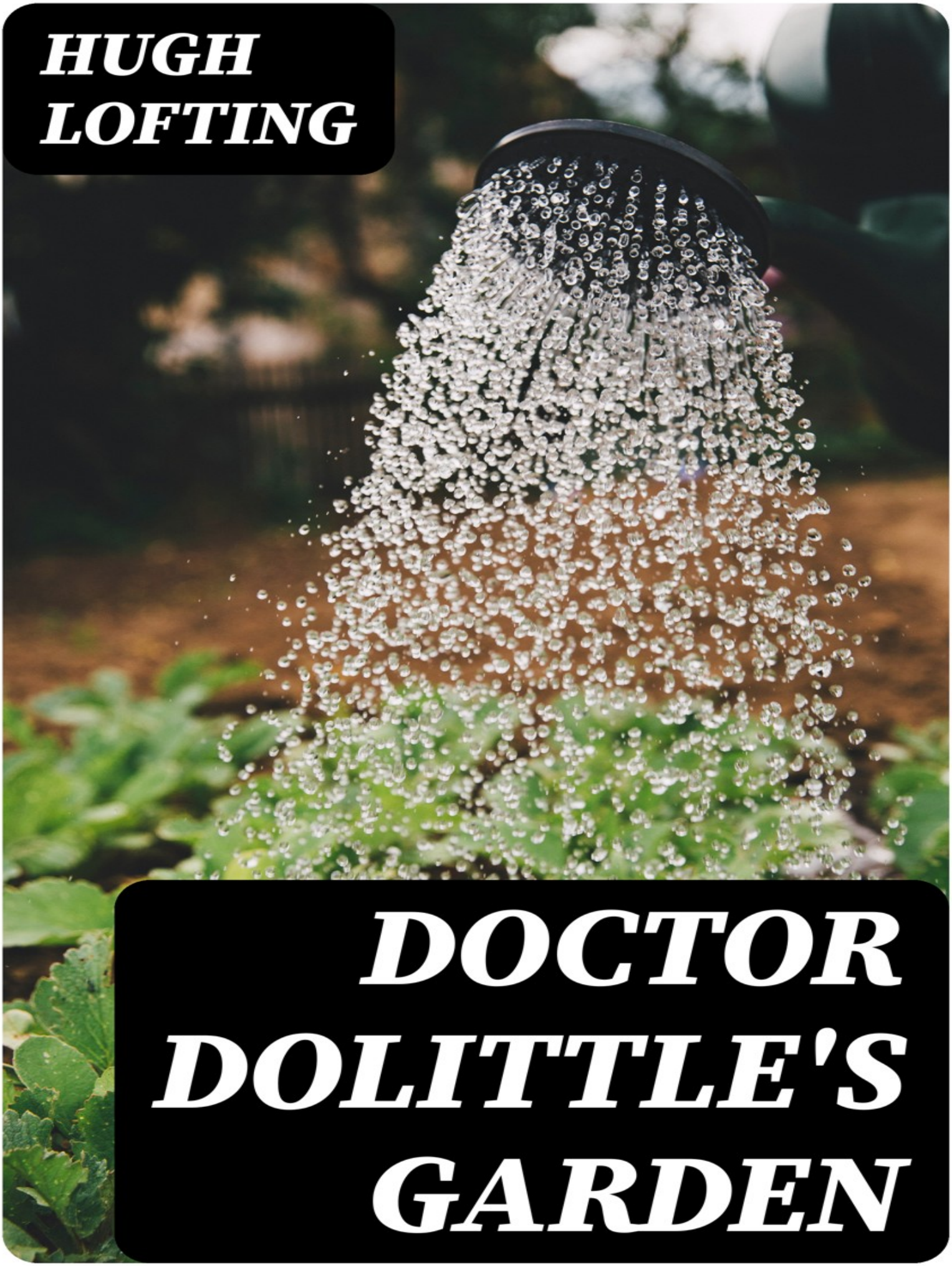
HUGH LOFTING



DOCTOR DOLITTLE'S GARDEN

Hugh Lofting

Doctor Dolittle's Garden

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PART ONE

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I. THE DOG MUSEUM

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I suppose there is no part of my life with the Doctor that I, Thomas Stubbins, look back on with more pleasure than that period when I was Assistant Manager of the Zoo.

We had come, as I have told you elsewhere, to call that part of the Doctor's garden "Animal Town." One of my greatest difficulties was in keeping down the membership in the various clubs and institutions. Because of course a limit had to be put on them. The hardest one to keep in check was the Home for Crossbred Dogs. Jip was always trying to sneak in some waif or stray after dark; and I had to be quite stern and hard-hearted if I did not want the mongrels' club disorganized by over-crowding.

But while the Doctor and I were agreed that we must keep a fixed limit on all memberships, we encouraged development, expansion and new ideas of every kind on the part of the animals themselves that would help to make Animal Town a more interesting and more comfortable place to live in. Many of these were extremely interesting. Among them was the Dog Museum.

For many years the Doctor had had a museum of his own. This was a large room next to the study where bones, mineral specimens and other natural-history things were kept. There is an old saying: Imitation is the sincerest form

of flattery. A natural interest in bones often led the dogs to contemplate this display and finally to start a museum of their own.

This was helped to some extent by a peculiar dog who had some months before become a member of the club. The peculiarity of his character was that he had an inborn passion for collecting. Prune-stones, umbrella-handles, door-knobs—there was no end to the variety of his collections. He always maintained that his prune-stone collection was the largest and finest in the country.

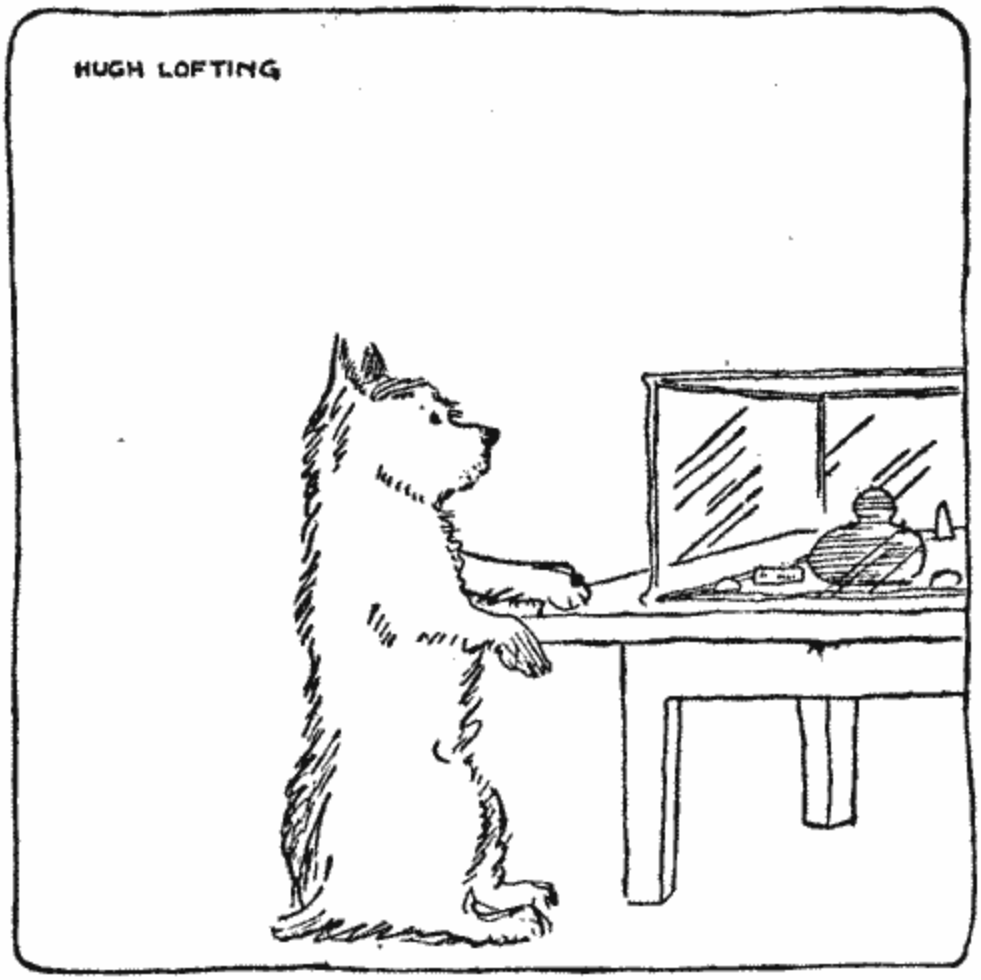
This dog's name was Quetch. He was a great friend of Toby, who had first introduced him and put him up for membership at the club. He was a good second to Toby in upholding the rights of the small dogs at the club-house and seeing that they didn't get bullied out of any of their privileges. In fact Blackie and Grab always said that the small dogs, with Toby and Quetch to champion them, bossed the club a good deal more than they had any business to. Well, Quetch it was (he was a cross between a West Highland terrier and an Aberdeen) who first suggested the idea that the Mongrels' Club should have a museum of its own. With his passion for collecting, he was probably counting on getting the job of museum curator for himself-which he eventually did. The House Committee met in solemn council to discuss the pros and cons and ways and means. The idea was finally adopted by a large majority vote and a section of the gymnasium was screened off to form the first headquarters of the museum.

Quetch (he was always called "Professor" by the other members of the club)—Professor Quetch, besides being a

keen scientist, had a genius for organization almost as good as the white mouse's. And even he could not find fault with the general enthusiasm with which the Dog Museum was supported, and contributed to, by the members of the club. There was hardly a dog in the Home who didn't turn to collecting and bringing in material. And Quetch the curator had his paws more than full receiving and arranging the continuous flow of specimens of every kind that poured in.

The Museum was not confined to natural history. It was also an archæological or historical museum. The bones department was perhaps the largest. Personally, I don't think that any student of comparative anatomy would have found it scientifically very helpful. For the bones were mostly beef, mutton and ham bones.

But not all. There were fish bones. In fact there was one whole fish, which Professor Quetch proudly ordered me to label, "*The Oldest Fish in the World*" I could well believe it was. Blackie the retriever had dug it up—from the place where some one had carefully buried it a long time ago. Its odour was so far-reaching that the members of the Badgers' Tavern (which was at least a hundred yards away from the Home for Crossbred Dogs) sent in a request that something be done about it. They said that while they were not usually over-sensitive to smells, this one kept them awake at night. Professor Quetch was very much annoyed and sent a message back to the badgers that they were a lot of low-brow, meddlesome busybodies who didn't appreciate science. But some of the Doctor's neighbours across the street also complained; and the "oldest fish in the world" had to go—back to the garbage heap.



"Professor Quetch"

The archæological side of the Dog Museum was even more varied and extensive than the natural history departments. Here could be found Quetch's own priceless collection of prune-stones, umbrella handles and door-knobs. But these formed only a small part of the whole. The habit of digging—generally for rats—natural to all dogs, now led to the unearthing of treasures of every variety. Saucepan-lids, bent spoons, top hats, horse-shoes, tin cans, pieces of iron pipe, broken tea-pots, there was hardly anything in the way of hardware and domestic furnishings that wasn't represented. A sock which had been worn full of

holes by the great Doctor himself was one of the most sacred and important exhibits.

For the first few days there was a general frenzy of digging. Jip and Kling had heard the Doctor say that the Romans had once had a military camp on the site now occupied by the town of Puddleby. They were determined that they'd find Roman jewelry if they only dug patiently enough. Among other places they tried was Colonel Bellowes' tulip bed. They had just dug up a bulb when they were seen by the Colonel and chased. But they got away—and home with the bulb. And that was how the Botanical Department of the museum began. The bulb in question had a label set under it reading:

"*This Orchid was donated by the famous naturalist and explorer, Jip. The intrepid collector was disturbed at his work and chased for miles by savage natives. He eluded his pursuers however and succeeded in bringing back this priceless specimen to the Dog Museum*."

"They were seen by the Colonel and chased"

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2. QUETCH

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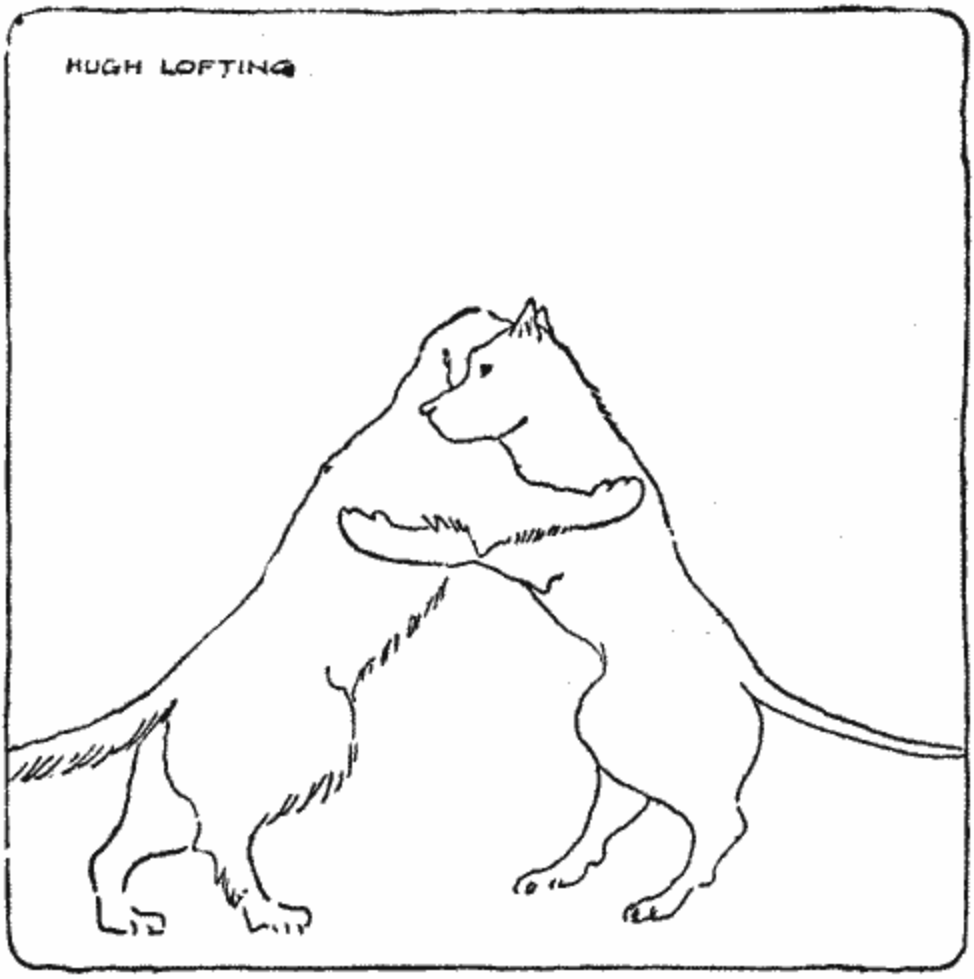
The Dog Museum continued for much longer than I had thought it would. My private opinion had been that the dogs were only captivated by the novelty of the idea and would drop it altogether when its newness had worn off. Some weeks after its beginning the collections had grown so fast that they filled the whole gymnasium. During the semi-final bout of a wrestling contest a Great Dane threw Blackie the

retriever through the dividing screen and landed him in the middle of the Botanical Department. It was clear that the gymnasium was getting crowded out by the museum.



"The semi-final bout of a wrestling contest"

So a second meeting of the House Committee was called. And it was decided that since athletics were equally important as science, most of the junk should be thrown out, and only those things kept that were really genuine and of special application to dogs and Dog History.

Jip's famous golden collar (which he only wore on holidays and occasions of importance) was made one of the star exhibits. There were also a few bones which Professor Quetch insisted had been chewed by the great dogs of

history. There was, also, a small keg which he said had been carried round the necks of the St. Bernard dogs who went to the aid of lost travellers in the snow-swept passes of the Alps. How he knew the record of these relics no one could tell. On the other hand, no one could deny it when he put up a label under a veal bone saying that this object had been the earliest plaything of the Empress Josephine's pet poodle.

At all events, the enormous array of hardware and rubbish which had formed the first displays gave place to one or two glass cases where a small collection of objects of great virtue was set forth. And for many years these remained a permanent part of the institution, and all visitors, whether dogs or people, were shown them. Professor Quetch never allowed visitors into the museum, however, without personally conducting them, to see that they didn't lean on the cases—if they were people—or, if they were dogs, that they didn't take away the historic bones.

The third story in the "Tales of the Home for Crossbred Dogs" was Jip's own tale of how he had posed for the great George Morland and helped the Lame Man's Dog earn money for his crippled master. For the fourth story Professor Quetch himself was called upon. Both Toby and Kling had often told me that they knew that he had led rather an interesting life, and I could well believe it, for he was certainly a dog of individuality and character. He was not easy to persuade however. In spite of his being, like Toby, a self-important, plucky, little animal, he wasn't boastful or given to talking about himself. He had always, when asked

to tell the story of his life, made the excuse that he was too busy with his duties as curator of the museum.

However, now that the museum had been considerably reduced in size, he did not have to give so much attention to it. And one day Jip came to me highly delighted with the news that Quetch had promised to-morrow night to give us an account of his life which was to be entitled "The Story of the Dog Who Set Out to Seek His Fortune."

Feeling it would probably be a good yarn well told, I asked the Doctor if he would come and listen. In former times he had frequently attended the dogs' after-supper story-tellings. But of late he had seldom had the time to spare. However, he said he would make this a special occasion and be there without fail.

When the following night came the Dogs' Dining Room was jammed. For not only was every single member present, eagerly waiting to hear the yarn, but it turned out that this was Guest Night, the second Friday in the month, when members were allowed to bring friends to dinner as guests of the Club.

"I was born," Professor Quetch began, "of poor but honest parents. My father was a hard-working Aberdeen terrier and my mother was a West Highland of excellent pedigree. Our owners were small farmers in Scotland. My father helped regularly with the sheep. In spite of his size, he was a mighty good sheep dog and could round up a flock or cut out a single ewe from the herd with great skill. When we children were puppies we got fed well enough, because we were easy to feed, not requiring much more than milk. But as soon as we began to grow up into regular dogs it was

another story. We saw then that the farmer that owned us had hardly enough food most of the time to feed his own family and the hands who worked for him, let alone a large litter of hungry terriers.

"He was a mighty good sheep dog"

"We lived in a stable behind the farm-house where we had an old disused horse-stall to ourselves. It was well lined with dry straw, snug and warm. One night I happened to lie awake late and I overheard my mother and father talking. Their names were Jock and Jenny.

"'You know, Jock,' said my mother, 'very soon that farmer is going to get rid of these puppies of ours. I heard him

talking about it only the other day.'

"'Well,' said my father, 'I suppose that was to be expected. They'll keep one or two, I imagine. I hope they leave Quetch here. He seems a bright youngster and is already quite a help to me with those silly sheep. For the rest, I think they're rather stupid.'

"'Stupid indeed!' snapped my mother with great indignation. 'They're every bit as clever as their father, that's certain.'

"'All right, have it your own way, Jenny,' said my father, snuggling his nose down into the straw to go to sleep—he never cared for arguments anyway—'have it your own way. But you can hardly expect McPherson to keep the whole litter when he can barely support his own family.'

"With that my father fell asleep and I fell to thinking. First of all, it seemed to me very wrong that dogs should be disposed of in this haphazard, hit-and-miss fashion. If we were given away, to whom would we be given? Had dogs no rights at all? My father was a worker on the farm, doing his daily job as faithfully and as well as any of the clodhoppers who drove the plough or cut the corn. And here he was calmly talking about his own children being given away as though they were apples or turnips! It made me quite angry. I lay awake far into the night wondering why dogs were not allowed to lead their own lives and shape their own careers. It was an outrage. I got myself quite worked up over it. And before I fell asleep I made up my mind that no one was going to give *me* away as though I were no more than an old pair of shoes. I was an individual, the same as the

farmer himself. And I was going to make the world acknowledge that fact or know the reason why."

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3. THE DICK WHITTINGTON DOG

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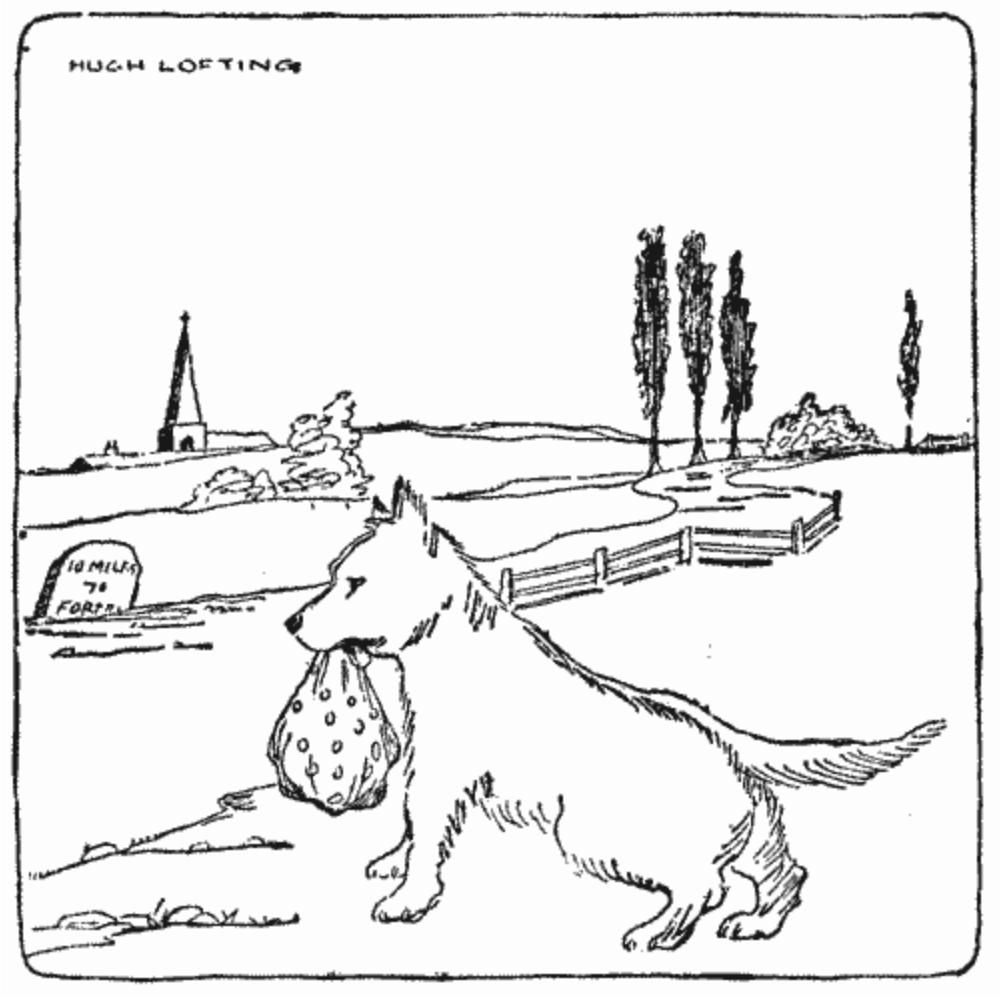
"Perhaps the only notable thing about this yarn of mine is that it is the story of a dog trying to lead his own life. I know of course that there are many of you present who have struggled to do the same. That was one reason why I wasn't keen to tell a story: I didn't feel that my life had anything particularly thrilling about it. But at all events what small adventures I ran into may have been different from your own, and the way I attacked the problem of winning liberty and independence for myself may interest you.

"A few days after I had overheard my parents' conversation I began to see that my mother's fears were right. Almost every day McPherson the farmer would bring friends of his in to see us, hoping they'd be willing to adopt one or other of us. As luck would have it, I was selected the very first. A stupid fat man—I think he was a farmer too—chose me out of the whole litter. I wouldn't have chosen him from among a million. He had no wits at all and no—er—refinement, none whatever. He turned me over and prodded me and examined me as though I were a pig for the fatting market instead of a dog. I determined right away that whatever happened I wouldn't become *his* property. Luckily he couldn't take me immediately and he asked McPherson to keep me for him a couple of days, at the end of which he would come and fetch me.

"I had heard of boys setting out to seek their fortunes. Never of a dog. And yet why not? The more I thought of the idea, the more it appealed to me. I had to go somewhere if I didn't want to be taken away by that stupid man. I had seen nothing of the world so far. Very well then: I would set out to seek my fortune—yes, to-morrow!

"The next morning I was up before any of the farm was stirring. I had collected several old bones, and with these as all my earthly possessions tied up in a red handkerchief, I set out to carve a career for myself. I remember the morning so well. It was late in the Fall and the daylight would not appear for an hour yet. But an old rooster was already crowing in a hoarse voice through the misty chill air as I gained the road and looked back at the farm buildings huddled in the gloom of the hollow. With a light heart I waved my tail at him and trotted off down the road.



"I set out to carve a career for myself"

"Dear me, how inexperienced I was! I realize that now. Literally I knew nothing—not even the geography of the immediate neighbourhood around the farm. I didn't know where the road I was travelling along led to. But at that time such a thing only added to the thrill of the adventure. I would stick to this road, I told myself, and see what fortune it brought me to.

"After I had jogged along for about an hour I began to feel very much like breakfast. I therefore retired off the road into a hedge and opened my bundle of bones. I selected a ham bone which had not been quite so thoroughly chewed

as the rest and set to work on it. My teeth were young and good and I soon managed to gnaw off the half of it.

"After that I felt much better, though still somewhat hungry. I re-packed my baggage, but just as I was about to set off I thought I heard a noise the other side of the hedge. Very quietly I crept through, thinking I might surprise a rabbit and get a better breakfast. But I found it was only an old tramp waking up in the meadow where, I suppose, he had spent the night. I had a fellow feeling for him. He was homeless too, and, like me, a gentleman of the road. Within the thicket I lay and watched him a moment. There was a herd of cows in the field. Presently the tramp went and began milking one of them into a tin which he carried. When he had the tin filled he brought it back to the corner of the field where he had slept and set it down. Then he went away—I suppose to get something else. But while he was gone I crept out of the hedge and drank up all the milk.

"It was only an old tramp waking up"

"Considerably refreshed, I set off along the road. But I hadn't gone more than a few hundred yards when I thought I'd go back and make the tramp's acquaintance. Maybe I felt sort of guilty about the milk. But anyway a fellow feeling for this adventurer whom I had robbed made me turn back.

"When I regained the corner of the meadow I saw him in the distance milking the cow again. I waited till he returned. Then I came out and showed myself.

"'Ah, young feller me lad!' says he. 'So it was you who pinched my milk. Well, no matter. I got some more now. Come here. What's your name?'

"Well, he seemed a decent sort of man and I kind of palled on to him. I was glad of his company. On both sides it seemed to be taken for granted that we would travel together along the road. He was much better at foraging food than I was—in some ways; and I was better than he was in others. At the farmhouses he used to beg meals which he always shared with me. And I caught rabbits and pheasants for him which he cooked over a fire by the roadside. Together we managed very well.

"We went through several towns on our way and saw many interesting things. He allowed me complete liberty. That I will always remember to his credit. Often at nights we nearly froze. But he was a good hand at finding sleeping-places, burrowing into the sides of haystacks, opening up old barns and such like. And he always spread part of his coat over me when he lay down to sleep."

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4. THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITALITY

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"But the day soon came when my new friend played me false. He wanted money. I fancy it was to get coach-fare to go to some other part of the country. I don't know. Anyway one afternoon he knocked at a farm-house door. I thought that as usual he was going to ask for food. Imagine my horror when he said to the woman who answered the door, 'Do you want to buy a dog, Ma'am?'

"I just ran. I left him standing at the door there and never looked back. It was such a shock to my faith in human nature that for the present I did nothing but feel blue.

Puzzled, I went on down the road, still seeking my fortune, alone. It was only later that I began to feel angry and indignant. The cheek of the man, trying to sell me when he hadn't even bought me!—Me, the free companion of the road who had been in partnership with him! Why, I had caught dozens of rabbits and pheasants for that ungrateful tramp. And that was how he repaid me!

"After jogging miserably along for a few miles I came upon some children playing with a ball. They seemed nice youngsters. I was always fond of ball games and I just joined in this one, chased the ball whenever it rolled away and got it for them. I could see they were delighted to have me and for quite a while we had a very good time together.

"Then the children found it was time to go home to supper. I had no idea where my own supper was coming from so I decided I'd go along with them. Maybe they would let me join them at their meal too, I thought. They appeared more pleased than ever when I started to follow them. But when they met their mother at the gate and told her that I had played with them and followed them home she promptly chased me off with a broom. Stray dogs, she said, always had diseases. Goodness only knows where she got that from! *Stray* dogs too, if you please. To her every animal who wasn't tagged on to some stupid human must be a stray, something to be pitied, something disgraceful. Well anyway, to go on: that night it did seem to me as though mankind were divided into two classes: those that enslaved dogs when they wanted to be free; and those that chased them away when they wanted to be friendly.

"She promptly chased me off with a broom"

"One of the children, a little girl, began to cry when her mother drove me off, saying she was sure I was hungry.—Which I was. She had more sense than her mother, had that child. However I thought I'd use a little strategy. So I just pretended to go off; but I didn't go far. When the lights were lit in the dining-room I waited till I saw the mother's shadow on a blind in another part of the house. I knew then that the children would be alone at their supper. I slipped up to the window, hopped on to the sill and tapped gently on the pane with my paw. At first the children were a bit scared, I imagine. But presently one of them came over, raised the corner of the blind and saw me squatting on the sill outside.

"Well, to make a long story short, the youngsters not only took me in, but they stowed me away in a closet so their mother wouldn't see me and gave me a fine square meal into the bargain. And after they were supposed to be fast asleep one of them crept downstairs and took me up to their nursery where I slept under a bed on a grand soft pillow which they spread for me. That was what I call hospitality. Never was a tramp dog treated better.

"One of them crept downstairs"

"In the morning I managed to slip out unseen by Mama and once more I hit the trail. Not only was one child crying this time, but the whole four of them were sniffling at the

garden gate as I said goodbye. I often look back on those children's hospitality as one of the happiest episodes in my entire career. They certainly knew how to treat dogs—and such people, as we all know, are scarce. I hated to leave them. And I don't believe I would have done if it hadn't been for their mama and her insulting remark about all stray dogs having diseases. That was too much. So, with a good plate of oatmeal porridge and gravy inside me—which the children had secretly given me for breakfast—I faced the future with a stout heart and wondered as I trotted along the highway what Fortune would bring forward next,"

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5. GIPSY LIFE

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"About three miles further on I overtook a Gipsy caravan creeping along the road through the morning mist. At the rear of the procession a dog was scouting around in the ditches for rats. I had never met a Gipsy dog, so, rather curious, I went up to him and offered to help him hunt for rats. He seemed a sort of a grouchy silent fellow but I liked him for all that. He made no objection to my joining him and together we gave several rats a good run for their money.

"Little by little I drew the Gipsy dog out and questioned him as to what sort of a life it was to travel with the caravans. These people too were folk of the road like me, and I had serious thoughts of throwing in my lot with them for a while. From what he told me I gathered that a dog led quite a free life with the Gipsies and was interfered with very little.