

CHAPTER IV

Irish terriers, when they have gained maturity, are notable, not alone for their courage, fidelity, and capacity for love, but for their cool-headedness and power of self-control and restraint. They are less easily excited off their balance; they can recognize and obey their master's voice in the scuffle and rage of battle; and they never fly into nervous hysterics such as are common, say, with fox-terriers.

Michael possessed no trace of hysteria, though he was more temperamentally excitable and explosive than his blood-brother Jerry, while his father and mother were a sedate old couple indeed compared with him. Far more than mature Jerry, was mature Michael playful and rowdyish. His ebullient spirits were always on tap to spill over on the slightest provocation, and, as he was afterwards to demonstrate, he could weary a puppy with play. In short, Michael was a merry soul.

"Soul" is used advisedly. Whatever the human soul may be--informing spirit, identity, personality, consciousness--that intangible thing Michael certainly possessed. His soul, differing only in degree, partook of the same attributes as the human soul. He knew love, sorrow, joy, wrath, pride, self-consciousness, humour. Three cardinal attributes of the human soul are memory, will, and understanding; and memory, will, and understanding were Michael's.

Just like a human, with his five senses he contacted with the world exterior to him. Just like a human, the results to him of these contacts were sensations. Just like a human, these sensations on occasion culminated in emotions. Still further, like a human, he could and did perceive, and such perceptions did flower in his brain as concepts, certainly not so wide and deep and recondite as those of humans, but concepts nevertheless.

Perhaps, to let the human down a trifle from such disgraceful identity of the highest life-attributes, it would be well to admit that Michael's sensations were not quite so poignant, say in the matter of a needle-thrust through his foot as compared with a needle-thrust through the palm of a hand. Also, it is admitted, when consciousness suffused his brain with a thought, that the thought was dimmer, vaguer than a similar thought in a human brain. Furthermore, it is admitted that never, never, in a million lifetimes, could Michael have demonstrated a proposition in Euclid or solved a quadratic equation. Yet he was capable of knowing beyond all peradventure of a doubt that three bones are more than two bones, and that ten dogs compose a more redoubtable host than do two dogs.

One admission, however, will not be made, namely, that Michael could not love as devotedly, as wholeheartedly, unselfishly, madly, self-sacrificingly as a human. He did so love--not because he was Michael, but because he was a dog.

Michael had loved Captain Kellar more than he loved his own life. No more than Jerry for Skipper, would he have hesitated to risk his life for Captain Kellar. And he was destined, as time went by and the conviction that Captain Kellar had passed into the inevitable nothingness along with Meringe and the Solomons, to love just as absolutely this six-quart steward with the understanding ways and the fascinating lip-caress. Kwaque, no; for Kwaque was black. Kwaque he merely accepted, as an appurtenance, as a part of the human landscape, as a chattel of Dag Daughtry.

But he did not know this new god as Dag Daughtry. Kwaque called him "marster"; but Michael heard other white men so addressed by the blacks. Many blacks had he heard call Captain Kellar "marster." It was Captain Duncan who called the steward "Steward." Michael came to hear him, and his officers, and all the passengers, so call him; and thus, to Michael, his god's name was Steward, and for ever after he was to know him and think of him as Steward.

There was the question of his own name. The next evening after he came on board, Dag Daughtry talked it over with him. Michael sat on his haunches, the length of his lower jaw resting on Daughtry's knee, the while his eyes dilated, contracted and glowed, his ears ever pricking and repringing to listen, his stump tail thumping ecstatically on the floor.

"It's this way, son," the steward told him. "Your father and mother were Irish. Now don't be denying it, you rascal--"

This, as Michael, encouraged by the unmistakable geniality and kindness in the voice, wriggled his whole body and thumped double knocks of delight with his tail. Not that he understood a word of it, but that he did understand the something behind the speech that informed the string of sounds with all the mysterious likeableness that white gods possessed.

"Never be ashamed of your ancestry. An' remember, God loves the Irish--Kwaque! Go fetch 'm two bottle beer fella stop 'm along icey-chestis!--Why, the very mug of you, my lad, sticks out Irish all over it." (Michael's tail beat a tattoo.) "Now don't be blarneyin' me. 'Tis well I'm wise to your insidyous, snugglin', heart-stealin' ways. I'll have ye know my heart's impervious. 'Tis soaked too long this many a day in beer. I stole you to sell you, not to be lovin' you. I could've loved you once; but that was before me and beer was introduced. I'd sell you for twenty quid right now, coin down, if the chance offered. An' I ain't goin' to love you, so you can put that in your pipe 'n' smoke it."

"But as I was about to say when so rudely interrupted by your 'fectionate ways--"

Here he broke off to tilt to his mouth the opened bottle Kwaque handed him. He sighed, wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and proceeded.

"'Tis a strange thing, son, this silly matter of beer. Kwaque, the

Methusalem-faced ape grinnin' there, belongs to me. But by my faith do I belong to beer, bottles 'n' bottles of it 'n' mountains of bottles of it enough to sink the ship. Dog, truly I envy you, settin' there comfortable-like inside your body that's untainted of alcohol. I may own you, and the man that gives me twenty quid will own you, but never will a mountain of bottles own you. You're a freer man than I am, Mister Dog, though I don't know your name. Which reminds me--"

He drained the bottle, tossed it to Kwaque, and made signs for him to open the remaining one.

"The namin' of you, son, is not lightly to be considered. Irish, of course, but what shall it be? Paddy? Well may you shake your head. There's no smack of distinction to it. Who'd mistake you for a hod-carrier? Ballymena might do, but it sounds much like a lady, my boy. Ay, boy you are. 'Tis an idea. Boy! Let's see. Banshee Boy? Rotten. Lad of Erin!"

He nodded approbation and reached for the second bottle. He drank and meditated, and drank again.

"I've got you," he announced solemnly. "Killeny is a lovely name, and it's Killeny Boy for you. How's that strike your honourableness?--high-soundin', dignified as a earl or . . . or a retired brewer. Many's the one of that gentry I've helped to retire in my day."

He finished his bottle, caught Michael suddenly by both jowls, and, leaning forward, rubbed noses with him. As suddenly released, with thumping tail and dancing eyes, Michael gazed up into the god's face. A definite soul, or entity, or spirit-thing glimmered behind his dog's eyes, already fond with affection for this hair-grizzled god who talked with him he knew not what, but whose very talking carried delicious and unguessable messages to his heart.

"Hey! Kwaque, you!"

Kwaque, squatted on the floor, his hams on his heels, paused from the rough-polishing of a shell comb designed and cut out by his master, and looked up, eager to receive command and serve.

"Kwaque, you fella this time now savvee name stop along this fella dog. His name belong 'm him, Killeny Boy. You make 'm name stop 'm inside head belong you. All the time you speak 'm this fella dog, you speak 'm Killeny Boy. Savvee? Suppose 'm you no savvee, I knock 'm block off belong you. Killeny Boy, savvee! Killeny Boy. Killeny Boy."

As Kwaque removed his shoes and helped him undress, Daughtry regarded Michael with sleepy eyes.

"I've got you, laddy," he announced, as he stood up and swayed toward bed. "I've got your name, an' here's your number--I got that, too: high-strung but reasonable. It fits you like the paper on the wall.

"High-strung but reasonable, that's what you are, Killeny Boy, high-strung but reasonable," he continued to mumble as Kwaque helped to roll him into his bunk.

Kwaque returned to his polishing. His lips stammered and halted in the making of noiseless whispers, as, with corrugated brows of puzzlement, he addressed the steward:

"Marster, what name stop 'm along that fella dog?"

"Killeny Boy, you kinky-head man-eater, Killeny Boy, Killeny Boy," Dag Daughtry murmured drowsily. "Kwaque, you black blood-drinker, run n' fetch 'm one fella bottle stop 'm along icy-chestis."

"No stop 'm, marster," the black quavered, with eyes alert for something to be thrown at him. "Six fella bottle he finish altogether."

The steward's sole reply was a snore.

The black, with the twisted hand of leprosy and with a barely perceptible infiltration of the same disease thickening the skin of the forehead between the eyes, bent over his polishing, and ever his lips moved, repeating over and over, "Killeny Boy."