

Dogs and Dog-Spoilers

by "SUNDOWNER"

A NORTH ISLAND reader wants to know at what point a barking dog becomes a public nuisance. He is, he assures me, a man of peace, and he likes dogs. He wants to live in harmony with his neighbours, who are, in fact, good neighbours and good citizens; and so far this has been

JUNE 5 achieved. But their dog is making harmony difficult. What, within the limits of Christian behaviour, can be done?

Why the question should have been addressed to me I don't know, since it is clear that he is a better Christian than I am. If I offer sympathy only that will not help much, and if I recommend dealing with the dog, as Dr Johnson said he would deal with the Whigs ("Hit the fractious brutes on the head") I take him outside the limits of Christian conduct. All I can do is suggest that if the situation becomes desperate enough he should forget his

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last bundle out of the old copper; and everything had to be hung under the holey washhouse roof, there to take its chance among perching hens, the old tom cat who never could resist playing peekaboo round a sheet when he found it within reach, and the absent-minded old dog, who'd once found an open bag of dog biscuits in the washhouse, and was forever snuffling shaggily about on the chance of another.

You might think that, in such complicated living, rubbish disposal also presented a problem. Here you'd be quite, quite wrong. Teapots (we enjoyed on an average the contents of eight per day) were emptied straight out of the kitchen window, had been for years, so that anyone going along the path had to circumvent a soggy quagmire of dregs. "Inorganic rubbish" (of which there was a great deal, since the place was innocent of a garden, and vitamins had to be derived from tins) were thrown out from the sitting-room window. I never understand why but could only suppose that to mix tealeaves with rusty tins might lead to regrettable confusion. The innards of the many pheasants, ducks, rabbits and quail we consumed were wrapped in copies of the *Northern Advocate* and either cast under the trees by the side of the house, where the dogs ate what they fancied and scattered the rest; or, when remembered in time, were taken along the road by anyone going to milk, and thrust into a patch of manuka scrub. There was no incinerator in the place; and a compost heap would naturally have been the height of absurdity.

Does it all sound too dreadful to be borne? If so, I'm afraid you're wrong again. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves didn't wash more than we had to, were rather glad the cows ran dry a day or two after we arrived, so that tinned milk was substituted, and came back resoundingly healthy, cheerful, and pleased with ourselves. Philip has reached the age at which cleanliness appears simply as an invention of sadistic mothers; and I, when irritated by my rural slum, reflected that some of us, sometimes, tend to be rather hysterical about hygiene. We may even be confusing it with culture.

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Christianity for ten minutes and take direct action. I don't remember that there is much sympathy for dogs in the Old Testament or the New, and there is sympathy for the sinner whose burdens are greater than he can bear.

But when I recommend direct action I am not thinking of the dog. I am thinking of his owners and corrupters. Though dogs delight to bark and bite it is easy enough to cure them of those habits when they are indulged at the wrong time. Not to cure them is treachery to the dog—turning him loose into a world in which every man's boot will be against him. Our boots should have another mark. We should deal with dog spoilers as we ought to deal with child spoilers—cease pretending that we think their darlings amusing. How we do it must depend on the circumstances and the place; but it should be done. It is not a requirement of good citizenship that we should smile at public nuisances whether they run on four legs or on two; bark without ceasing or grizzle without ceasing; keep us awake with their yapping or use our hands or our clothes or our books as wipers for sticky fingers.

I HAVE been thinking a good deal about that barking dog, and my thoughts have not been pleasant. There was, I think, a time when I liked all dogs, or all dogs of the breeds with which I was most familiar: sheepdogs and gundogs. Now I am sharply aware of the difference between

JUNE 7 dogs and dog. I can no longer say that I like all dogs, or many dogs, or, in fact, any but the dog that is my daily companion. I have had many dogs, and never any to which I did not become deeply attached; but they died one by one, as dogs do; each loss made me less inclined to risk loss again, and mercifully—or unworthily?—less able to develop affection once more. I don't know whether it is one of the changes due to age, one of the wounds of experience, or simply the running out of my supply of affection for dogs, which has perhaps been smaller than I realised. Whatever the explanation is I am now a one-dog

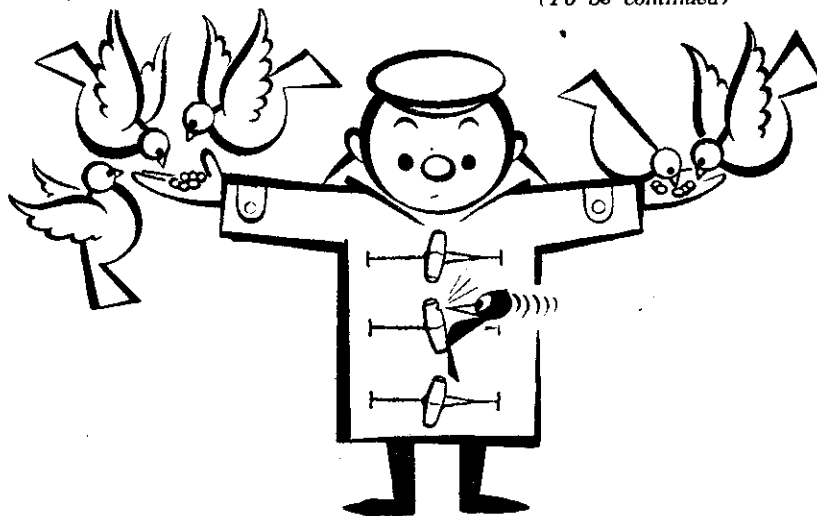
owner and a one-dog lover, and well on the way to dislike of other dogs.

I AM told by Dr L. J. Wild that there is no justification for my dismal attitude to Red Poll cattle in New Zealand. The Red Poll, he says, is the only breed that competes every year at both the Smithfield Fat Stock and the London Dairy Shows, and some of the results he has summarised

JUNE 8 for me indicate that it competes to some purpose. I have, of course, not doubted that it is a useful as well as a beautiful breed—its colour alone is worth working for; but my belief still is that it has not been accepted in New Zealand. That belief was strengthened painfully at the dispersal sale of the Otahuna stud.

I suppose it is the old problem of trying to kill two birds with one stone. My earliest acquaintance with dual purpose cows began when I had to milk two Shorthorns before going off to school; one of them usually tough as leather. They were, of course, not well bred or by today's standards well fed. It was an accident that they were Shorthorns and not Ayrshires, but at that time a lucky accident. The Ayrshires in the neighbourhood were, I distinctly remember, nervous, bad tempered, excitable, and so badly equipped underneath that even my small hands were too big by half for comfortable milking. My father chose Shorthorns—I am not sure that he ever saw a Friesian—because there was something to hold during the operating of milking and something to eat if the milk failed or was too difficult to extract. It was many years before I saw a pedigree herd of milking Shorthorns, or knew that this had become a special breed. Now I wonder if it is a special breed, as I wonder sometimes about the separate identity of Corriedale sheep. In both cases the pull back to the ancestors is too strong for any but ruthless cullers, and eternally vigilant selectors, and I imagine that Red Polls are no safer, or not much safer, than other dual purpose animals. In any case, New Zealand shows no great enthusiasm for such trials. Our farmers breed for beef or for milk, but only in a small percentage of cases for both simultaneously. If dairy farmers are persuaded to use beef bulls where it is not intended to add the calves to the milking herd, there may be a new opportunity for Red Polls; but the result of that experiment could easily be the deliberate neglect of milk for meat.

(To be continued)



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