

How a Lapdog Turned Terrier

W. J. Locke Writes in "The Rough Road" a Mighty Pleasant Story of Young Love and Romance With the War in It, Too, but Not Usurping the Principal Role

IN *The Rough Road* William J. Locke has done something that we thought would happen one of these days, and yet, now that the thing has been achieved, it has the effect of a mild shock. Pleasurable, but still a shock.

What he has done is to revive the old fashioned English novel of the before the war days. Love and romance breathe again in his pages, conventional English folk live conventional lives, drink tea on the lawn in the soft beauty of an English afternoon, fall in love and out again.

War enters in only to serve as the rough road over which the hero travels to find romance and the light that lies in woman's eyes shining for him at its end.

We may readily imagine that Locke has revolted against the too typical "war novel," the sort of thing that even he gave us in *The Wonderful Year* and *The Red Planet*, in which the reader all too clearly felt the literary mill grinding because it must grind. The average novel reader had come to expect something better than this of Locke ever since the memorable days of Marcus Ordeyne and his morals and of *The Beloved Vagabond*.

You at least expected of him a "good story." And this is what he has given you in his tale of "Doggie" Trevor, which may be opened with the certain assurance that while reading it you are going to have a thoroughly good time.

They Named Him Marmaduke.

The Rough Road is the tale of a youth who began life as a lapdog and who ended it, so far as this narrative goes, as a faithful kind of terrier. Marmaduke is a truly awful name to christen a boy, even if it is redeemed by James at one end and Trevor at the other. Marmaduke was what Trevor's mother and relatives called him when he was a little lad, and while his doting parent was wrapping him up in a cotton-wool sort of an existence that aroused the healthy young contempt of his cousin Oliver to the point where he likened Marmaduke to a pet dog and therefore called him "Doggie." Yet the time came, so does life work its wonders, when Trevor thought more of being called "Doggie" by his mates in the trenches and by a certain tragic eyed French girl than he would have thought of winning the Victoria Cross. Locke's story may have more than one moral for those who like to find such things in all books, but it certainly has this one: That it is a detestable thing to spoil a lad by keeping him entirely aloof from his fellows.

At the time August 5, 1914, came around in Trevor's life he was the perfect dilettante, a solitary orphan with a good income, living on his own estate in Durdlebury (famed for its cathedral) with the dean of that episcopal pile for an uncle; a favorite with all the old ladies, and possessed by a passion for collecting representations of dogs in clay, porcelain and what not from all over the world.

He played admirably on certain ancient musical instruments, dressed exquisitely, and was writing a history of wall papers. The average Socialist would have called Doggie Trevor a parasite. And he was. So far as use in the world was concerned his merits would be correctly estimated by a zero mark. Of



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Road."*

course his tailor and the dealers who sold him porcelain dogs thought otherwise. But we confess we still stick to that zero mark as our estimate of him.

The Slacker.

Then the war came; and Doggie was made to feel extremely uncomfortable, like many other Britons, as we know through what Mr. Britling endured. Doggie's cousin Oliver went off to France as an infantry captain while Doggie stayed at home and was "wished" into becoming engaged to his cousin Peggy, daughter of the aforesaid dean of the cathedral. English folk at that time didn't like the young men who stayed at home; and somebody in Durdlebury sent Doggie a white feather, with the result that Doggie got a commission and went into a training camp for officers.

Of course he was perfectly unsuited for the command of troops, and presently the Lieutenant Colonel of his battalion had to tell him so. And Doggie was "chucked" out of the army. He went to London, hid himself in a lodging house, and went through that particular hell such men travel until they come to resolution once again.

Doggie's resolution was to commit suicide. But he was saved from too long a contemplation of this by being recognized by his former tutor, Phineas McPhail, once a man self-destined for the church but spoiled by whiskey for that vocation, and now a private in the British army. And into the army Doggie followed him.

McPhail is one of the chief joys of the book. You get the character of the man who, when Doggie said that "Dante's inferno was child's play" to war, replied: "Dante had no more imagination than a

Free Kirk precentor in Kirkeudbright."

Now except for one incident, which was quite apart from his military duties, there was nothing of the heroic about Doggie's life as a private in the army in France. He naturally loathed the dirt and discomfort of it, and he had no way of approaching the men in his company. Yet, curiously enough, aside from McPhail, his great friend was a London cockney fish dealer, one Shendish.

But the life made a man of him physically; and he grew to be popular among his mates, owing to his ability to wrest real music out of a tin whistle. And then, in billets, he met Jeanne Boissiere, whose tale of her treatment at the hands of the enemy made him say, "God give me strength to kill every German I see!" When he went back to the trenches he performed the unmilitary feat of leaving his command and finding Jeanne's fortune where it had been hidden in an old well, getting a bullet in his hip from a German sniper for his reward and being sent back to Blighty, which he did not consider favorably since it separated him from Jeanne.

Does He Marry Her?

If it were not for the fact that the wrong man sees the wrong woman at the wrong time there would be no stories to tell. In this case it was Phineas who was the wrong man, for he saw Jeanne and told her of Doggie's real place in the world. True to her French habit of thought Jeanne saw Doggie marrying in his own world of wealth and social position,

recognized the inevitability of such things and sternly bade him adieu in a letter of gratitude for restoring to her her little fortune. And so Doggie came to, finding himself thrown over by Jeanne and also by Peggy who had fallen in love with Oliver, who keeps turning up in the story like a bad but dependable penny. We reserve to Mr. Locke's pages the outcome of the tale, which is charged from beginning to end with all his old charm of style, tender passion and humor. Except for the immortal *Vagabond* he has done nothing better.

And even in the *Vagabond* there is no scene so charged with exquisite emotion as the description of the dinner given by Jeanne to McPhail and Shendish simply because they were friends of Doggie's. To make the average enlisted man in any army think more of an act of friendship than of food is a supreme accomplishment.

Of the varied minor characters introduced in the story the portraits of McPhail and of Shendish stand out as very definite figures. One might wish that the alluring sketch Locke began of Oliver's "man" Chipmunk might have been carried out with the same degree of finish. The vision of Chipmunk, after drinking two quarts of beer in the kitchen of the deanery, standing on his head on the kitchen table and driving the maids into hysterical joy thereby, is one that fills the mind with possibilities of what might have been made of Chipmunk. But possibly the author had his home audience in mind; and there are lengths to which a novelist may not go even with a Chipmunk.

THE ROUGH ROAD. BY WILLIAM J. LOCKE. John Lane Company. \$1.50.