

*Simply Charlotte Mason presents*

# ONLY A DOG

*A Story of the Great War*



by Bertha Whitridge Smith

Snuggle up with your children and read this touching true story of the faithfulness of a dog called Army, an Irish Terrier who devotes his life to the soldier who saved him from No Man's Land near Flanders in France.

Learn about World War I as seen through his innocent and loyal eyes—the civilians' heartache, life in the trenches, standing watch, hand-to-hand combat, a doctor's care, and the British soldiers' camaraderie.

Originally written in 1917, on the heels of the Great War, *Only a Dog* presents a living narrative of the realities of war but in a tender, first-person style reminiscent of the classic *Black Beauty*.

# Only a Dog

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by  
Bertha Whitridge Smith

Only a Dog  
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## Author's Note

This story of the bravery of a man, the faithfulness of a dog, the kind heart of the British Tommy, and the wanton cruelty of the German "Hun," is quite true, and was given to me by Major Edgar, R. A. M. C. (of Montreal) with his kind permission to elaborate it into its present form.

It all happened near Armentières in Flanders, and it is there, that anyone who cares to look may find the big grave with the little one beside it, both marked by the same cross, and on it the legend

No. 678962—Private Rice  
and  
"Army"

B. W. S.

## Bishop Doane on His Dog

I am quite sure he thinks that I am God—  
Since He is God on whom each one depends  
For life, and all things that His bounty sends—  
My dear old dog, most constant of all friends;  
Not too quick to mind, but quicker far than I  
To Him whom God I know and own: his eye,  
Deep brown and liquid, watches for my nod;  
He is more patient underneath the rod  
Than I, when God His wise corrections sends.  
He looks love at me, deep as words e'er spake:  
And from me never crumb nor sup will take  
But he wags thanks with his most vocal tail:  
And when some crashing noise wakes all his fear,  
He is content and quiet if I am near,  
Secure that my protection will prevail.  
So, faithful, mindful, thankful, trustful, he  
Tells me what I unto my God should be.





# Chapter 1

*“There is a world outside the one you know.”—Kipling*

**A**s I lie here on my dear Master’s breast waiting for him to wake, I have much time to think of all that has happened to me, and through the many long days, and weary dark cold nights, I try to make the time seem shorter by talking it all out to myself.

I have sometimes heard People say, “He’s only a dog, never mind about him,” and I do wonder why they speak so, because really it seems to me that we are wiser than they are. It is true we cannot speak their language any more than they can ours, but we do understand almost everything they say, and try as we may we cannot make them understand us, except the very easy things about being tired or hungry, or something like that. Once in a while we do find someone like my dear Master lying here, who talks to us just as if he knew we had real deep thoughts and could appreciate his. However, all this is neither here nor there until I have told my story.

I was born in a most beautiful place, the “Château de T—” they called it, and unlike many little dogs I was allowed to stay long enough with my Mother to learn how to behave, and how to take many things in the world, which often trouble us young ones very much indeed. She used to say, “You must always remember, my child, that People have the power to make your life happy or miserable, and that if you always try to behave well, and do what you are told, you will generally be well treated. Of course there are some cruel men who take pleasure in tormenting us, and when you meet that kind you will be justified in using all the means of defence that Nature gave you. You have very sharp claws and still sharper teeth, and will generally be able to make People very much afraid of you, if you use them. But when you find a good kind master, be obedient to him, and faithful to the death.”

Another thing she told me, was, that although I had been born in France I was really an Irishman, and could hold up my tail with the best-bred poodle in this country, and that I must never allow myself to be overawed by any of their grand airs, but let them know that I had the finest forbears a dog could have. I have always been very glad she told me this, because when I have seen one of those poodles with carved

hair and waved mustaches, looking like a bloomin' Punch and Judy show, come tiptoeing towards me, I have felt sure that it was all right for me to tiptoe up to him, with the same air of insolence, and to give him what-for.

When I left my Mother, I went to live in a much smaller house than the Château, but quite near by, so that I was often taken to see her. I lived with two very nice kind children, a boy and a girl, and they took me with them wherever they went, even if it were as far as Paris or London, so that I saw a great deal of the world.

We had been very happy together for a number of years, when there came a hot morning in midsummer and all of us in the breakfast room together. All at once I heard my oldest Master make a loud exclamation; something about "War" having come at last, and that his uniform must be got ready as he would have to go to Paris immediately to join his regiment.

I did not quite understand what all this meant, so I was pleased when my youngest Master called out, "Mon Père, what do you mean by your uniform?" and to hear his Father say, "My soldier clothes, little Jean. Papa has to go to war and be a soldier."

My little Master and I both knew from the

anxious looks of the family, that this must be something very sad and sorrowful, and when we went out to the garden together, he threw himself on the ground and putting his arms around me cried, “Oh! boy! my dear Irish boy! I am afraid my Papa will be killed!” I licked him and nuzzled him all I could to show my sympathy, and I did seem to be a comfort to him.

After this, things began to happen very quickly, and hardly had the oldest Master gone, than soldiers began to come to the house. Every time they came, they took something away with them. The day they took the horses from the stable, Jean and I stood watching them, and suddenly he turned to me and said, “Oh! my boy! they might want to take you too! Run! run quickly, and hide!” pointing to a place in the shrubbery. I felt very rebellious at this, for it looked too much like being a coward to suit me, so I only looked at him and did not move. But when he stamped his foot angrily, and said, “Go!” in a loud voice, I thought best to humour him and turned to obey. Just as I did so one of the soldiers noticed me, and called to his officer to ask if he should take me.

Now I did not at all want to go away with those strange men, even though they were taking my friends from the stable, so I just laid myself down at

my little Master's feet, hoping they would see that I could not leave him. The officer took a good look at me, and another at little Jean, and then I was much relieved to hear him say, "No, we will not take him, I think the child needs him more than we do; though he looks a good sort."

After this day, we soon began to hear sounds like thunder in the distance, and as I never did like thunder I was glad enough to stay inside the house, especially as the queerest kind of procession began to go by. Men, women, and children, cows, pigs, old lame horses, and often dogs and cats, and once in a while birds, carried in open boxes; and everybody hung all over with bundles or babies. Even the children, and the dogs, had almost more than they could carry, and many of them dragged heavily loaded little carts as well.

As we sat in the window and watched all these things, I did long to ask my youngest Master what it all meant, but of course it wasn't any use to try, even if he had been able to explain, and so I made up my mind to listen to everything I could hear. In this way I learned that the War had begun in earnest, and was coming closer and closer to us, and that all these people we saw were leaving their nice comfortable homes, because they were afraid of the "Germans."

I did wonder what a “German” was, so I kept my ears wide open, and when one day Marie the cook came running to my oldest Mistress calling out, “Madame! Madame! the Germans!” I flew out into the garden to see for myself. Rushing to the gate which stood open, I looked down the road, and saw away off in the distance a big cloud of dust, and as I kept on looking very hard, I presently made out big black horses, with big men on them, who wore queer shining pointed caps on their heads.

I was so excited I trembled all over from head to foot, but I did not feel afraid, and remembered to hold my tail well up in case they should be like those impudent poodles. When they came up to me, partly because I was so excited and partly because I felt unaccountably savage, I bared my teeth, and gave the deepest growl I knew how, and this must have made them angry, for the head one leaned over the side of his horse and hit me so hard with a kind of gleaming stick he carried in his hand, the blood ran, and I was rolled over and over on the ground. I should have been trampled to death under the horses’ feet, if I hadn’t jumped up very quickly, and dashed back through the gate to the house, where my oldest Mistress, who was standing at the door, caught me in her arms. They stopped at the gate,

those “Germans,” and the head one called out in the roughest voice I ever heard, that ten of them would eat and sleep, and to get ready! I did wonder how my oldest Mistress could answer them as sweetly as she did, but she welcomed them and gave them everything they wanted.

Late that night they seemed to be making a great deal of noise, and I thought I heard women’s voices screaming, but as I had been shut up in the tool-house outside in the garden, I could not be sure; and when after a long, long time the noises stopped, I fell asleep.





## Chapter 2

*“Smells are surer than sounds or sights  
To make your heart-strings crack—  
They start those awful voices o’ nights  
That whisper, . . .”—Kipling*

**W**hen I awoke I could see out of the high window that the sun was shining, and I wanted very much to get out of the tool-house. I whined and whined, hoping somebody would hear me, and I was very sure that if my youngest Master could hear me, he at least would understand, but nobody came and it was so silent I grew more and more miserable, and being very hungry and frightened, I barked finally, just as loud as I could.

If there was any one to hear, they certainly did not understand, for nobody came to help me, and after a while when I was quite tired out with barking and scratching, I lay down to think what was best to be done. I suppose I slept again, for when I noticed once more, I could see from the look of the sunshine that it must be quite late in the day, and the only sound I could hear, though I listened with my ears

at their very highest, was the humming of the bees around their hives in the garden.

I looked around me carefully for some way of escape, and noticing on the door the piece of iron which fastened it, and remembering that my little Master used to lift it when he wanted to get out, I wondered if I couldn't push it up with my nose. It was very high above my head, but as it seemed the only way, I determined to try, so again and again I jumped, and jumped, without the least success. I did not despair, however, but just decided to take a rest and then to gather all my strength for one big leap, so getting my legs under me and as near under the iron piece as I could, I made one grand effort and wonder of wonders! succeeded. The door opened a small crack and to push it wide was easy, but I did it slowly and with great caution, for I was filled with an anxiety and dread I could not understand, and put my head out to look around before I ventured any more. I could see that the garden was all trampled, but no one seemed to be near, so I came out slowly and smelled about, and found that horses and men both had been trampling the grass my oldest Mistress was so fond of, and had broken all the lovely flowers.

As I still saw no signs of People, and was very hungry and still more thirsty, I crept slowly to the



“I wondered if I couldn’t push it up with my nose.”

house where the door hung wide open, and just inside, as usual my bowl, with only a few drops of water. I lapped these eagerly; then feeling better took courage to seek further for my little Master or some of the family. Still creeping silently, though I did not quite know why, I went through the hall where things seemed to be much as usual, and then to the breakfast room where there was the most dreadful mess over everything, of plates, and food, and broken china, and glass. Hungry and worried as I was, I could not help wondering how it was that my careful oldest Mistress could have left the place in such a condition.

I tried to eat some pieces of food I found on the floor, but everything had a very odd taste, and such a strong smell it made my sneeze and feel quite sick, so I went on from room to room, still seeing no one and unable to smell any of my dear People, because of that horrid sickening stuff, whatever it was.

At last I came to the little room where I had been accustomed to stay so much with my youngest Master, and to lie and sleep before the fire while he amused himself. As I crept across the floor, I saw that somebody was lying on the couch at the other side, but I could not quite tell whether it was my oldest Mistress, or Marie the cook; and just then my foot

touched something wet on the floor. I put down my nose to smell, and quickly realized that it was blood I had stepped into! Now blood had always seemed to me a very delicious kind of food, particularly the fresh blood of a nice young chicken when once in a while I had managed to steal off by myself and kill one, but somehow this did not tempt me at all. It had a most peculiar smell and I felt quite sickened again, so I drew back and tried to get to the couch another way, and finally got so near that by stretching out my neck I could touch a hand, which hung down almost to the floor.

The light was too dim to see clearly, but I knew it was a hand, and on it there was again that dreadful blood I could not bear to taste, so I reached a little further and nuzzled at the arm, and made sure it was my oldest Mistress lying there, though in spite of whines and scratches, and little barks, I could not make her speak. I waited, and waited, until it grew quite dark and there was not a sound,—not in the room, nor in the whole house, nor outside,—and I began to tremble and to get more frightened, until at last I felt I could not bear it another second, and I crept out of the room, trying not to touch that dreadful blood.

I knew that it was my work to look further for

my little Master, and to search upstairs where he might be needing me, so gathering my courage as best I could, I went fearfully up the stairs and from room to room, finding not a sign of any that I loved, and only dirt and disorder, and the beds all flung about. After searching everywhere, I gave it up and pattered down again, and as I passed the door of the little room, an unaccountable terror seized me. I felt my hair rising all along my back, and then there seemed to be Something, or Somebody, I could not see, and I flew through the hall, and out the big door, bumping against things but not minding; through the garden, and out through the open gate to the road. Down the road I ran—and ran—and ran—and ran, and the faster I went, the faster the terror seemed to come after me.

As I look back, it seems to me that I ran the whole night through, but I suppose I must have stopped to breathe sometimes, and all the time I never met a soul, because if I came near anything I thought might be human I turned another way, or crept into a bush. All the sadness and trouble had come since I had heard so much about “Germans,” and my own experiences had taught me already that I could not give them too wide a berth, for good fighter as I knew myself to be, I was powerless

among them. At last I was so exhausted I felt I could run no more, and as the day had begun to dawn and to light up the black darkness, I felt less afraid, and determined to lie down and rest if I could only find a place where I might feel safe. In the distance I could see the outlines of houses, and knew there must be a village, but I did not want to go near it until it was bright day, when I could perhaps tell something about the People, whether they were friends, or that terrible enemy. So I ran into a thick lot of trees and bushes near by. After scratching a bed together as best I could, I lay down without much fuss of turning and choosing, being too utterly tired out to care, and shutting my eyes, I tried to think a little about what I should do to find my dear family.





## Chapter 3

*“Towns without people, ten times took,  
An’ ten times left an’ burned at last!  
An’ starvin’ dogs that came to look  
For owners, when a column passed—”—Kipling*

I did not succeed in doing much thinking, because as soon as I closed my eyes I saw that dreadful room again, and my poor oldest Mistress lying there on the couch! Then I tried to keep my eyes open, but I could not, and in spite of the horrors and fears I fell asleep.

It seemed only a moment, but must have been a good long time, because when I came to myself, the sun was shining quite high up in the sky, and feeling very sore and tired still, I crept out of the bushes into the warmth of the sunshine and sat down to think what I should do. I was very hungry and quickly decided that the first thing was to find something to eat, and that unless there was something to hunt in the wood where I had slept, I must try to find some kind People in those houses, which looked nearer in the daylight.

It did not take me long to discover that there were only birds in the wood, and though I had sometimes caught them, it was no use to try now when I felt so sore and lame, so I crept cautiously towards the houses, keeping under bushes, in case I saw a “German.” As no one seemed to be about, however, my courage began to rise and I trotted along a little faster, until I came to a house which stood a little way out of the village by itself, and I went around it carefully to see what I could find. Just as I had nearly given up hope of finding anything, I saw the door of the house open, a little crack at first, and then wide enough for a queer-looking old woman to put her head out. She looked about her just the way *I* had done when I got out of the tool-house, so I could understand just how she was feeling, and I wondered if she had been frightened by the “Germans” too. At any rate I did not feel at all afraid of her, and as she came out of the door, I walked up to her wagging my tail, and trying in every possible way to make her see what I wanted.

She looked at me in an odd sort of way, and I heard her whisper “*pauvre chien—pauvre chien,*” then she bent down and tried to brush some of the dirt off me, but though I knew I must be a sight, what I wanted most was food and drink. I looked

very hard in her face and whined a little low whine which means distress, hoping she would understand, but she did not seem to, so I pushed past her into the house. I went smelling about everywhere until I found a cupboard, with half-open door, where on a low shelf there was a large piece of bread and a piece of bone, which I could easily reach, though I did not know if I might have it.

As the woman did not come in after me I thought she couldn't care much, so I snatched the bread and gulped it down in great pieces which nearly choked me, and when I had finished it, I took the bone and went out of the door, where the woman was still standing just as I had left her. She did not seem to see me, so I lay down near her and began to gnaw the bits of meat, and as I worried over the bone, I watched her, and saw her draw her hand across her eyes several times as if she were trying to wake. Then I heard her say again, in the same odd whisper, "*Pauvre, pauvre chien!* art thou too, like me, terrified and alone? Hast thou heard sounds and seen sights to madden thee? Are all thy dear ones gone too, and thyself better dead, as they are?"

All the time I worked over the bone, she stood there just the same, whispering once in a while, and sometimes I caught a word or two, like "*Jésu,*" and

*“Pitié.”* When I had quite finished and had found a drink from some water in the yard, I went over to her and rubbed myself against her, and licked her hand, and pulled at her skirt, but she never noticed me more than to pat my head a little, so at last I gave it up, for though I felt very grateful to her for the food and very sorry for her, she did not belong to me, and I knew I must hurry on.

I went away slowly, looking back now and again, hoping she would call me, but she just stood there quite still, and I could see she was not thinking of me, at all.

From there I went on through the village and was astonished to find that the houses were only broken walls, and that inside were only heaps of stones and broken things, and not a Person anywhere. I went on and on from house to house noticing that some were blackened by fire, and others just knocked down, as I had often seen my youngest Master knock down his block houses, and when I had got quite to the other end, I was rejoiced to see another dog. I ran up to him, and though at first he was not friendly, when I talked to him and told him all I had been through and how completely I was lost, he became very willing to talk to me. I asked all about the village and whether he had lived here before, and when I



“I asked him if it was Germans who had done all this to his village.”

found he had, I thought he might know whether it was anywhere near the Château de T—, which was the place where I thought I might possibly find some of my dear People, if only I could learn the way.

He did not know and, like the old woman, did not seem to mind very much about anything. He refused to come with me, because, he said, he must stay by what had been his home, in case any of his People came back. I asked him if it was “Germans” who had done all this to his village, but he was evidently not educated, for he did not seem to understand, and just laid himself down quite hopelessly on a very uncomfortable pile of stones in his house, so I said I must run on.

## Chapter 4

*“Rivers at night that cluck an’ jeer,  
Plains which the moonshine turns to sea,  
Mountains which never let you near,  
An’ stars to all eternity—”—Kipling*

I trotted up and down about the country all that day, without ever coming to the Château or any place that looked at all familiar, and I spent the night as before under some bushes.

When morning came again, I found I was in quite an open country with no houses anywhere that I could see, and chasing about after food I was fortunate enough to catch a couple of field-mice which I ate bones and all, though I had never deigned to eat such food before. Finding a nice clear brook, I had a good long drink, and then I laid down in the water and had a good soak, for it was the first time I had been able even to try to clean myself since I had been rolled under the hoofs of that big black horse, by that dreadful shining stick.

As the country seemed so open, I decided to go up to the top of a high hill I saw in the distance,

thinking that from there I might see the towers of the Château de T—. I trotted along in the hot sun for hours without the hill appearing to be much nearer, and got quite discouraged, for I hadn't dreamed it would be so far. But I never was one to give up easily, and so I trotted on, and on, and late in the afternoon found myself at last, at the very top. When I looked over the other side of the hill, there was no sign of anything like the Château as I had hoped, but far off in the distance I saw what I thought must be a town, and still beyond that a river, winding at the foot of hills much higher than the one I was on.

I sat down to rest, and to look, and consider what I should do. If I stayed out in a place like this by myself I should certainly starve before long, and not be able to find any of my dear People, so I thought I had better try to get to the town where perhaps some Person might be kind to me, and where if I listened carefully to all that People said, I might hear something about what had happened to my little Master.

I went down the hill as fast as I could, for I knew that if I did not find the town before the dark came, I should lose my way and perhaps never find it; just the same as I lost my own house, because I ran away in such a fright in the night and never looked where



I was going.

When I got to the bottom of the hill, and found myself all alone in the open, with not even a bush to give me cover, I did feel nervous, but it was no use to give way to that, besides, so far as I could see there was not a Person anywhere. Indeed I could not even see any animals either, and it did seem strange when I came to think about it that I had seen so few animals anywhere I had been. It made me feel that there must be something very wrong somewhere, if even the little beasts in the fields had to hide or fly for their lives. When I had begun to think about this, I got more worried than ever, and stopped to look around me once more.

There was still the town in front of me, and off to one side from that, the river and the mountains, just as I had seen them from the hill-top. Between me and the town, there was a long flat plain which seemed to be all dust and dirt, and just two ridges, not very high; they hardly looked higher to me than the ridges the men make in the fields when they plough. But these were very far apart.

I decided after a bit that I would go right down the middle of that ground between the ridges, as it seemed my straightest way to the town; so I pulled myself together once more, and remembered to

keep my tail well up and my head too so that I could see, and with my ears pricked high for listening, I trotted on as bravely as I could. I know now only too well that the path I had chosen was the deadly “No Man’s Land” which lay between the British and the German trenches, and that my nervous fears had a firmer foundation than I dreamed; but I have heard People say that “Ignorance is bliss,” and it was like that with me, so on I went.

The sun at this time was nearly down to the tops of the hills, and as it was shining directly in my eyes, it was very hard for me to see. I was thinking how glad I should be when it was gone, when I heard nice kind English voices coming faintly from I knew not where, and then a louder whistling call, which I understood very well as an invitation, so I turned to run to the place from which I thought it sounded. As I turned, I heard a whizzing something come from behind me and rush through the air just above my head, and then another, and another, and then laughter, which seemed to be quite far away and also behind me. My eyes were too blinded by the sun to see, even if I had dared to stop and look, so I tried to run even faster towards the kind whistling voices, which were louder and kinder than before, when I was suddenly knocked off my feet, and rolled over,

by a terrible blow which took my breath away.

When I came to myself, the sun was gone and it was fast growing dusk, but remembering the friendly voices I tried to get on my legs again, and was dismayed to find after many attempts, that all I could do was to sit up a very little, as my hind legs were quite useless and the blood running from them. For a minute after this I lost my courage entirely and, lifting up my head, I uttered one long howl of despair, but only one, for as soon as I had done this, there came more of those whizzing things falling near me, so I lay down again and kept very quiet, hoping it would soon be dark, and that I could die in peace, if die I must.

Just as I had made up my mind to this, I heard from in front of me a dear kind English voice, calling in a whisper, "Come, boy! come!" but alas! I could not come, which the owner of the voice seemed to understand, for he kept on whispering kind encouraging words, and they sounded nearer and nearer, until at last I saw in the dim light that a man, the colour of the earth itself, was coming towards me, crawling and wriggling on the ground the way snakes come, and as soon as he was near enough he took me very carefully in his arms. "Poor little laddie," he said softly, "did those beastly 'Uns try ter shoot

yer? They shan't hurt yer any more, if Rice P-t-e-can help it," and with that he had got me somehow on his shoulders, and was squirming back the way he came. I did suffer dreadfully, but determined not to make any sound, for I had already learned that if I did, there would be more of those bullets (as I afterwards knew they were called) coming after us; and, as it was, I have never understood how we got through safely. When we got to the edge of what had looked to me like a ridge, more kind voices called out, quite loud this time, "Well done, Rice! well done, old man!" and reaching out strong hands, they caught him and me together, and pulled us down inside.

It was almost dark in that place, but I could just see that there were many men, and heard them ask somebody if they might give "them" what-for! Then a second after there was the loudest sound I ever heard in my life, and I knew no more.