

The Donkey that tried to Bark

ONCE upon a time there lived a simple farmer whose dearest friends were his dog and his donkey. Each animal performed important tasks for the farmer and he, in turn, took very good care of them and treated them well. Indeed, the farmer, the dog and the donkey were a most happy family.

Every evening, after the day's work was done, the farmer would see to it that his animals were well fed. The dog would be given a fair share of the farmer's dinner. And the farmer would cut a bundle of the best grass for the donkey. This was the way things went with them for many years. But the donkey was beginning to grow tired of things as they were. He began to imagine all kinds of strange things. He began to think that the dog was more favoured by the master because he shared in his master's dinner. And, al-



though he could not ask for a better meal than the grass the farmer cut for him, after a while the donkey began to long for some of the cooked food that the dog enjoyed.

In this state of mind, the donkey began to look for all kinds of examples which he felt would prove the dog was better treated than he was. Why did the dog remain at home all day while he was forced to go to the fields with the farmer? Dog was supposed to keep watch and guard the house. But Donkey was sure that Dog spent the entire day sleeping while he, Donkey, had to work in the scorching sun in the fields.

Soon the donkey began to think that the reason why the farmer treated the dog more kindly than himself was because dogs were better than donkeys. And the donkey decided to change his ways and become more like his friend, Dog. In this way, he thought he would please his master and so get the same kind of treatment as the dog.

Now, at night-time, instead of braying, Donkey would try to bark like Dog. But he neither barked nor brayed. No matter how hard he tried to bark, he could never manage to sound like Dog. It was a



strange and frightening sound that came from his mouth each night.

It was even stranger and more frightening to see Donkey galloping around the farmer's house some nights. He would wag his bushy tail and make these frightful noises, pretending that he was chasing thieves.

A few days after he had started this strange behaviour, the donkey began to refuse to eat the juicy grass the farmer brought for him. He preferred the scraps of meat which the farmer threw from his plate. But since the donkey could not catch with his

mouth, the dog got most of the food and he often went hungry.

Donkey soon got quite weak and thin. He could no longer work in the fields. The farmer realized that the donkey could not cope with the field work any more. He did not want to overwork the donkey so he decided to leave him at home. Donkey began to think that field work was low and humiliating. He was quite happy to remain at home with the dog. He fell into the habit of sleeping at odd hours during the day but felt that this was a good thing since Dog himself used to do this. In fact, Donkey made up his mind to become a better dog than Dog himself.

Many days passed and Donkey continued with his strange behaviour. The farmer, much as he loved the donkey, was becoming more and more impatient with him. He could not understand what had come over his faithful, hard-working friend. The donkey refused to eat his food but fought with the dog for the dog's. The donkey slept in the day and remained awake at night, making the most frightful noises. Finally, the farmer lost his patience altogether.

One night, when the donkey was carrying on in his usual way, the farmer took a stick and began to

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beat the donkey. He beat the donkey until he was so tired he could hardly lift his hand to lay another stroke. The poor donkey was so shocked he did not utter a sound. He just could not understand why his master was beating him this way. Never before had his master lifted a finger to hurt him. And now there was even more reason why his master should be pleased with him.

“Surely,” he thought, “I am no longer behaving like a donkey. I may not be able to bark exactly like the dog but I know that, with time and a little practice, I shall be able to do most things as well as



the dog. Surely my master should praise me not beat me like this."

Donkey felt that he was probably not trying hard enough. The next night, therefore, he tried even harder to be like Dog. He filled the night air with his strange braying. The farmer, tired after a hard day's work, could not get to sleep. Donkey was again beaten. He was so puzzled now, he did not know what to do. At last, he decided to speak to Dog about his problem.

"Tell me, my friend, why does the farmer treat me this way? I try very hard to be good and to please him, yet he beats me so badly."

"I've been watching you for a long time," the dog told him. "I was hoping you would realize for yourself how foolishly you've been behaving."

"Me? But how? Are you foolish? I'm just trying to be like you!"

"That's what is foolish! You are trying to be something you're not. That can never be. You can never be a dog just as I can never be a donkey."

The donkey opened his eyes wide. Never again would he try to be something he was not. He became the wisest donkey in the land.

