

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, AUGUST 12, 1899:

SOUTHERN BLOODHOUNDS

FEW OF THE BREED USED TO HUNT SLAVES FOUND NOW.

Causes of Their Sudden Disappearance After the War—Dogs of Keen Scent and Acute Intelligence—The Wits of Slaves Matched Against Theirs—Once Very Costly.

There was a time when the bloodhound was distinctively a dog of the Southern tier of States; when to own one or a pair meant that a owned slaves, was therefore a man of property, and presumably a planter. One if not more of these dogs was carefully kept on each plantation. If the plantation was a large one, the bloodhounds would number probably half a dozen, sufficient to form a fair sized pack. They were registered, highly valued and crossed and bred with forethought and skill. Certain strains were celebrated for scent, others for speed, others for endurance, others for ferocity. If a slave owner could obtain dogs which united the blood of all these strains, he had an idea pack. Sometimes the proprietor of a highly valuable strain established a dog stud, as was the case with a bloodhound in Kentucky is to day. It cost the owner much money, and it cost the patrons more. Some of the dogs are yet remembered in the South for their superlative merits. Such was Ranger, a bloodhound owned in southern Georgia in the early fifties. Such also were Meteor of western Alabama, and Nig of the Yazoo delta in Mississippi and Lawyer Jack of an upper county in Florida and Pancho of middle Louisiana. The blood of these brutes runs here and there in the veins of animal now widely scattered, survivors of a vast number of forebears that have gone no man knows whither.

In the South the question is often asked by an old timer. What has become of the bloodhounds? Only the questioner does not say 'bloodhounds.' He says 'nigger dogs,' which is the name by which they were known from South Carolina to Texas. The question has not yet been answered. There must have been when the war began as many as 20,000 bloodhounds in the South. There were nearly as many when the war ended. That was less than thirty-five years ago, yet the dog is now comparatively rare. The explanation is to be found in the fact that the bloodhound—the American variety—is good for nothing in the world except to chase men. When the need of chasing men disappeared the dogs disappeared. They were not bred longer. Because of their temper they were not permitted to cross with other dogs. They lived out their lives and died without further progeny. Those now alive have been kept for the old purpose and their number has been restricted by the limit of that purpose. They are used now only in the pursuit of criminals. Every Southern penitentiary has a brace of them. A good many Sheriffs keep them.

Generally these animals are of pure blood, undefiled descendants of their mighty progenitors. They are quite remarkable animals in their way, probably the greatest exemplars of patient, untiring ferocity. Their keenness of scent is a strange thing, though it is of more value in thinly settled localities than in neighborhoods where many feet are likely to confuse a trail. It does not seem credible that the mere temporary pressure of a man's boot or shoe upon the ground should leave a distinguishable odor for a space of twenty-four hours, providing that there be no rain in the meantime; but that it does has been proved by a thousand chases and captures. Sometimes in the South a murderer breaks jail. Until the introduction of chilled steel cages this was not a difficult matter. Dogs are telephoned for probably 150 miles away. They arrive a day late. They are led in leash to a point where the criminal made his exit and uncoupled. They take up the scent instantly and follow it rapidly. The man must have crossed much water or blundered his trail among the footsteps of dozens of others to throw them off. Always supposing that twenty-four hours is the extreme limit allowed the fugitive, the dogs are the best means to effect his capture. They will follow him until they come up with him if it takes a week, unless he has boarded a train at some swamp station or been taken up by some little steamer plying the inland rivers. In that case the dogs will run to the place where the quarry began the use of means of locomotion other than his own, utter one deep note of anger and surrender all at-

tempt at pursuit. They seem to know better than any man could know the end of their quest and the limitation of their powers.

It is not so an infrequent thing with these animals to display brain action closely allied to reason. A bloodhound of two years' experience, if the trail brings it to a stream, will never waste a moment looking for the scent on the side exactly opposite to where it ran down to the water. The dog will always begin casting down the bank, going sometimes for a half mile before it again strikes the trail. It concludes instantly that no fugitive will emerge on a direct line with his entrance and that he will go out of his course in the water to confuse the trail. It is aware also, in some strange fashion, that it is the impulse of a flying man to wade downstream, and if he is hurried he will not stop to change this impulse. The bloodhound will turn and cast along the bank up stream only when he has thoroughly searched the downstream bank. The dog's nose gets better practice, just as his brain does. Certain old fellows, with white hairs here and there in their black coats, are as nearly infallible as flesh and blood ever get to be. They hesitate on a trail only at rare intervals. If a man has doubled they will overrun for possibly ten yards, wheel and take the back track with certainty. If their quarry has sprung far to one side they will overrun, wheel, search for the back trail, fail to find it, then begin a series of circles of small diameter along the trail until they strike the new one. Then they steam away once more, heavy heads within two inches of the ground, tails straight behind them and rigid as iron bars. The bloodhound is not a water dog, yet when a stream crosses its path it takes it without hesitation, no matter how wide or swift it may be. It seems to believe that it can traverse anything a man can swim, and the possibility that the fugitive has found a boat does not enter into canine calculation. A good many dogs have been drowned in endeavoring to cross estuaries and other arms of the sea running into the Southern coasts. As for the Mississippi, a bloodhound can always swim it, if it be not more than bankful; that is to say not more than a mile or a mile and a half wide.

Strolling 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' companies occasionally have a couple of huge hounds to add unnecessary horror to the performance. These companies are not popular in the South, but they come through sometimes and are liberally patronized for the fun of it. Also the Southerner likes to sit around afterward and denounce the show and consider himself abused, which is a privilege. These theatrical dogs are sometimes bloodhounds all right, but they are not Southern bloodhounds. They belong to the English, or Continental, breed, the kind that Walter Scott knew. He speaks of 'The deep-mouthed bloodhound's mellow bay Resounding up the rocky way.' The English bloodhound not only bays, but also has a remarkably sonorous and beautiful voice. It opens on a cold trail, and keeps it up until the quarry is sighted or run down. It is of great size, with deep chest, powerful shoulders, massive head, drooping jaws and long ears, a sagacious and affectionate animal, courageous, not especially savage, and a good friend to man. This is the old sluthound or slouthound, a name taken from a slenth or slot or trail of the deer. Subsequently the dog was named bloodhound as a matter of diet, but because having once found the bloodspot of a wounded animal, it follows with great stanchness. The Southern bloodhound of pure breed does not bay on the trail. When running, its note is confined to a querulous whine, and this is heard only when the nose is temporarily at fault. When casting about for a doubled trail or a leap aside, it whimpers a good deal like a whipped puppy. When it sights the chase however it breaks into a deep, hoarse bark that has little music in it, yet has a strong effect on the nerves. It is raucous and utterly savage.

The bloodhound of the South is a descendant of the Cuban bloodhound and differs materially from its English cousin. It is generally larger, it is fiercer and it is swifter. There is more of a bulldog cut above the head. Undoubtedly back in the past the race was crossed with the bulldog. The bull strain is evidenced also in its manner of taking hold. It is not a snapping dog, but grips and hangs on steadily to the selected spot and can be disengaged only by compressing its nostrils and shutting off its

breath. The first Cuban bloodhounds in this country were imported more than 200 years ago by Louisiana planters. They were owned by every man who owned negroes and were used liberally. Slaves were cheaper then than afterward and it did not much matter pecuniarily if the dog's hold on the throat were broken by tearing out the flesh and tendons. The planting don of 1700 had the Spanish streak of cruelty intensified by a semi-wild life and the transplantation to the New World of feudal customs and despoticisms. He existed baronially and his wife, his sons, his daughters and his poor kin were as much his chattels as the blacks. He regarded the African merely as animals of a different species and not individually worth so much as the dogs. It was often the case that the fugitive slave did not live after his capture. If the dogs caught him on the ground, which was seldom they killed him before the riders could be in at the death. If he gained a tree his olive-skinned masters shot him out as an example to the others. The Cuban hound then coast a good deal of money and was well treated. Old bills of sale in the Court Houses of Louisiana record the purchase of these animals. Sometimes they brought as much as \$1,000 a pair.

Eventually the breed spread all through the South, though the dog was not used as man hunters in the upper tier of the Southern States. It is to be doubted if a bloodhound was ever laid on the trail of a negro slave in Virginia, North Carolina or Maryland. The planters of this century, however, as a matter of course protected their slaves from attack by the animal. The dog had become much cheaper while the negroes had risen enormously in value. I did not pay to have a \$1000 negro chewed up by a \$50 dog, humane consideration aside, and among the old planters there was much humanity in the treatment of their dependants. Furthermore, they had the property pride their possessions. They valued a fine negro, as nowadays they value a fine horse, thought him a better negro than anybody else's negro, boasted of his fine points and beliberally on his capacities. Generally when a slave ran away it was an easy matter to preserve him from the fangs of the trailing brutes. Invariably he made for the swamp at the back of the plantation. It contained many streams and lagoons that aided him in throwing dogs off the scent. If the worst came to the worst, he could always climb a tree. There is no doubt that the ancient anecdote of the coon which remarked to the man with the gun, 'Don't shoot, mister, I'm coming down,' had its origin in some runaway hand perched in a cypress and glairing down with frightened eyes at his irate master but preserving always the negro's sense of humor. Indeed this story is venerated and loved in every quarter, and is always good for a laugh.

It stands to reason that the negroes hated the dogs as their bitterest enemies and feared them. The African when left to himself is a good deal of a botanist in a crude way and may be trusted to find any poison that lurks in strange plants. The old slaves had poisons that produced madness and poisons that produced permanent or temporary paralysis and poisons that produced death. The secrets of many of them have lapsed with the death of their possessors. In the southern part of this State to-day are several voodoo women who as toxicologists know more than is written in the books. When a bloodhound died suddenly the master knew what ailed him, but as he could not identify the guilty negro little was ever done about it. The only thing possible to him was to guard the animals sedulously, and this was done. The most trusty slave was made their keeper and was held responsible for their health. When one of them came to a mysterious end the keeper was severely beaten, but this did not bring the dog back.

There were other negroes of a more daring temperament who sometimes ran away merely to match their wits against the wits of the dogs, and these duels were often memorable. Just as certain dogs are now famed for the stanchness, intelligence and nose, so certain men are remembered for their courage, skill and steadfastness displayed in dodging or outfooting them. There are instances of negroes going forty hours without a moment's pause, and finally beating the pack back to the quarters. Of course they were whipped as soon as found, but that did not trouble them any. They had their fun.

On Belle Isle plantation in the lower

part of this parish years ago lived a slave called Big Matt. He was a self-taught carpenter, and a good one, and did all the woodwork about the place, the making of wheels and repairing of wagons included. He was as black as jet, jovial and beloved of the children at the big house, but with a wild streak in him that demanded just so much liberty every six months. Holidays were not given to slaves when they thought they needed him, and Big Matt knew this as well as he knew anything, but he took his. When the fit seized him, he disappeared. At the end of three weeks his longing for savagery was satisfied. He came back then, sheepishly, quietly took his whipping, listened to the scoldings of his wife and went back to work. It was hard for a reasonable man to blame him. He was but one remove from the primeval forest fastnesses of equatorial Africa. For ages his ancestors had ranged free as the lion and leopard in the hunting grounds. It was not difficult to imagine Big Matt stripped to a bark breechclout, his powerful limbs shining with palm oil, the bone ring of the warrior plaited into his hair and in his brawny hand a spear. His father used to say that he had been a prince in his own country. This father spoke little English and to the day of his death was feared by the over-seers. Big Matt got gentleness from his mother, who was a Zanzibar woman and a house servant; nevertheless the roving blood was in him and would not out. He was a mystery to many, because he was never captured, though pursued with vigor. It being necessary to maintain discipline at all hazards, the best dogs were put behind him, but always his trail ended in the swamp at a point three-quarters of a mile from the furthest cultivated land. The dogs faulted there suddenly and absolutely cast about for hours in every direction, but could never recover the scent. His master questioned the giant negro many times, but could get no satisfactory answer. Big Matt had an unvarying reply: 'W'en I gits dar, he would say with a laugh as rich and true as the big string of a bass viol. 'I jies' melts dat's w'at I does. Den I clects me'sel' tergedder fuder on.'

He ran away many times and was whipped many times. His periodicals came to be recognized thing. They were always followed by the fruitless chase and the return of the weary and disgusted planters and dogs. Then there would come the whipping of the prodigal and his black wife's oburgations, and the suppressed but intense admiration of the other slaves, and the next morning the mellow voice would be rolling out from the carpenter shop without a note of care in it.

'Yes, sub,' his owner, Col. Sallis, would say to a neighbor crouching in the mint stood dark green in the tall glasses and the spoons tinkled on the rims; 'yes, sub, he's gone ag'in. Left yestiddy right after sundown, I s'pose. Dogs followed true as a hair to the place near whur I killed th' big buck and then went whimperin' round like childun. I believe they were afraid, sub, actually afraid. He'll be back in three weeks, I reckon, ragged an' dirty an' hungry; tired o' livin' on lizards an' birds. W'at am I goin' to do? I can tie up the wuthless black reekil sub, and strip his wuthless black hide off his wuthless black carkies, and it'll do no good. Nobody'll buy him and I'll be pestered with him till he dies.' Col. Sallis was not sincere in this. He would not have taken \$2,000 for Matt as his neighbors knew.

The time came when Big Matt forced his way into the innermost chamber of his owner's heart and abode therein, black as he was, for many a day. It came about in this way: 'Pidgy' was 3 years old, the newest child in the big house and its tyrannous mistress. Her father was rather an old man, and as it is not frequent with the old men so blessed, he belonged to her body and soul. It is said that the Colonel would arise often in the night and tiptoe to her cot and look down upon her sleeping. All the other fruits of his union with Miss Ida, as the slaves called their mistress were as dross beside this youngster. Pidgy had been told to keep away from the quarters, and consequently went there as often as she could escape surveillance. She was in search of folklore tales and sweet potatoes roasted in the ashes, and always found them. Aunt Mandy, whom she favored on the day in question, left her alone for a little space to gossip with a neighbor. The cabin in some way caught fire and the flames spread merrily. Aunt Mandy jumped excitedly up and down and screamed. Now and then a tiny cry came from the wee one inside, as she groped blindly for the door. The interior of the cabin was a flashing red when Big Matt came bounding from the carpenter shop with a speed of a buck and the courage of an army of chieftains. He hurried his huge form through the door from which the black smoke poured and reappeared in an instant, bearing Pidgy in his arms. She has a slight red scar upon her forehead to this day. The slave was burned about the legs and body and Miss Ida nursed him. When he got out of bed he was formerly manumitted. The Colonel called him a 'wuthless reekil' from force of habit, but his hand trembled as he gave him the paper which recited that he was a free man and told the reason why.

This son of an equatorial kingling did not know what to do with his liberty. He resumed work in the carpenter shop for hire. When his period of wandering came

around he ran away. Nobody followed him. He did not have to dodge possible witnesses of his flight. He did not have to fool any dogs. He melted and collected himself together again, but there was no reason for it. There was no thrill in it. All of the old zest was gone from life. If he felt himself tempted to steal out from the swamp and beg for food, it was given to him freely. If, creeping along the edge of the woods, he was detected by one of the fiend hands, the fellow called him 'Fool Matt' and laughed at him. At the end of a week he came in. He was not whipped nor asked where he had been. His wife, it is true, termed him a 'black ruffian' and refused to give him dinner, but she came around in time. Distinctly freedom was a failure. The next day he went to his former master and volunteered to clear up the mystery of his disappearance. He took the curious planter to the point where his trails had ended and showed him a massive rattan vine depending from the limb of a live oak. It hung thirty feet out from the trunk and its end swung a clear twelve feet from the ground, so high, in fact, that not a pursuer had ever noticed it. 'Big Matt' was six feet four inches in his bare feet. The great African ran ten yards, sprang into the air, clutched the vine and clambered up it hand over hand as rapidly as any sailor. He leaped from the tree into another of its kind and then into a hickory. For a quarter of a mile, forty feet above the ground, with all the sureness and almost the speed of a monkey, he made his way. The limbs swayed far down under his weight, but they did not break, being green and tough all of them. Reaching the end of his aerial journey, he dropped into a wide, shallow bayou, ran down it a half mile and emerged upon its further bank. The mystery was a mystery no longer. He explained that when a slave, always before leaping to his vine, he anointed his bare soles with oil from the nut of the sweet gum. This, he said, would blunt the nose of any dog. It was merely an additional precaution.

THE STRENGTH OF TEN.

He was Wonderfully Strong and Lifted Very Great Weights.

William Morris, craftsman, poet and socialist, was very little of a milkop, in youth or in manhood. Like Sir Galahad, 'his strength was as the strength of ten;' not altogether, it would seem, because of his purity of heart, although he was honest, manly and generous, for his biographer frankly admits that he had a violent temper. Indeed, some of the stories told of his physical strength recall Bret Harte's hero, Gay Heavystone, and the snuff-bit which, in one of his strange freaks, he wore in his mouth to curb his occasional ferocity.

In his youth Morris, as one of his school-fellows describes him, was a thick-set, strong-looking boy, with a high color and black, curly hair. He was good-natured and kind, but had a fearful temper. At the game of single-stick, of which he was very fond, his opponent had to be guarded against Morris' impetuous rushes by a table placed between the two combatants. While at Oxford he had a habit of beating his own head, dealing himself vigorous blows 'to take it out of himself.'

At dinner one evening, Val Prinsep, the English artist, said something which, whether so intended or not, offended Morris. Everybody expected an outburst of fury. But by a prodigious effort of self-control, Morris swallowed his anger, and only bit his fork,—of the common four-pronged, fiddle-pattern kind,—which was crushed and twisted almost beyond recognition.

At one period of his life Morris was so singularly placid as to provoke comment. 'I grieve to say,' wrote one of his friends, 'that he has kicked only one panel out of the door for this twelve-month past.'

He was a model employer, but in any case his workman would have respected and admired one whose language was so forcible and copious when things were not going so his mind. Once he hurled a fifteen century folio, which in ordinary circumstances he would not have allowed any one but himself to touch, at the head of an offending workman. On other occasions he was known to drive his head against a wall so as to make a deep dent in the plaster, and to bite almost through the woodwork of a window-frame.

He could lift enormous weights by his teeth with apparent ease. Once, when describing how he had seen passengers staggering off a channel steamer loaded with luggage, he illustrated his point to the amusement and horror of his audience by getting a chair under his arm and then stooping and lifting the coal-scuttle in his teeth.

Much of his strength resided in his hair. This he always wore long partly as a sign of his artistic profession, partly because he could not be bothered to have it trimmed. It remained through life of extraordinary beauty, very thick, fine and strong with a beautiful curl that made it look like exquisitely wrought metal. It was so strong that he used to amuse his children by letting them take hold of it and lifting them by it off the ground.