

MR. BONES AND MR. LEONARD

W. G. PRENTICE*

IF a gentleman is one who is gentle and at the same time very much of a man, then my brother Leonard deserved that title. Leonard could be strict and firm enough, but to those deserving gentleness, especially women, children, and dogs, he was the gentlest person I have ever known.

Some years ago we got a small dog and named him Mr. Bones. Leonard had a way with dogs; I guess it was love at first sight. Every time Leonard went on a business trip, Mr. Bones wanted to go along. Leonard would say, "Just wait, Mr. Bones; I'll be back and will take you with me next time."

Leonard would be gone a week sometimes, but patiently Mr. Bones would wait because he knew what "next time" meant. When Leonard returned he would say, "Well, Mr. Bones, you did wait, didn't you? Come on, then. This is 'next time'." Off they would go on the long hike for which Mr. Bones had been living.

When Leonard was home, Mr. Bones would go upstairs every evening after dinner, bring Leonard's slippers down, and put them on the floor before Leonard's favorite chair. Mr. Bones would lie there until bedtime, with his chin across Leonard's foot.

One summer Leonard became very ill. On his last day he said to me, "The dog is going to miss me. Let him in here to me." Mr. Bones came in and looked at Leonard with anxious eyes. Leonard said, "You just wait, Mr. Bones; I'll be back and take you with me next time."

Mr. Bones waited cheerfully. Leonard, it was true, was staying away much longer than usual, but he always kept his promise with a dog. . .

Five years had passed. My mother and I were reading in the living room one evening, and the house was very quiet. All of a sudden, on the floor by my mother's chair, Mr. Bones' old tail went thump, thump, thump. You know how dogs hear things we human beings cannot. We listened, but no footsteps sounded on the walk.

Thump, thump again—and then, a bit stiffly, being full of years, Mr. Bones got up and left the room. A minute later he returned with Leonard's slippers and put them down in front of Leonard's chair, laid his chin across them, and immediately went to sleep again.

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Maybe the glow of memories at the sight of Leonard's slippers in their old place made me feel it, but the whole room warmed with kindness. "Leonard was the gentlest man," said Mother. There we let Mr. Bones remain for the night.

And there he was next morning, exactly as we had left him—his head between his paws, and his chin across the slippers. Mr. Bones was through waiting. Stretching ahead of him, no end, splendid with comradeship, he had seen a long and joyous hike.
