

## THE CURATE'S WONDER DOG

*Following his nose towards the founder of the Rose Show, **Derek Barnard** relates an amusing story of Dean Reynolds Hole, Dean of Rochester 1887-1904, and a remarkable canine performer.*

This year I read again the book of the letters of Samuel Reynolds Hole who was Dean of Rochester from 1887 to 1904. He was noted, not only for founding The Royal National Rose Society but also for the excellence of his sermons, lectures and after dinner speeches, for which he used no notes. I looked to see if there was a story to be extracted from 1897 and indeed there was.

In that, his 78th year, he spoke at the Church Conference in Nottingham. *The Times* reported that the speech was performed 'with his usual felicity, and combined sound wisdom with shrewd humour and amusing anecdote.'

He had told the story of a young curate who was asked to preach in a strange parish while the vicar was away. The sermon he delivered was very short and when asked by the churchwarden in the vestry after the service why it was so brief, the curate explained that a puppy at his lodgings had eaten half of his notes. Whereupon the churchwarden said that he would be obliged if the curate could get their vicar one of the same breed.

Obviously knowing of the Dean's sense of fun, a gentleman wrote asking if he knew what had happened to the dog who ate the sermon. The Dean replied:

Dear Sir,

You will be pleased to hear that when the dog had inwardly digested the sermon which he had torn, he turned over a new leaf. He had been sullen and morose, he became a very jolly dog. He had been selfish and exclusive in his manger, he generously gave it up to an aged poodle. He had been noisy and vulgar, he became a quiet, gentlemanly dog, he never growled again; and when he was bitten he always requested the cur who had torn his flesh to be so good, as a particular favour, to bite him again.

He has established a Reformatory in the Isle of Dogs, for perverse puppies, and an Infirmary for Mangy Mastiffs at Houndsditch. He has won 26 medals from the Humane Society for rescuing children who have fallen into canals. He spends six days of the week in conducting his brothers and sisters, who have lost their ways, to the Dogs Home, and it is a touching sight to see him leading the blind to church from morning to night on Sundays.

Faithfully yours

Reynolds Hole.

According to the American press, he told this story in Chicago when lecturing there to raise funds for cathedral repairs. Several men asked him if some descendants of that

dog could not be got for their city but the Dean told them that England needed a monopoly. Of course, any regular attender who has sat through many an elongated sermon will know that any religious establishment, whatever denomination, would do well to obtain one of these animals.



**Family scene at the Deanery;**

**Seated: Dean Hole and Mrs Caroline Hole with Bridget and John.**

**Standing: Hugh and Geraldine Hole. (circa 1894)**