



TWINK, *the* Tail Wagger!

A Delightful Nature Story by Clive R. Fenn

TWINK was the tinker's dog and of no particular breed. You would pass him by as a mongrel with a terrier touch about him, but, mixed as might be his ancestry, in sagacity he was second to none.

The animal had got the eye of knowledge and alertness. See him asleep by the side of Timmins', his owner's, little caravan, lying in the deep shade by the wayside some summer afternoon. You would say he slept, but not so. One eye was on the qui vive. There would have been short work with the clothing of any misguided tramp who tried to rob the tinker's go-cart of its pots and pans.

Up and down the country they went, Timmins, the repairer of leaky tea kettles and frying pans, and Twink, the faithful dog.

The tinker had a great respect for the dog. The latter liked the tinker well enough in his way, but knew the fellow's limitations. Where Twink would have barked defiance at some mean customer who complained of the workmanship of a mend, simply to

get the price down, Timmins took it all as meekly as a lamb.

There were lots of things of which the tinker was afraid. Twink was scared of nothing.

There were other points of difference, but, maybe, it is not needful to deal with these, apart from the tinker's love of peace at almost any price, whereas Twink was always keen as mustard on a fight. Many a mill he had been in with dogs of superior fighting weight. Twink was a hardy fellow who had lived a spartan life. Of course, he shared things with Timmins, but the tinker lived poorly, for he was a poor helpless sort of man.

It was some considerable pleasure to Twink when on a certain lowering afternoon in midsummer the threatening storm broke. The tinker trembled for the lightning, fearing that the next flash would have him for sure. Twink splashed joyfully in the sloshing rain, which fell in big white crowns on the surface of a canal near which they had been camped.

Timmins started pushing his little cart down the path, making like mad for a culvert, where he hoped to get refuge.

There was no shelter there! The waters of the canal were rising fast and the track was as wet as could be. Twink defied the lightning like Ajax of old, barking at the flashes furiously, while his master cowered, and, with the perspiration pouring down his face, pushed his cart towards a grey pile of buildings which loomed up a hundred yards away.

The place looked forbidding, but any port in a storm, and so Timmins felt as he gained the covered courtyard of the house.

What a ruin! There were broken windows, doors which had broken adrift from their hinges; there were dim passages right and left, and the tinker shivered at the dismal loneliness. Still, he was out of the rain!

"Better than nothing, eh, Twink?" he muttered.

The dog barked, shook off the wet from his coat, and then stood, ears cocked, listening to something. The next second he was off down one of the dusky passages as if possessed.

"Here, Twink, come back!" shouted the tinker.

But Twink turned a deaf ear. He knew what it was he had heard—not the quavering voice of his companion, who was getting the little brazier alight so as to make a cup of tea, but the sound of rats, and the scuffling of rats was like music to the dog. He felt in his element at last, for the old Moat House where he and Timmins had found sanctuary from the blinding storm was the headquarters of whole tribes of rodents.

Twink barked gleefully as he made his first catch, a big bull rat which had been trotting along by the rotting

wainscoting of a corridor. The dog snapped and the rat's squeal ended suddenly, for Twink had a short way with rodents. The first kill! The bag promised to be big, and from far away Timmins heard triumphant barking as the dog charged on into the interior of the mansion.

The place had been derelict for years, and Twink felt that he had been missing much grand sport through not having looked in before. The dog had no time to think of his master, who had made himself a cup of tea and was trying to feel less lonely and miserable as he crouched by his little coke fire. For Twink, the first business was rats. But rats did not represent the whole population.

It was the fate of the tinker to discover that, for just as he was brewing himself a second cup of tea, a quick step close behind him followed by a growl of anger, caused him to start to his feet.

Three burly-looking roughs glared at him savagely. The tinker wanted to flee, but his legs gave way. He was not fitted for fight or flight.

"Spying on us, eh?" rumbled the leader of the newcomers, as he shook the tinker.

"I didn't! I wasn't! I never!" stammered Timmins.

"Oh, yeah?" jeered Jinks, the rough-looking fellow who had grabbed the tinker. "You're not squatting here over your tea for the police, to find out what we are doing? Oh, dear me, no!"

The speaker gave the little equipment a kick. Over it went, brazier, tea-kettle and all. Then, despite his protests, Timmins was hustled down a long corridor, where there was less evidence of decay.

No use his declaring that he knew nothing of the doings of the gang who

had put the Moat House to good service, as far as they were concerned. The deserted place was ideal as a store-place for stolen goods, and Jinks was a "fence" in a large way of business, while the canal with its barges—from which the droves of rats found much good food—was the means of access.

Timmins was roughly handled and slung into a dark and gloomy cellar. The key was turned in the lock and thrown away. The tinker felt his last hour had come, for Twink had vanished.

From a distance the thieves heard excited barking, but paid it scant attention. Leaving the tinker in tears, they hurried up with preparations for their departure in their motor-boat on the canal, with all their swag. They were smart fellows, always

prepared for emergencies, and all might have gone well for them, though not for the tinker, had it not been for Twink. He had just accounted for Rotan, a veritable king of rats, who had shown plenty of fight and had left his marks on the dog. Twink had won in the end.

But even the dog felt one could have enough rat killing for one day. Moreover he was a good deal the worse for wear, and one eye was closed for temporary repairs.

It was then that it flashed through his canine mind that there was a tinker named Timmins who drank tea and mended pots and things.

The trifling fact had entirely escaped his memory!

But where was this Timmins? Twink dashed back the way he had come, through the rambling old ram-

The scuffling of rats was like music to Twink's ears. The old Moat House was the headquarters of scores of rats, and Twink barked gleefully as he made his first catch—a big bull rat.



shackle place, in search of his master. But Timmins had gone. Then, suddenly, from somewhere below Twink heard a sound. His ears cocked up alertly. He knew that sound. It was the tinker sobbing. Not the faintest doubt! Twink had heard that sob before. It was when an angry housewife had whacked the tinker over the head with a saucepan which had been badly mended. Twink traced the sound to the locked cellar and barked a cheerio! The tinker whimpered. The dog threw himself at the door again and again, scratching at it with energetic paws, but it was no use. Then he darted off, barking, to raise all the sleeping echoes. He streaked out of the ruin and across the moat, gaining a road. He wanted to tell the world that something had happened to his master while he (Twink) was ratting, but the only sign of the world he met consisted of a couple of policemen.

Then Twink remembered that policemen were useful folk. He barked lustily.

"Hallo, Twink!" said one of the officers, stooping to pat the dog. He knew Twink, for he had often had a chat with the tinker.

Twink barked, and ran backwards and forwards excitedly.

That something was much amiss was evident, for the dog was covered with blood, while he kept on baying in the direction of the Moat House.

It was Twink who led the policemen to the place, and they were just in time to make the catch of the season, for Jinks and his two friends were just escaping by water. And shortly after Timmins saw the door of his cellar prison open. Outside stood more police, and Twink.

And actually when the officers, who had made their haul, started thanking the tinker for the part he had played, Timmins only blushed, and at most protested as if he knew that he really had done something worthy of note, whereas he had only cried.

As for Twink, he merely gave a short bark, half of scorn, half of understanding. So far as he was concerned, anybody who liked could take any credit that happened to be going. It was quite enough for him to make a note of the fact that the Moat House and its myriad rats would offer endless sport whenever he and Timmins came that way. After all, rats were rats.

