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*'The one absolutely unselfish
friend that man can have... the one that
never deserts him and the
one that never proves ungrateful
or treacherous is his dog...'*

George Graham Vest

IT'S A DOG'S LIFE

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a human in possession of a good home must be in want of a dog... especially because of the huge prize money available from entering them into TV talent shows.

However, in a world where fame lasts no longer than 15 seconds (a relatively long time in dog years), it may come as a surprise to discover that the domestic dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*) and mankind (*Homo sapiens*) have been working together for over 15,000 years, making it one of the most successful inter-species relationships in history. The irony is not lost on the astute dog bluffer who will have spotted that, when many of man's own relationships break down, more effort is put into fighting for custody of the dog than anything else except the children (and sometimes even them).

The most famous description of the bond between man and dog can be attributed to an American politician and lawyer, George Graham Vest. In September 1870, he represented a dog owner whose faithful four-legged companion, Old Drum, had been shot dead by a local sheep

farmer. This farmer had publicly declared that any dog found on his property would be shot. Old Drum's owner sued for damages, and, in a classic courtroom drama, Vest turned to the jury and said: 'The one absolutely unselfish friend that man can have ... the one that never deserts him and the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous is his dog...He guards the sleep of his pauper master as if he were a prince. When all other friends desert, he remains.'

Vest's heartfelt words pulled the jury's heartstrings so strongly that he won the case, and Old Drum's owner was awarded \$500 compensation (so the story goes), 10 times the maximum limit for damages at that time. Since that day, dogs have been known as man's best friend.

Many millions of dog owners since have happily invited their canine friends into their homes, spending hours training them to sit, stay, and roll over dead when they shout 'bang' at them. You will of course realise that in these dog-friendly households it is the dog who has successfully trained the family to run around after him or her, not the other way around.

But dogs are social animals. Leave them home alone for too long and they might be tempted to trash the place. Alternatively, they'll simply leave something unpleasant in your bed, chew the chair legs on your dining furniture, and annoy the neighbours with their incessant howling. Dog-behaviour specialists refer to this as 'separation anxiety'. Dog owners refer to it as bloody annoying. How else are they supposed to pay the vet bills if they don't go out to work? It's a fair enough point, but if they can't make arrangements for the dog to be walked in their absence, they might wonder about the wisdom of having a dog in