

# All Things Wise and Wonderful

*AUTHOR OF ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL*

JAMES HERRIOT



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# All Things Wise and Wonderful

James Herriot



*To my dogs,  
Hector and Dan  
Faithful companions of the daily round*

All things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful,  
The Lord God made them all.  
*Cecil Frances Alexander 1818-1895*

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# CHAPTER 1

“MOVE!” BAWLED THE DRILL corporal. “Come on, speed it up!” He sprinted effortlessly to the rear of the gasping, panting column of men and urged us on from there.

I was somewhere in the middle, jog-trotting laboriously with the rest and wondering how much longer I could keep going. And as my ribs heaved agonisingly and my leg muscles protested I tried to work out just how many miles we had run.

I had suspected nothing when we lined up outside our billets. We weren't clad in PT kit but in woollen pullovers and regulation slacks and it seemed unlikely that anything violent was imminent. The corporal, too, a cheerful little cockney, appeared to regard us as his brothers. He had a kind face.

“Awright lads,” he had cried, smiling over the fifty new airmen. “We're just going to trot round to the park, so follow me. Le-eft turn! At the double, qui-ick march! 'eft-ight 'eft-ight 'eft-ight!”

That had been a long, long time ago and we were still reeling through the London streets with never a sign of a park anywhere. The thought hammered in my brain that I had been under the impression that I was fit. A country vet, especially in the Yorkshire Dales, never had the chance to get out of condition; he was always on the move, wrestling with the big animals, walking for miles between the fell-side barns; he was hard and tough. That's what I thought.

But now other reflections began to creep in. My few months of married life with Helen had been so much lotus eating. She was too good a cook and I was too faithful a disciple of her art. Just lounging by our bed-sitter's fireside was the sweetest of all occupations. I had tried to ignore the disappearance of my abdominal muscles, the sagging of my pectorals, but it was all coming home to me now.

“It's not far now, lads,” the corporal chirped from the rear, but he struck no responsive chords in the toiling group. He had said it several times before and we had stopped believing him.

But this time it seemed he really meant it, because as we turned into yet another street I could see iron railings and trees at the far end. The relief was inexpressible. I would just about have the strength to make it through the gates—to the rest and smoke which I badly needed because my legs were beginning to seize up.

We passed under an arch of branches which still bore a few autumn leaves and stopped as one man, but the corporal was waving us on.

“Come on, lads, round the track!” he shouted and pointed to a broad earthen path which circled the park.

We stared at him. He couldn't be serious! A storm of protest broke out.

“Aw no, corp ...!” “Have a heart, corp ...!”

The smile vanished from the little man's face. “Get movin', I said! Faster, faster ... one-two, one-two.”

As I stumbled forward over the black earth, between borders of sooty rhododendrons and tired grass, I just couldn't believe it. It was all too sudden. Three days ago I was in Darrowby and half of me was still back there, back with Helen. And another part was still looking out of the rear window of the taxi at the green hills receding behind the tiled roofs into the morning sunshine; still standing in the corridor of the train as the flat terrain of southern England slid past and a great weight built up steadily in my chest.

My first introduction to the RAF was at Lord's cricket ground. Masses of forms to fill, medicals, then the issue of an enormous pile of kit. I was billeted in a block of flats in St. John's Wood—luxurious before the lush fittings had been removed. But they couldn't take away the heavy bathroom ware and one of our blessings was the unlimited hot water gushing at our touch into the expensive surroundings.

After that first crowded day I retired to one of those green-tiled sanctuaries and lathered myself with a new bar of a famous toilet soap which Helen had put in my bag. I have never been able to use that soap since. Scents are too evocative and the merest whiff jerks me back to that first night away from my wife, and to the feeling I had then. It was a dull, empty ache which never really went away.

On the second day we marched endlessly; lectures, meals, inoculations. I was used to syringes but the very sight of them was too much for many of my friends. Especially when the doctor took the blood samples; one look at the dark fluid flowing from their veins and the young men toppled quietly from their chairs, often four or five in a row while the orderlies, grinning cheerfully, bore them away.

We ate in the London Zoo and our meals were made interesting by the chatter of monkeys and the roar of lions in the background. But in between it was march, march, march, with our new boots giving us hell.

And on this third day the whole thing was still a blur. We had been wakened as on my first morning by the hideous 6 a.m. clattering of dustbin lids; I hadn't really expected the silvery tones of a bugle but I found this totally unromantic din intolerable. However, at the moment my only concern was that we had completed the

circuit of the park. The gates were only a few yards ahead and I staggered up to them and halted among my groaning comrades.

“Round again, lads!” the corporal yelled, and as we stared at him aghast he smiled affectionately. “You think this is tough? Wait till they get hold of you at ITW. I’m just kinda breakin’ you urgently. You’ll thank me for this later. Right, at the double! One-two, one two!”

Bitter thoughts assailed me as I lurched forward once more. Another round of the park would kill me—there was not a shadow of a doubt about that. You left a loving wife and a happy home to serve king and country and this was how they treated you. It wasn’t fair.

The night before I had dreamed of Darrowby. I was back in old Mr. Dakin’s cow byre. The farmer’s patient eyes in the long, drooping-moustached face looked down at me from his stooping height.

“It looks as though it’s over wi’ awd Blossom, then,” he said, and rested his hand briefly on the old cow’s back. It was an enormous, work-swollen hand. Mr. Dakin’s gaunt frame carried little flesh but the grossly thickened fingers bore testimony to a life of toil.

I dried off the needle and dropped it into the metal box where I carried my suture materials, scalpels and blades. “Well, it’s up to you of course, Mr. Dakin, but this is the third time I’ve had to stitch her teats and I’m afraid it’s going to keep on happening.”

“Aye, it’s just the shape she is.” The farmer bent and examined the row of knots along the four-inch scar. “By gaw, you wouldn’t believe it could mek such a mess—just another cow standin’ on it.”

“A cow’s hoof is sharp,” I said. “It’s nearly like a knife coming down.”

That was the worst of very old cows. Their udders dropped and their teats became larger and more pendulous so that when they lay down in their stalls the vital milk-producing organ was pushed away to one side into the path of the neighbouring animals. If it wasn’t Mabel on the right standing on it, it was Buttercup on the other side.

There were only six cows in the little cobbled byre with its low roof and wooden partitions and they all had names. You don’t find cows with names any more and there aren’t any farmers like Mr. Dakin, who somehow scratched a living from a herd of six milkers plus a few calves, pigs and hens.

“Aye, well,” he said. “Ah reckon t’awd lass doesn’t owe me anythin’. Ah remember the night she was born, twelve years ago. She was out of awd Daisy and ah

carried her out of this very byre on a sack and the snow was comin' down hard. Sin' then ah wouldn't like to count how many thousand gallons o' milk she's turned out—she's still givin' four a day. Naw, she doesn't owe me a thing."

As if she knew she was the topic of conversation Blossom turned her head and looked at him. She was the classical picture of an ancient bovine; as fleshless as her owner, with jutting pelvic bones, splayed, overgrown feet and horns with a multitude of rings along their curving length. Beneath her, the udder, once high and tight, drooped forlornly almost to the floor.

She resembled her owner, too, in her quiet, patient demeanour. I had infiltrated her teat with a local anaesthetic before stitching but I don't think she would have moved if I hadn't used any. Stitching teats puts a vet in the ideal position to be kicked, with his head low down in front of the hind feet, but there was no danger with Blossom. She had never kicked anybody in her life.

Mr. Dakin blew out his cheeks. "Well, there's nowt else for it. She'll have to go. I'll tell Jack Dodson to pick 'er up for the fatstock market on Thursday. She'll be a bit tough for eatin' but ah reckon she'll make a few steak pies."

He was trying to joke but he was unable to smile as he looked at the old cow. Behind him, beyond the open door, the green hillside ran down to the river and the spring sunshine touched the broad sweep of the shallows with a million dancing lights. A beach of bleached stones gleamed bone-white against the long stretch of grassy bank which rolled up to the pastures lining the valley floor.

I had often felt that this smallholding would be an ideal place to live; only a mile outside Darrowby, but secluded, and with this heart-lifting vista of river and fell. I remarked on this once to Mr. Dakin and the old man turned to me with a wry smile.

"Aye, but the view's not very sustainin'," he said.

It happened that I was called back to the farm on the following Thursday to "cleanse" a cow and was in the byre when Dodson the drover called to pick up Blossom. He had collected a group of fat bullocks and cows from other farms and they stood, watched by one of his men, on the road high above.

"Nah then, Mr. Dakin," he cried as he bustled in. "It's easy to see which one you want me to tek. It's that awd screw over there."

He pointed at Blossom, and in truth the unkind description seemed to fit the bony creature standing between her sleek neighbours.

The farmer did not reply for a moment, then he went up between the cows and gently rubbed Blossom's forehead. "Aye, this is the one, Jack." He hesitated, then

undid the chain round her neck. “Off ye go, awd lass,” he murmured, and the old animal turned and made her way placidly from the stall.

“Aye, come on with ye!” shouted the dealer, poking his stick against the cow’s rump.

“Doan’t hit ’er!” barked Mr. Dakin.

Dodson looked at him in surprise. “Ah never ’it ’em, you know that. Just send ’em on, like.”

“Ah knaw, ah knaw, Jack, but you won’t need your stick for this ’un. She’ll go wherever ye want—allus has done.”

Blossom confirmed his words as she ambled through the door and, at a gesture from the farmer, turned along the track.

The old man and I stood watching as the cow made her way unhurriedly up the hill, Jack Dodson in his long khaki smock sauntering behind her. As the path wound behind a clump of sparse trees man and beast disappeared but Mr. Dakin still gazed after them, listening to the clip-clop of the hooves on the hard ground.

When the sound died away he turned to me quickly. “Right, Mr. Herriot, we’ll get on wi’ our job, then. I’ll bring your hot watter.”

The farmer was silent as I soaped my arm and inserted it into the cow. If there is one thing more disagreeable than removing the bovine afterbirth it is watching somebody else doing it, and I always try to maintain a conversation as I grope around inside. But this time it was hard work. Mr. Dakin responded to my sallies on the weather, cricket and the price of milk with a series of grunts.

Holding the cow’s tail he leaned on the hairy back and, empty-eyed, blew smoke from the pipe which like most farmers at a cleansing he had prudently lit at the outset. And of course, since the going was heavy, it just would happen that the job took much longer than usual. Sometimes a placenta simply lifted out but I had to peel this one away from the cotyledons one by one, returning every few minutes to the hot water and antiseptic to re-soap my aching arms.

But at last it was finished. I pushed in a couple of pessaries, untied the sack from my middle and pulled my shirt over my head. The conversation had died and the silence was almost oppressive as we opened the byre door.

Mr. Dakin paused, his hand on the latch. “What’s that?” he said softly.

From somewhere on the hillside I could hear the clip-clop of a cow’s feet. There were two ways to the farm and the sound came from a narrow track which joined the main road half a mile beyond the other entrance. As we listened a cow rounded a

rocky outcrop and came towards us.

It was Blossom, moving at a brisk trot, great udder swinging, eyes fixed purposefully on the open door behind us.

“What the hangment ...?” Mr. Dakin burst out, but the old cow brushed past us and marched without hesitation into the stall which she had occupied for all those years. She sniffed enquiringly at the empty hay rack and looked round at her owner.

Mr. Dakin stared back at her. The eyes in the weathered face were expressionless but the smoke rose from his pipe in a series of rapid puffs.

Heavy boots clattered suddenly outside and Jack Dodson panted his way through the door.

“Oh, you’re there, ye awd beggar!” he gasped. “Ah thought I’d lost ye!”

He turned to the farmer. “By gaw, I’m sorry, Mr. Dakin. She must ’ave turned off at t’ top of your other path. Ah never saw her go.”

The farmer shrugged. “It’s awright, Jack. It’s not your fault, ah should’ve told ye.”

“That’s soon mended anyway.” The drover grinned and moved towards Blossom. “Come on, lass, let’s have ye out o’ there again.”

But he halted as Mr. Dakin held an arm in front of him.

There was a long silence as Dodson and I looked in surprise at the farmer who continued to gaze fixedly at the cow. There was a pathetic dignity about the old animal as she stood there against the mouldering timber of the partition, her eyes patient and undemanding. It was a dignity which triumphed over the unsightliness of the long upturned hooves, the fleshless ribs, the broken-down udder almost brushing the cobbles.

Then, still without speaking, Mr. Dakin moved unhurriedly between the cows and a faint chink of metal sounded as he fastened the chain around Blossom’s neck. Then he strolled to the end of the byre and returned with a forkful of hay which he tossed expertly into the rack.

This was what Blossom was waiting for. She jerked a mouthful from between the spars and began to chew with quiet satisfaction.

“What’s to do, Mr. Dakin?” the drover cried in bewilderment “They’re waiting for me at t’ mart!”

The farmer tapped out his pipe on the half door and began to fill it with black shag from a battered tin. “Ah’m sorry to waste your time, Jack, but you’ll have to go without ’er.”

“Without ’er ...? But ...?”

“Aye, ye’ll think I’m daft, but that’s how it is. T’awd lass has come ’ome and she’s stoppin’ ’ome.” He directed a look of flat finality at the drover.

Dodson nodded a couple of times then shuffled from the byre. Mr. Dakin followed and called after him.

“Ah’ll pay ye for your time, Jack. Put it down on ma bill.”

He returned, applied a match to his pipe and drew deeply.

“Mr. Herriot,” he said as the smoke rose around his ears, “do you ever feel when summat happens that it was meant to happen and that it was for t’best?”

“Yes, I do, Mr. Dakin. I often feel that.”

“Aye well, that’s how I felt when Blossom came down that hill.” He reached out and scratched the root of the cow’s tail. “She’s allus been a favourite and by gaw I’m glad she’s back.”

“But how about those teats? I’m willing to keep stitching them up, but ...”

“Nay, lad, ah’ve had an idea. Just came to me when you were tekkin’ away that cleansin’ and I thowt I was ower late.”

“An idea?”

“Aye.” The old man nodded and tamped down the tobacco with his thumb. “I can put two or three calves on to ’er instead of milkin’ ’er. The old stable is empty—she can live in there where there’s nobody to stand on ’er awd tits.”

I laughed. “You’re right, Mr. Dakin. She’d be safe in the stable and she’d suckle three calves easily. She could pay her way.”

“Well, as ah said, it’s matterless. After all them years she doesn’t owe me a thing.” A gentle smile spread over the seamed face. “Main thing is, she’s come ’ome.”

My eyes were shut most of the time now as I blundered round the park and when I opened them a red mist swirled. But it is incredible what the human frame will stand and I blinked in disbelief as the iron gates appeared once more under their arch of sooty branches.

I had survived the second lap but an ordinary rest would be inadequate now. This time I would have to lie down. I felt sick.

“Good lads!” the corporal called out, cheerful as ever. “You’re doin’ fine. Now we’re just going to ’ave a little hoppin’ on the spot.”

Incredulous wails rose from our demoralised band but the corporal was unabashed.

“Feet together now. Up! Up! Up! That’s no good, come on, get some height into

it! Up! Up!”

This was the final absurdity. My chest was a flaming cavern of agony. These people were supposed to be making us fit and instead they were doing irreparable damage to my heart and lungs.

“You’ll thank me for this later, lads. Take my word for it. GET YOURSELVES OFF THE GROUND. UP! UP!”

Through my pain I could see the corporal’s laughing face. The man was clearly a sadist. It was no good appealing to him.

And as, with the last of my strength, I launched myself into the air it came to me suddenly why I had dreamed about Blossom last night.

I wanted to go home, too.

## CHAPTER 2

THE FOG SWIRLED OVER the heads of the marching men; a London fog, thick, yellow, metallic on the tongue. I couldn't see the head of the column, only the swinging lantern carried by the leader.

This 6:30 a.m. walk to breakfast was just about the worst part of the day, when my morale was low and thoughts of home rose painfully.

We used to have fogs in Darrowby, but they were country fogs, different from this. One morning I drove out on my rounds with the headlights blazing against the grey curtain ahead, seeing nothing from my tight-shut box. But I was heading up the Dale, climbing steadily with the engine pulling against the rising ground, then quite suddenly the fog thinned to a shimmering silvery mist and was gone.

And there, above the pall, the sun was dazzling and the long green line of the fells rose before me, thrusting exultantly into a sky of summer blue.

Spellbound, I drove upwards into the bright splendour, staring through the windscreen as though I had never seen it all before; the bronze of the dead bracken spilling down the grassy flanks of the hills, the dark smudges of trees, the grey farmhouses and the endless pattern of walls creeping to the heather above.

I was in a rush as usual but I had to stop. I pulled up in a gateway, Sam jumped out and we went through into a field; and as the beagle scampered over the glittering turf I stood in the warm sunshine amid the melting frost and looked back at the dark damp blanket which blotted out the low country but left this jewelled world above it.

And, gulping the sweet air, I gazed about me gratefully at the clean green land where I worked and made my living.

I could have stayed there, wandering round, watching Sam exploring with waving tail, nosing into the shady corners where the sun had not reached and the ground was iron hard and the rime thick and crisp on the grass. But I had an appointment to keep, and no ordinary one—it was with a peer of the realm. Reluctantly I got back into the car.

I was due to start Lord Hulton's tuberculin test at 9:30 a.m. and as I drove round the back of the Elizabethan mansion to the farm buildings nearby I felt a pang of misgiving; there were no animals in sight. There was only a man in tattered blue dungarees hammering busily at a makeshift crush at the exit to the fold yard.

He turned round when he saw me and waved his hammer. As I approached I

looked wonderingly at the slight figure with the soft fairish hair falling over his brow, at the holed cardigan and muck-encrusted Wellingtons. You would have expected him to say, “Nah, then, Mr. Herriot how ista this morning’?”

But he didn’t, he said, “Herriot, my dear chap, I’m most frightfully sorry, but I’m very much afraid we’re not quite ready for you.” And he began to fumble with his tobacco pouch.

William George Henry Augustus, Eleventh Marquis of Hulton, always had a pipe in his mouth and he was invariably either filling it, cleaning it out with a metal reaming tool or trying to light it. I had never seen him actually smoking it. And at times of stress he attempted to do everything at once. He was obviously embarrassed at his lack of preparedness and when he saw me glance involuntarily at my watch he grew more agitated, pulling his pipe from his mouth and putting it back in again, tucking the hammer under his arm, rummaging in a large box of matches.

I gazed across to the rising ground beyond the farm buildings. Far off on the horizon I could make out tiny figures: galloping beasts, scurrying men; and faint sounds came down to me of barking dogs, irritated bellowings and shrill cries of “Haow, haow!” “Gerraway by!” “Siddown, dog!”

I sighed. It was the old story. Even the Yorkshire aristocracy seemed to share this carefree attitude to time.

His lordship clearly sensed my feelings because his discomfort increased.

“It’s too bad for me, old chap,” he said, spraying a few matchsticks around and dropping flakes of tobacco on the stone flags. “I did promise to be ready for nine thirty but those blasted animals just won’t cooperate.”

I managed a smile. “Oh never mind, Lord Hulton, they seem to be getting them down the hill now and I’m not in such a panic this morning, anyway.”

“Oh splendid, splendid!” He attempted to ignite a towering mound of dark flake which spluttered feebly then toppled over the edge of his pipe. “And come and see this! I’ve been rigging up a crush. We’ll drive them in here and we’ll really have ’em. Remember we had a spot of bother last time, what?”

I nodded. I did remember. Lord Hulton had only about thirty suckling cows but it had taken a three-hour rodeo to test them. I looked doubtfully at the rickety structure of planks and corrugated iron. It would be interesting to see how it coped with the moorland cattle.

I didn’t mean to rub it in, but again I glanced unthinkingly at my watch and the little man winced as though he had received a blow.

“Dammit!” he burst out “What are they doing over there? Tell you what, I’ll go and give them a hand!” Distractedly, he began to change hammer, pouch, pipe and matches from hand to hand, dropping them and picking them up, before finally deciding to put the hammer down and stuff the rest into his pockets. He went off at a steady trot and I thought as I had done so often that there couldn’t be many noblemen in England like him.

If I had been a marquis, I felt, I would still have been in bed or perhaps just parting the curtains and peering out to see what kind of day it was. But Lord Hulton worked all the time, just about as hard as any of his men. One morning I arrived to find him at the supremely mundane task of “plugging muck,” standing on a manure heap, hurling steaming forkfuls on to a cart. And he always dressed in rags. I suppose he must have had more orthodox items in his wardrobe but I never saw them. Even his tobacco was the great smoke of the ordinary farmer—Redbreast Flake.

My musings were interrupted by the thunder of hooves and wild cries; the Hulton herd was approaching. Within minutes the fold yard was filled with milling creatures, steam rising in rolling clouds from their bodies.

The marquis appeared round the corner of the building at a gallop.

“Right, Charlie!” he yelled. “Let the first one into the crush!”

Panting with anticipation he stood by the nailed boards as the men inside opened the yard gate. He didn’t have to wait long. A shaggy red monster catapulted from the interior, appeared briefly in the narrow passage then emerged at about fifty miles an hour from the other end with portions of his lordship’s creation dangling from its horns and neck. The rest of the herd pounded close behind.

“Stop them! Stop them!” screamed the little peer, but it was of no avail. A hairy torrent flooded through the opening and in no time at all the herd was legging it back to the high land in a wild stampede. The men followed them and within a few moments Lord Hulton and I were standing there just as before watching the tiny figures on the skyline, listening to the distant “Haow, haow!” “Gerraway by!”

“I say,” he murmured despondently. “It didn’t work terribly well, did it?”

But he was made of stern stuff. Seizing his hammer he began to bang away with undiminished enthusiasm and by the time the beasts returned the crush was rebuilt and a stout iron bar pushed across the front to prevent further break-outs.

It seemed to solve the problem because the first cow, confronted by the bar, stood quietly and I was able to clip the hair on her neck through an opening between the planks. Lord Hulton, in high good humour, settled down on an upturned oil drum with

my testing book on his knee.

“I’ll do the writing for you,” he cried. “Fire away, old chap!”

I poised my calipers. “Eight, eight.” He wrote it down and the next cow came in.

“Eight, eight,” I said, and he bowed his head again.

The third cow arrived: “Eight, eight.” And the fourth, “Eight, eight.”

His lordship looked up from the book and passed a weary hand across his forehead.

“Herriot, dear boy, can’t you vary it a bit? I’m beginning to lose interest.”

All went well until we saw the cow which had originally smashed the crush. She had sustained a slight scratch on her neck.

“I say, look at that!” cried the peer. “Will it be all right?”

“Oh yes, it’s nothing. Superficial.”

“Ah, good, but don’t you think we should have something to put on it? Some of that ...”

I waited for it. Lord Hulton was a devotee of May and Baker’s Propamidine Cream and used it for all minor cuts and grazes in his cattle. He loved the stuff. But unfortunately he couldn’t say “Propamidine.” In fact nobody on the entire establishment could say it except Charlie the farm foreman and he only thought he could say it. He called it “Propopamide” but his lordship had the utmost faith in him.

“Charlie!” he bawled. “Are you there, Charlie?”

The foreman appeared from the pack in the yard and touched his cap, “Yes, m’lord.”

“Charlie, that wonderful stuff we get from Mr. Herriot—you know, for cut teats and things, Pro ... Pero ... what the hell do you call it again?”

Charlie paused. It was one of his big moments. “Propopamide, m’lord.”

The marquis, intensely gratified, slapped the knee of his dungarees. “That’s it, Propopamide! Damned if I can get my tongue round it. Well done, Charlie!”

Charlie inclined his head modestly.

The whole test was a vast improvement on last time and we were finished within an hour and a half. There was just one tragedy. About halfway through, one of the cows dropped down dead with an attack of hypomagnesaemia, a condition which often plagues sucklers. It was a sudden, painless collapse and I had no chance to do anything.

Lord Hulton looked down at the animal which had just stopped breathing. “Do you think we could salvage her for meat if we bled her?”