

Jiff's Happy Family.

By HUNTER MURDOCK.

Illustrated by W. Wright.

I AM an animal painter, and in that capacity made the acquaintance of Anthony Jiff. It was in this wise: One day there came into my studio a short broad-shouldered young man, close-shaven, ruddy and tight trousered. He looked so "doggy" that I was not surprised when he extracted from a capacious coat-pocket a black and tan terrier not much larger than a rat.

"This," said he, introducing her, "is the champion toy terrier, Queen Mab, and I want you to oblige me by painting her."

"It strikes me," I replied, "that she has already painted herself. Look at her."

Directly upon being put down, the imp had jumped upon a chair where I had deposited my palette, upon which she was calmly sitting.

Well, I cleaned her up, and eventually painted her portrait so much to Jiff's satisfaction that he insisted upon paying me half as much again as I had asked. This led to a friendship, in the course of which I had the most curious experience of my life.

I should premise that my friend had been a clerk in the City until he came into a "bit of money," as he termed it, which enabled him to realise the dream of his life, and establish himself in a snug little place near Barnet, where he went in for dogs, "and so on." I did not at the time realise the full significance of the "so on." It was afterwards revealed to me.

"Come down to my place for a few days," said he one hot summer day. "You'll find plenty of models, and I'll introduce you to my happy family."

"I didn't know you were married," I replied.

"Neither am I," he rejoined with a twinkle in his eye, "and that's why it is a happy family."

More than this I could not get out of him, and piqued by curiosity, I ran down to Barnet the next day, and was there met by Jiff in a natty dog-cart followed by a splendid mastiff.

"Glad to see you," he exclaimed, jumping down. "Allow me to introduce you to Bella (champion at the Crystal Palace Show)." This in a whisper, as too sacred a piece of information for ears profane. "Bella, friend of mine."

Upon this the creature gravely held out her paw, which I duly shook. Then unluckily I patted her head, exclaiming, "You beauty!"

This was too much for her feminine vanity. She immediately rose up, placed her paw on my shoulders, and—well, let's say, kissed me.

"You must excuse her," said Jiff, apologetically, "she's young and impulsive. When she's been more into society she will understand that it is not etiquette to behave like this upon a first introduction. She is really too gushing."

"Gushing!" I growled, wiping my face, "I call it slobbering."

On reaching Jiff's "little place" we were welcomed by a strange chorus of barks, yelps, growls, neighing, and bellowing.

"That's my happy family," exclaimed Jiff. "They all come to welcome me on my return."

Sure enough as a boy, who doubled the rôles of groom and gardener, threw open the gates, out rushed an excited mob composed of Queen Mab aforesaid, a big-headed bull dog, who sniffed curiously, and as I thought cannibalistically, at my legs, a game cock who flew on to Jiff's left shoulder, a monkey who climbed on to his right, a horse who trotted whinnying from his stable, and last but not least a huge brown bear.