



ARMCHAIR REFLECTIONS

BY THE "DREAMER"



MANY highly interesting theories have been put forward from time to time upon the strange conduct of dogs when there is an air raid in progress. Many letters have also been written in the same connection. Most of these have been ventilated through the columns of the press; other animals—cats, chickens, and even snails—being periodically brought within the scope of these theories.

The other day I read a letter in the *Daily Mail*, signed "C. V. D." This seeker after enlightenment claims that on several occasions during the past 12 months bombs have been dropped within anything from 50 to 100 miles of his house, and that his dogs always seem to know that an air raid is in progress, and indicate their knowledge by incessant barking. Nor are his dogs alone in this respect, for the adjacent farmers have the same to report about their own dogs, who are all alert, uneasy, and noisy.

He asks whether it is possible that dogs can hear at a greater distance than humans, and altogether appears to look upon the matter as uncanny.

There does not appear to me to be anything uncanny in the matter. I think it is more that man is unversed, and supposes that all other animals must of necessity be built on the same plan as himself with regard to the senses.

One has only to reflect for a moment to realise that the contrary holds in nature. Man cannot, for instance, approach a dog's extreme sensibility with regard to the sense of smell—a bit of luck sometimes for the human!—Just consider the way a dog will follow the track of another animal, hours or even days after that animal has passed that way, provided there has not been rain to destroy the scent.

Sight is a much more difficult thing to test in competition with man. But in dogs trained to the hunting of game, large and small, we have evidences of extremely quick, if not long, sightedness. A dog will notice the slightest movement out of the ordinary in long grass, or the like, caused by the passage of some small animal, when the same would entirely escape the notice of man, or would be thought to be merely movement caused by the breeze.

And so as to hearing. For it is, in my opinion, hearing, about which there is nothing uncanny, that the dog calls into play when he gives notice that something unusual is afoot during an air raid. Now, it does not necessarily follow that because all, or nearly all, animals have the sense of hearing, that they are all equally sensitive to the same sounds.

For instance, I am deaf, or nearly so, to all sounds above a certain pitch. I cannot hear the tick of a watch, even though close to my ear. Sometimes my attention will be called in the night to the hissing of rain outside—I cannot hear it. Yet I will undertake to pick up the distant sound of an aero engine in an approaching aeroplane, minutes before any of those standing around. As example, and also as

showing my extraordinary long distance sight. On Saturday evening, leaving the Hendon aerodrome, I sighted an aeroplane up over the aerodrome at Chingford. The distance was, what? I do not know, perhaps 12 miles; it may be more. None of my friends could see it. I could not only see it, but I could *hear* it. Nothing extraordinary; simply that my ears, deaf to a high pitched sound, are extra sensitive to a low pitched one.

It is well known that a dog is sensitive to a sound of a high pitch. Why do we always whistle to call a dog to attention? It is because of his capability of hearing a highly pitched note.

I remember, long years ago, there were on sale in a shop in the Strand, some dog whistles which gave out no sound whatever. That is, it appeared to the human being that they gave out no sound. The fact is they gave a note so high in the scale of pitch that it was beyond the power of the human ear to distinguish any sound but the slight one given by the passage of the breath through the instrument. Yet a dog could hear it distinctly, even at a great distance. It may well be that a dog also hear lower sounds at a greater distance than humans. I am not a doggy man, and although I am very fond of them, have no great knowledge of their peculiarities,

It may be, therefore, that a dog can hear the sound of dropping bombs, or the hum of engines, at greater distances than we can. I am inclined to the belief, however, that what he hears is a note of a high pitch, possibly the passage of the propellers through the air, or the singing of wires, sounds altogether inaudible to us at any distance.

I am inclined to this belief because dogs do not, as a rule, take any great notice of the firing of guns. Dogs brought up to the sporting gun, take no notice whatever of its firing, unless it be discharged directly over its head, when it will cringe slightly. Even then, it is just possible that it is the singing of the pellets through the air that causes his momentary crouching, for I have noticed that a dog well out in the stubble, when partridge stalking is in progress, will crouch when shots pass above him, even when the gun which fired them is at a distance. I am, I say, not a doggy man, or I would try to learn something more about our four-footed friend than appears to be known. Why is it, I wonder, that a dog's eyes do not reflect? When I look into the eyes of a human I cannot penetrate beyond the surface. It is true they reflect. Eyes are honest in their reflections. I can read in them honesty, or its reverse purpose, love, kindness, fidelity, craftiness; but it is by reflection. When I look into the great, big, brown eyes of some dogs, I see beyond the eye, right down into depths unfathomable. I would love to study dogs had I the time. Meanwhile there are those students who can see nothing, and call purblindness in themselves, uncanniness in their canine friends.