

# The Play-Mood

By James Sully

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5 No one can observe a dog during a walk with his child-comrades without noting how readily he falls in with their playful proposals. The infectiousness of an announcement of the playful temper is clearly illustrated here. The dog imitates the gambols, and will even seem to respond to the vocal outbursts of his merry playmates. Darwin has rightly recognised a germ of our “sense of humour” in a dog’s joining in the game of stick-throwing. You throw a bit of stick for him to fetch, and having picked it up he proceeds to carry it away some distance and to squat down with it on the ground just before him. You then come quite close as if to take the stick from him, on which he seizes it and bears it off exultingly, repeating the little make-believe with evident enjoyment.

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I have tested a dog again and again when playing with him in this fashion, and have satisfied myself that he is in the play-mood, and knows perfectly well that you are too; so that if you pretend to be serious and to command him in your most magisterial voice to give up the stick he sidles up with a hollow show of obedience which could impose on nobody, as if to say, “I know better: you are not really serious; so I am going on with the game”. All the notes of a true sense of fun seem to be present in this case: the gay and festive mood, a firm resolve desipere in loco, and a strong inclination to play at “pretending”.

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