

All Things Bright and Beautiful Study Guide

All Things Bright and Beautiful by James Herriot

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Plot Summary

The novel "All Things Bright and Beautiful" details the life and work of country veterinarian James Herriot during the early years of his practice. Herriot writes his touching stories, which feature the antics of the animals he treats as well as their owners' eccentricities, from his own experience as an animal doctor in Yorkshire, England. Through his stories Herriot shares the challenges of his job as well as the fulfillment and joy he gains working with the animals.

The majority of Herriot's book tells the stories of many of the varied veterinary cases he worked with during his first few years after becoming a veterinary surgeon. He describes his experiences in a way that is both humorous and compassionate to the animals as well as their owners. Through his writing Herriot shows he has the ability to admit his mistakes and laugh at his own down failings as well as rejoice with the birth of a baby animal or the improvement of a sick patient. Siegfried and Tristan Farnon, the two brothers with whom Herriot works and lives, are common characters in Herriot's stories. These brothers, with their lively yet differing personalities, add to Herriot's stock of comical stories about the life and work of the average veterinarian.

Herriot's courtship of and marriage to Helen Alderson is another major theme in his autobiography. Herriot makes it known from the beginning of the book that he did marry his sweetheart but includes stories throughout the novel of their courting days. These stories show that Herriot did not always believe he would be Helen's husband. In fact there were many times Herriot felt he made such a fool of himself in front of Helen and her family that he would never stand a chance at marrying her.

Perhaps the most touching part of the book is the ending when Herriot is preparing to leave his pregnant wife because he has been called for duty with the Royal Air Force. Things have not turned out exactly the way he hoped they would. His practice is still young and he has little money to provide the necessities for his family. While he is away on duty, Helen will be going back to live with her parents because Helen and Herriot have been living in some empty rooms above the veterinary clinic at which Herriot worked. In these distressing circumstances Herriot remembers thinking that something pleasant was ending. He closes with the comment that with the perspective of age, he realizes that things then were just beginning.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

The novel "All Things Bright and Beautiful" details the life and work of country veterinarian James Herriot during the early years of his practice. Herriot writes his touching stories, which feature the antics of the animals he treats as well as their owners' eccentricities, from his own experience as an animal doctor in Yorkshire, England. Through his stories Herriot shares the challenges of his job as well as the fulfillment and joy he gains working with the animals.

In chapter 1 Herriot recounts a time when he was called in the middle of the night to check on a ewe that had just lambed. Harold Ingledew, the ewe's owner, has been out drinking. He slowly prepares to show Herriot the ailing animal while Herriot stands out in the cold. When they find the ewe and Herriot examines her, he discovers her problem is that she has another lamb in her that she hasn't delivered. Although Herriot does not want to strip off to his short sleeves to assist with the birth, he is thrilled by the birth of the new lamb.

In Chapter 2 Herriot shares some details of his life as a newly-married veterinarian. He and his wife live on the third floor of the veterinarian clinic in which he works. Each day Herriot must carry water up to their kitchen. Their furniture includes a wardrobe that won't stay shut and a high bench the couple uses as a table. Herriot and his wife fight over who will sit on the short chair and who will sit on the high stool.

Also in Chapter 2 Herriot writes about Jock, a dog who loves to chase cars. Herriot has gone to stitch up the leg of a foal on the farm where Jock lives. Jock lurks in the background until he sees Herriot is ready to leave. As soon as Herriot pulls away Jock chases him from the farm down the long driveway to the road. Jock gets a run for his money when his owner decides to have Jock bred. These puppies like to chase cars as much as Jock. On each of his visits to this farm Herriot finds it difficult to watch as the puppies overtake Jock as he chases Herriot's car. Herriot dreads his next visit to the farm but finds all the puppies have been sold. Jock is once again king of his territory.

In Chapter 3 lambing season is in full swing. Herriot delivers first a single lamb unable to be born because its legs were bent back. On the same farm he delivers a set of triplet lambs. As he is delivering the first lamb Herriot notices a lone lamb going from ewe to ewe trying to nurse. Herriot asks Rob Benson, the owner of the farm, about this beggar lamb. Benson tells him the lamb's mother will not have anything to do with the lamb, who he has named Herbert.

A couple of days later Benson calls Herriot back to his farm saying there has been a dog chasing his ewes. As Herriot examines the fallen ewes he notices they are not bleeding or wounded externally in any way. When he listens to one of the ewe's breathing, Herriot realizes that they are all suffering from a calcium deficiency. As soon



as he injects the supplement, the ewes begin to get better. Probably as a result of the dog incident Herriot is called to the same farm later to assist a ewe whose lambs are still born. Without a lamb to restore her interest in life, the ewe stands with her nose to the ground. Herriot and Benson decide to put one of the dead lamb's skins on Herbert to see if the ewe will adopt Herbert as her own. The trick works and both the ewe and Herbert get a fresh chance at life.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Right off the bat Herriot engages his reader in the everyday irritations of his job. Although Herriot could let these irritations frustrate him, he instead portrays them in a way that is highly humorous but at the same time touching and full of humanity. Throughout his stories about his job, Herriot also weaves his pleasure at being married in with his veterinarian stories. He notes life with a wife is much different from life as a single veterinarian. Herriot's courtship of and marriage to Helen is a major theme in the novel.

Note also the way Herriot notes the shortcomings of veterinary medicine during this time period. There is no penicillin. Vets are called to the farms to work. Sometimes they are even called in the middle of the night. There is often no sterile equipment and sometimes, in the case of Ingledew's farm, not even any running water. Despite these adverse conditions, Herriot seems to be thrilled with his job. Even in the bone chilling cold, Herriot is warmed and amazed at the birth of the new lamb.



Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

The dog Clancy and his deaf master Joe Mulligan are the subjects of the next chapter. Siegfried learns both Herriot and Tristan have examined this huge dog only to report the animal is "pretty lively." They suspect Clancy's problem with vomiting is caused by his habit of eating any bit of trash he finds. Siegfried is unhappy with his colleagues' report on the dog and decides to go himself and do an examination. Siegfried finds the dog just as ominous as Herriot and Tristan did and decides quickly to skip the examination also. Not to be undone by the dog Siegfried schedules an appointment with the dog so that all three men will be present. Siegfried devises a plan for the three to restrain Clancy and sedate him so he can be examined thoroughly. When the time for the appointment comes, however, Mulligan is late as usual. Siegfried takes this opportunity for the three to escape to other calls and avoid seeing the dog altogether.

Herriot introduces Mr. Pickersgill in the chapter 5. Because he spent two weeks at Leeds University learning about agriculture, Mr. Pickersgill feels like he is an educated man. In reality Mr. Pickersgill mispronounces and misdiagnoses many of the ailments about which he tries to talk to Herriot. In one appointment in which he sees Mr. Pickersgill's cows about as mastitis problem Herriot, without hurting Pickersgill's feelings, cleverly convinces Pickersgill to stop milking, which Herriot feels is the cause of the mastitis.

In Chapter 6 Siegfried chastises Herriot after catching Herriot trying to appropriate his extra hoof knife. Siegfried continues to lecture both Tristan and Herriot about their habit of leaving surgical equipment on farms during their visits. He tells his partners that he remembers to get all of his equipment by simply putting his mind on remembering to pick up what he has laid down. Later during a visit to a farm, the farmer jokes with Siegfried about the numerous pieces of equipment he has left on the farm. During the visit Siegfried impresses all the men by mysteriously removing a tumor from a cow. At the end of the chapter, however, Herriot asks to see the pair of forceps Siegfried used on the farm. To his dismay, Siegfried discovers he has left the forceps on the farm.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

In Chapters 4 and 6 Herriot begins to develop the personality of his partner Siegfried. After Herriot and Tristan are only able to tell him that the dog Clancy is "lively," Siegfried orders a complete examination be made of this dog. In order to avoid any error, Siegfried decides to examine the dog himself. His first impression of Clancy is the same as Herriot's and Tristan's and he leaves without examining the dog. Although Siegfried makes a show of scheduling an appointment with Clancy when all three men can be there to help control him, it is impossible to miss the tone of relief when the chronically late Mr. Mulligan does not show up in time for his appointment. The three men clear out



of the office in a hurry in order to miss an encounter with the massive dog. Note also the way Herriot describes Clancy. He writes that the dog is a cross between a donkey and an Airedale. Although this description, given to Herriot by Siegfried, might not be biologically correct, it gives the reader an idea of the size of dog with whom Herriot is dealing.

In his next encounter with Siegfried, Herriot is caught in the act of "appropriating" his partner's spare hoof knife. This action leads to a lecture by Siegfried about the importance of keeping up with expensive equipment. By the end of the chapter, however, it becomes obvious Siegfried is not as good at keeping up with equipment as he claims he is. Herriot learns from farmers Siegfried has left several instruments on neighboring farms. This example shows the hypocritical nature of Siegfried's personality. Although he may insist that his employees act a certain way and follow certain rules, he does not necessarily follow his own rules.

Chapter 5 gives the reader a glimpse into how deeply personable Herriot is. Although he suspects that it is Mr. Pickersgill's manner of milking that is causing the cows their troubles, he does not want to hurt the man's feelings. Herriot also does not want to tell Mr. Pickersgill that the udder salve he wants to try is completely useless. Under the cover of suggesting a way to help Mr. Pickersgill with his back problems, Herriot comes up with a solution that helps the man's back, solves the mastitis problem and allows Mr. Pickersgill to think his udder salve works. Herriot simply suggests that Mr. Pickersgill stop milking. Although Herriot could have handled the problem in a way that would have offended Mr. Pickersgill, he instead finds a more genteel solution even though it doesn't appear to Mr. Pickersgill that Herriot did anything about the cows at all.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

In Chapter 7 Herriot discusses his third encounter with Helen and her family before the two are married. He has already taken her on two failed dates. On this day he joins the family for tea. Helen's father speaks little to Herriot and when he does speak he disagrees with him. One of the family's cow hands comes to tell Helen's father one of the cows is sick. Thinking this is a way to impress the farmer, Herriot goes out to look at it. Instead of being able to save the cow, however, the cow dies despite Herriot's treatment.

Chapter 8 recounts an embarrassing instance in Herriot's career. In an attempt to befriend Mr. Crump, the owner of a Shire horse he'd been treating, Herriot drinks a bit too much homemade wine. Unfortunately in this state he is called to help deliver a calf at the Bamford's farm. As a result of his inebriation Herriot is unable to speak clearly in a normal voice and must whisper all his instructions, and he is also unable to hold onto the soap as he tries to wash up prior to helping the cow. The next day Siegfried is appalled to learn Herriot drank so much wine before going to the Bamford's farm. While Siegfried hopes the strict Methodists did not realize Herriot was drunk, Herriot knows they knew he was intoxicated.

Herriot introduces Mrs. Donovan in Chapter 9. Mrs. Donovan has a habit of showing up at Herriot's cases and treating his patients. Commonly Herriot's patrons put more faith in Mrs. Donovan's diagnosis and treatment than Herriot's. Even Mrs. Donovan turns to Herriot when her pet dog Rex is hit by a car. Unfortunately Rex's injuries are fatal and he does not survive. Mrs. Donovan swears she will never own another dog.

About a month later Herriot is called to confer on a case of dog cruelty. The year old Golden Retriever had been locked in a dark shed for nearly his entire life. The dog is malnourished, covered with pressure sores and filthy. A crowd gathers as Herriot and Inspector Halliday of the R.S.P.C.A. check the dog over. Herriot is pleasantly surprised to see that Mrs. Donovan is among those in the crowd. Although his words baffle Halliday, Herriot begins to talk about how the dog needs food and good conditioning powders. Just as he hoped, Mrs. Donovan speaks up and asks for permission to take the dog. Under her care, the dog fills out and blossoms. Each time they met each other Mrs. Donovan still points out the difference she made in the neglected dog's life.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

It is in Chapter 7 that Herriot first shares his string of bad luck associated with his wooing of Helen. He believes his intent to impress her is cursed as each time he has contact with her he winds up looking like an idiot. Almost any young man or young woman can appreciate the uncomfortable feeling of having to try to impress the family of



an intended. Few, however, have ever had the honor of treating the animal of their girlfriend's father. Herriot is horrified when the cow dies shortly after he gives it an injection. Although Herriot knows he could not have prevented the cow's death, he believes it is another sign that his relationship with Helen is cursed.

In Chapters 8 and 9 Herriot shows how much he cares for the welfare of people as well as animals. In Chapter 9 Herriot arranges for a lady who has recently lost her pet dog to care for a neglected dog. Herriot is intelligent enough to realize this set up is a good situation for both the lady, who needs a new animal for whom to care, and the dog, who needs love and attention. Herriot also has the habit of attempting to befriend people, even when these attempts don't have a positive affect on him. For instance, in Chapter 8 Herriot tries to strike up a connection of friendship with Mr. Crump by testing his homemade wine. Herriot becomes intoxicated by the vast array of strong samples Mr. Crump gives him. As fortune would have it Herriot makes a bad impression on a family of staunch Methodists when he is called from Mr. Crump's house to birth a calf.

One note of interest in the Mr. Crump story is massive hat Herriot wears throughout the process of birthing the calf. Although some might have left out the detail of the cap, Herriot weaves its existence through the story to prove just how intoxicated he was. It is also interesting how Herriot uses references to church-like behavior during his description of the birthing. Herriot says the Bamfords move about like they were in church. He also notes the "cathedral" silence in which the birthing is carried out. These references almost seem to be a foreshadowing of Herriot learning these patrons are strict Methodists, opposed to alcohol and drunk veterinarians.



Chapters 10-11

Chapters 10-11 Summary

In Chapters 10 and 11 Herriot writes about his experiences when he was called to serve as the veterinarian for the Darrowby Fair. Herriot's first sign that this will not be the completely pleasant experience he anticipated occurs when he catches sight of Helen with Richard Edmundson, her other suitor. Herriot searches out Tristan, who has made his way to the beer tent, for companionship. While there Herriot is called for on the fair's loudspeaker. One of the show heifers has knocked off a horn and is bleeding badly. For a while Herriot struggles trying to clamp the damaged blood vessel, but gives up and covers it with gauze. During this process he sees Helen and her boyfriend watching his struggles.

Next, Herriot is called to examine a dog whose master wants to enter it in the dog show. After looking at the animal and taking its temperature Herriot believes the dog is suffering with distemper, an illness that disqualifies it from show entry. The dog's master is angry at the diagnosis but is unable to argue further because Herriot is called to measure the ponies for the pony shows. As he does his work, Herriot is questioned by an onlooker about the progress of the measurements. This onlooker goes on to tell Herriot about all the different ways people try to cheat so they can get their ponies entered in a smaller class. As the man watches, Herriot refuses to pass a pony that doesn't fit the measurements for the class. On the next pony, Herriot is unable to get a good measurement because the pony ducks every time Herriot tries to measure him. In the middle of this frustration the man with the sick dog asks Herriot to take the dog's temperature again. Herriot does so but the temperature is still high. Herriot goes back for more abuse from the pony people. This time a young man argues that his veterinary certificate stating the height of the pony overrides Herriot's stick measurement. In the midst of this confrontation, the man with the sick dog again asks Herriot to take the dog's temperature again. In the midst of all of the hubbub Herriot again sees Helen and Edmundson watching his embarrassment.

In Chapter 11 Herriot's final duty of the fair is to judge the Family Pets. Herriot is confronted with a menagerie of assorted animals. Unsure of how to judge these pets, he decides to go strictly on how well informed the owners are about the care of their pets and the overall appearance of the pet. Herriot gives first prize to a goldfish who is unfortunately owned by the son of a local squire. Herriot did not realize who the young man was but hears great disapproval at his choice. To end the day, Helen and Edmundson leave the fair in Edmundson's shiny, new car as Herriot climbs into his beat-up old Austin. Unfortunately Herriot's car won't start so with Helen and boyfriend watching, he gets out the hand crank to manually start his car.



Chapters 10-11 Analysis

In these chapters Herriot's bad luck with Helen continues. Throughout the day, he feels Helen and her boyfriend catch him at the worst and most embarrassing times. Although Herriot reminds his readers at the beginning of the chapter that he and Helen are happily married, he still shares the uncomfortable and humiliating circumstances in which he found himself with Helen during their dating years.

Herriot's reactions to the circumstances of the Darrowby Show illustrate just how naïve he is about the ways of the world. This town fair is the last place Herriot expects to encounter people who cheat and treat their animals badly. It is at the fair*+

that he encounters both types of people. One man is insistent upon entering his dog in a show even though the dog is horribly ill. The man seems to have not sympathy for the dog's illness; he is only concerned that he is not being allowed to show his dog. In the pony show Herriot learns people torture their horses by forcing them to stand with sacks of corn on their backs or pricking them with pins to get them into smaller height classes.

Ironically Herriot's decision to award first prize in the Family Pets class to a young man with a goldfish puts him unknowingly in the same class with the other unfair judges and competitors. Although Herriot made his decision based solely on the knowledge each child had about their pet, the onlookers believe his decision is politically based. Herriot had awarded first prize to the squire's son.



Chapters 12-14

Chapters 12-14 Summary

Herriot tells the story of a determined widow and her family's fight to keep their farm in Chapters 12 and 13. Mrs. Dalby's husband had died of cancer leaving her to care for their three young children and their farm. Herriot is called to the Dalby farm to look after some cows that are coughing. Unfortunately these cows are badly infected with a lung parasite called husk. Although she can't afford the expense, Mrs. Dalby must take her cows off the pasture where they are picking up the parasite, keep them inside and feed them expensive hay and protein cakes. At the end of the episode, twelve of the Dalby cows die. Herriot is afraid another strike of bad luck will cause the family to lose their farm.

In Chapter 13 Herriot is called again to the Dalby farm to look after sick cows. The cows are not infected with husk this time. Herriot is unsure what the trouble is. He worms the cows but they don't appear to benefit from this treatment. Herriot runs tests to try to determine what the trouble is with the cows but all the results come back negative. Finally while studying the cows one day he realizes they all have copper deficiency. Herriot prescribes copper injections and luckily all of the animals improve. Herriot closes the story of the Dalby's by noting that even after the passage of twenty years Mrs. Dalby is still running her farm with the help of her sons. She is also still treating Herriot to tea and special service each time he visits their farm.

Chapter 14 details Herriot's attempts to buy furnishings for his and Helen's rooms. In the past he has developed the habit of coming home from sales and auctions with completely useless items. He hopes to redeem himself by visiting a large sale room during a trip to take a sample to the Leed's Laboratory. Unfortunately Herriot becomes infatuated with a set of twenty-four geography volumes which he cannot resist. Herriot's first challenge is to get his books home. He has parked about a mile away from the sale room and none of the buses will allow him to carry his books on the bus. After several embarrassing mishaps when the strings holding the books break, Herriot finally gets his books in his car, but he realizes they smell badly. Upon his arrival home, Helen is disappointed with her husband's purchases but is kind to him. She does, however, insist that the books can't stay in their rooms; the smell is too strong. Herriot takes his purchases to the office where Siegfried also states the stinky things can't stay there. Finally Herriot is forced to store his treasured books on a shelf in the basement of the Skedale House.

Chapters 12-14 Analysis

Once again Herriot shows his compassion for the farmers as he tells the tale of the Dalbys. It seems that if the family had lost their farm Herriot would have felt personally responsible because he was unable to cure the cows. Despite the fact he is unable to



offer Mrs. Dalby a miraculous cure for her cows' first round of sickness, Mrs. Dalby continues to trust Herriot to care for her animals, a trust Herriot believes must be wavering. Happily there is a cure available for the next round of illness the cows suffer, and Mrs. Dalby loses none of her livestock.

It is in dealing with Mrs. Dalby's case that Herriot mourns the fact that cures for the most common bovine diseases are so slow in coming. As he writes his novel from the time span of twenty years after Mrs. Dalby lost twelve of her herd to husk, Herriot writes there is presently a vaccine for husk. He notes that although so much livestock was lost to husk, now that there is a vaccine veterinarians seem to take this technology for granted.



Chapters 15-17

Chapters 15-17 Summary

In Chapter 15 Herriot tells the story of the Raynes ghost. The Raynes ghost is supposedly the spirit of a murdered monk who haunts the area near the Raynes village. Although many people state they have spotted the monk, none have ever tried to follow him into the woods. Tristan seems unusually interested in stories about this phantom. One night when he is called to doctor a Shetland pony at a home near Raynes Herriot thinks about the Raynes ghost. As he passes the spot where the ghost is usually seen Herriot cannot resist the urge to get out of his car and view the ruins of the abbey. Although there is no ghost in sight, Herriot begins to feel uncomfortable and hurries home. Once he is at home, Herriot is shocked to discover the figure of a monk standing in his bedroom. Although he is scared badly, it turns out the monk is Tristan. Tristan has been responsible for all of the sightings of the Raynes ghost.

A few days later Herriot rides to a call with Siegfried. After the two finish caring for the cow, Siegfried decides to follow up on another call while Herriot rides home with Claude Blenkiron, an off-duty police man. As the two drive past the abbey, Blenkiron catches sight of the ghost. Unlike others who had sighted the apparition Blenkiron stops the car and chases the figure on foot. Luckily for Tristan Blenkiron is unable to find him. When Tristan returns home the next day Herriot learns he spent the night in a drainage pipe in order to escape the policeman's rage. After this incident Tristan learns his lesson and never dresses as the Raynes ghost again.

In Chapters 16 and 17 Herriot recounts his first experience with Granville Bennett. Bennett is a small animal specialist whom Herriot calls upon to handle some of the more complicated cases involving small animals. Herriot is impressed with Granville's shiny operating room and skilled assistants. The sight reminds Herriot that this is what he wanted to do when he first began to study veterinary medicine. After Bennett finishes his work, he invites Herriot for a beer while the animal recovers.

As Chapter 17 details Bennett unfortunately pushes Herriot to have quite a bit more than one beer. By the time they leave the club Herriot is overly full of alcohol-infused liquid. Bennett then invites Herriot to his home to have a snack and meet his wife. Bennett's idea of a snack is a bowl of pickled onions and more whiskey. This combination upsets Herriot's stomach still further. When Bennett's wife finally arrives Herriot's stomach is voicing its displeasure in the unwelcome food it has received. He is also showing signs of being drunk. As he drives home with the patient Granville operated on, Herriot realizes that the dog, even after its surgery, feels better that he does.



Chapters 15-17 Analysis

The most interesting of these chapters is Herriot's encounter with Bennett. Herriot shares in this section that he had originally hoped to be a small animal specialist somewhat like the rich Bennett. Although Bennett's life had been his dream Herriot realizes he enjoys farm work more than he would have enjoyed being cooped up in an office all day long. Still, he envies Bennett his clean offices and trained assistants.

In Chapter 15 Herriot gives the reader a good picture of Tristan's personality. The young man enjoys dressing up as the Raynes ghost and scaring people. Tristan believes it is a harmless hobby and enjoys hearing about the fuss that is made when people see the "ghost." Tristan's fun comes to a halt when he is spotted by an off-duty policeman who chases him into the woods. Tristan is lucky to escape without being hurt. However, he spends the night in a drain pipe hiding from the policeman and emerges with a horrible cold.



Chapters 18-19

Chapters 18-19 Summary

In Chapter 18 Herriot tells the story of the bull Monty. A farmer bought Monty for the large sum of one hundred pounds. The farmer believes the bull will be worth the price since he is pedigreed and of the Newton breed. Unfortunately at about three months of age Monty becomes sick with an unusual illness. Herriot searches for a diagnosis and finally determines the calf has a hairball lodged in his fourth stomach. An operation which Herriot has never performed is the only way to save the expensive calf. Although it unnerves Herriot, the farmer has complete faith in Herriot's abilities. Although he is unsure of himself, Herriot completes the procedure and the calf is saved. After this miraculous operation Herriot develops a friendly relationship with the calf. Whenever he is on the farm Herriot never leaves without scratching Monty.

After a year of not seeing Monty Herriot is surprised at his next visit to see the calf has grown into a full-sized, mean bull. Herriot must get a blood sample from Monty, a procedure about which Monty is not happy. The farmer traps Monty's head in a metal yoke so Herriot can draw his blood. After he has finished Herriot is surprised by being knocked to the ground by the bull. Somehow the creature has gotten one of his horns loose from the yoke and is working on freeing the other one. Herriot is able to run from the box before the bull charges him, an impact that would have killed or badly injured him. As Herriot leaves the farm the farmer laughs at the sudden change in the relationship between the patient and his doctor.

In Chapter 19 Herriot talks about the dwindling number of work horses found on farms. He writes that working with horses was the hardest work for farm vets. Herriot follows this up with a story about a horse that nearly kicked him. Although he wanted to sedate the horse to finish his work an avid horse lover, Cliff Tyreman, subdued the horse with the sound of his voice to the extent that Herriot could finish his work without anesthetic. Sadly the next time Herriot visits this particular farm there is only one aged horse left. Herriot diagnoses this horse with tetanus or lockjaw. Herriot tries an antitoxin but the horse does not recover. Herriot is forced to put the horse down.

Chapters 18-19 Analysis

Herriot's experiences in these two chapters underscore how dangerous a farm veterinarian's job can be. Both the bull and the horse had enough power to badly injure Herriot. In one case, however, the horse was subdued by the words of its owner. The bull's meanness only signaled the end of the friendship between Herriot and the once gentle calf.



Chapters 20-22

Chapters 20-22 Summary

Chapter 20 brings Christmas. Herriot hopes to have a light day that will allow him some time for relaxation. Unfortunately Herriot is wakened early in the morning by a farm call. The farmer is rude and ungrateful for Herriot's services. Herriot returns home to find he has another call to answer. Helen has fixed him breakfast and details him on the call as he eats. Helen asks Herriot not to shout at her as he asks her questions about the call. Herriot feels an immediate pang of shame and apologizes. His next call is to see a choking nanny goat. The farmer is apologetic to call Herriot on Christmas but is concerned about his goat. To the surprise of both Herriot and the farmer Herriot discovers the goat has swallowed a pair of the farmer's summer underwear. Instead of going all the way down, however, the pants caught on the animal's tongue by the elastic. After Herriot is finished, the farmer's wife invites the vet in for a drink and some cake. It is this experience that renews Herriot's Christmas spirit and his love of farmers.

In Chapter 21 Herriot gets the opportunity to see Marmaduke Skelton by one of Herriot's veterinary friends. Duke, as he is known, is a quack veterinarian who tries to diagnose and treat animal illnesses. In this particular case a farmer has a cow whose uterus has prolapsed. Ross, Herriot's veterinarian friend responds to the case but arrives to find Duke is already hard at work. Ross prepares to leave, but the farmer begs him to stay. The farmer convinces Duke to give up and allow Ross to have a chance. Using a bag of sugar, a pig stool, a whiskey bottle and a beer tray Ross is able to put the uterus back into place effortlessly. Duke assumes Ross has used fancy equipment and doesn't realize the simple means the man actually used.

Herriot tells of Mrs. Bond and her cats in Chapter 22. Mrs. Bond adopts cats and has innumerable cats living both inside and outside her house. One of the cats who took an instant disliking to Herriot is Boris. This dislike stems from an instance where Herriot was called to give Boris a worm tablet. Although Herriot was an expert at wrapping a cat so it couldn't fight, Boris managed to get out of the wrap. One day Tristan decides to go with Herriot to visit Mrs. Bond's cats. One of the cats has a bone in its teeth. Unfortunately this cat is Boris. Not being familiar with Boris, Tristan frees the cat from the basket in which Mrs. Bond has trapped him. Although Herriot tries to catch the cat quietly, Tristan chases the cat unmercifully. All of the inside cats are stirred up by the commotion and begin to run and scatter also. Although Tristan enjoys the chase, Mrs. Bond asks Herriot not to bring Tristan with him on a call again.

Chapters 20-22 Analysis

In Chapter 20 Herriot shares the story of one Christmas day that brought out both the best and the worst of farmers. The first farmer to call Herriot that day was not sorry to bother the vet on Christmas. He is very business-like, almost rude and causes Herriot to



lose some of the joy of his Christmas spirit. On the next call, however, Herriot encounters the opposite reaction from the farmer. This farmer is grateful for Herriot and appreciates his services. He apologizes for calling Herriot on Christmas but voices concern for his goat. The couple also invites Herriot in for refreshments before sending him away. It is Herriot's experience with this couple that renews his Christmas spirit.

One of Herriot's frustrations on his job included having to deal with unlicensed people who tried to practice veterinary medicine. In the instance described in Chapter 21 Herriot not only learns an easier way to replace a prolapsed uterus, he also gets a chance to see one of these quacks shown up. Although Herriot is not a cruel person by nature, he is simply tired of seeing untrained people trying to treat his cases. It was often Herriot's experience that the farmers would take the advice of these quacks over the highly trained doctors.



Chapters 23-26

Chapters 23-26 Summary

In Chapter 23 Herriot makes a return visit to Bennett. This time he takes Colonel Bosworth's cat Maudie. Maudie has been struck in the face by a car, but Herriot believes Bennett can repair her injuries. After the surgery is complete Bennett invites Herriot to go with him to a veterinary meeting. Herriot has dressed in his best suit in an attempt to repair his image in the eyes of Bennett's wife. Since he is already dressed up, he decides to go along with Bennett.

Once they get in the car in Chapter 24 Herriot is surprised to learn the meeting is in Appleby. It is snowing heavily and Herriot has heard that the Bowes Moor Road is blocked. Herriot worries they will get to the meeting late. They arrive just as the meeting is ending but Herriot soon realizes this is just as Granville intended. Although Herriot had intended to meet Zoe Granville again only when he was sober and not over full of food and alcohol, he is once again plied with food and alcohol at the free buffet after the meeting. Herriot begins to feel badly during their return trip to Granville's home. As the car slides from side to side in the snow and lurches through the snowdrifts Herriot begins to feel even worse. The pair doesn't meet another car the entire stretch of the road. Although Herriot is afraid they will be stranded, they make it to Granville's safely. Herriot is, despite his best attempts, drunk and sick when he goes in with Granville to say goodnight to Zoe.

In Chapter 25 Herriot treats a dog with a tumor in one of his testicles. The dog's owner, Roland Partridge, fears his dog will die during surgery so he waits until the testicle is badly overgrown before he will allow Herriot to operate. In Chapter 26 Partridge finally allows Herriot to operate. Since the tumor has been allowed to grow for so long the wall of the scrotum has become affected as well. It is not long before the tumor begins to grow back. Herriot decides to use a new drug to stop the growth of the tumor. Although this drug works, it also has the unfortunate side effect of causing Percy to give off the scent of a female dog in heat. Soon Partridge's house is ambushed by a crowd of male dogs attracted by the scent. As Percy's tumor shrinks, the male dogs begin to go away. Finally one day Herriot pronounces the little dog cured.

Chapters 23-26 Analysis

In Chapters 23 and 24 Herriot has another encounter with Bennett. He is once again impressed with the big man's surgical ability. The mess that has been made of the cat's face is soon repaired under his swift fingers. Afterward, Bennett invites Herriot to a veterinary meeting. Herriot is excited the meeting will cover topics specific to large animal care. Bennett, however, has other things in mind. To Herriot's dismay the pair arrives late for the lecture but just in time for the free food and alcohol. Note the way Herriot describes Bennett's popularity. He believes that if the man were to visit a tribe in



the Amazon jungle Bennett would know at least one person there. Despite his and Helen's best intentions Herriot is once again drunk and sick when he meets Granville's wife.

In the story of Percy, Herriot shares another of the challenges of being a veterinarian. This little dog's owner waits until it is almost too late to have his dog cared for. This procrastination is not caused by the lack of knowledge on the owner's part, but is caused by fear. He is so afraid the dog will die during surgery that he almost waits too late to have the tumor removed. As it is, when Herriot is finally allowed to remove the tumor it has been allowed to progress so far that it grows back. Percy and his owner suffer with an onslaught of male dogs as they attempt to treat this new tumor with a medicine that makes Percy seem to the males like a female dog in heat. Herriot believes that had the original tumor been taken off promptly when it was first noticed, all of these problems would have been averted.



Chapters 27-30

Chapters 27-30 Summary

In Chapter 27 Herriot recalls the various interesting ways clients have called upon his services. One client was so drunk he came to Herriot's office but believed he was talking with the vet on the telephone. Some clients are unsure if they need a veterinarian even after they have called for him. Herriot remembers one client trying to force Herriot to decide if the animal needed treatment before he'd even seen the sick cow. Oftentimes clients give unclear descriptions of what might be wrong with their animals. In these situations, Herriot is unsure what he is dealing with until he actually arrives on the scene.

In Chapters 28 and 29 Herriot writes about the time Richard Carmody spent with him as a student observer. Herriot's first impression of Carmody is that he is well off and also very well learned. Carmody is unimpressed with the clinic set up in the Skeldale House and seems scornful of the use of older remedies. The next morning Carmody is unprepared to go on farm calls even though he believes he is properly dressed. Throughout the morning he disagrees with Herriot's diagnoses and answers Herriot's questions in an overly well-educated manner. The only time Carmody loses his poise is when he is bitten by a dog on the rear end. In Chapter 29 Carmody requests he be allowed to work hands on with the animals. Herriot grants him this request. Although Carmody has a great deal of book knowledge, he has no common sense. Herriot watches as the student chases pigs to the dirty end of the pen to try to catch them. He then allows Carmody to drench a horse, a task difficult for even Herriot. Herriot also gives Carmody the task of bleeding a pig, a task Herriot finally has to take over. Finally, Herriot watches as Carmody is dragged by a bull he is trying to treat across a manure laden field. Years later Herriot sees Carmody again at a banquet where Carmody is the guest of honor. The two share a moments talk in which Herriot sees a flicker of warm emotion in Carmody's otherwise cold eyes.

In Chapter 30 Herriot paints a picture of another common veterinary client in the person of Mr. Kitson. Kitson had tried for several hours to deliver his own lambs instead of calling Herriot. When Herriot arrives one lamb is dead and the birthing of the others more difficult because Kitson has been trying his own methods. Also while at the Kitson farm Herriot sees a ewe badly sick. Kitson wants no treatment for the ewe as he is certain she will die. In an effort to help her die peacefully Herriot secretly gives the ewe enough anesthetic to put her to sleep. When Herriot is called back to the farm a few days later to deliver more lambs, he discovers that the sick ewe has recovered. The farmer states the ewe slept two days in a row, then woke the third day ready to eat. Herriot feels it was the release from pain that allowed the ewe to heal.



Chapters 27-30 Analysis

The most interesting aspect of these chapters is the introduction of the student Carmody. Although he is only a student, his book learning has far surpassed that of Herriot. In fact, Carmody views the veterinary set up in the Skeldale House almost in distaste. He seems to believe the ways and the medicines of these country vets are archaic. Even though Carmody is very smart in book learning, he appears to have little or no common sense. It is this flaw in Carmody that makes him likable at all as a character. Herriot describes Carmody's actions almost sadistically when Herriot gives Carmody the hardest, dirtiest jobs during their rounds together. After the way Carmody has looked down his nose at Herriot, this treatment is deserved. Herriot gains respect for Carmody after the fellow refuses to give up, even after he winds up in a disgraceful state following an afternoon of farm calls.



Chapters 31-33

Chapters 31-33 Summary

In Chapter 31 Herriot treats a poodle suffering with gastroenteritis. Although Herriot tries a variety of different remedies, not of them relieves the dog's suffering. Finally, when the owners are at the point of wanting to euthanize the dog, Herriot tries putting the poodle to sleep for a few days, to relieve her suffering and let her body heal. This treatment works and the dog recovers.

At the beginning of Chapter 32 Herriot describes Sam. Sam is Helen's Beagle who has adopted Herriot and now keeps him company during his farm calls. Next Herriot recalls an experience where he was penned against a barn partition by a bull wanting to scratch an itch. Luckily the partition was rotten and the wood gave way, saving Herriot from being mashed to death by the bull. In a reversal of roles Herriot next writes about an experience when he was called to clip a budgie's beak. The bird dies of fright when Herriot removes it from its cage. Herriot finds he is unable to tell the old lady who owns the bird that it has died, so he buys a similar bird to replace the dead one.

In Chapter 33 Herriot has to contend with a pet's owner who is overly anxious for her dog to have her puppies. Herriot has examined the dog and has determined she is nowhere near giving birth to her puppies. Despite his advice, the woman insists it is time for the puppies to be born. She wants Herriot to give the dog a shot to start the contractions, a shot that will only work if the cervix has already dilated, which hasn't happened in her dog's case. Herriot tries to explain this fact to her, but she will not listen and understand. She calls Herriot to her house twice and insists on the shot. On her third call, Siegfried visits her home. During his visit, the dog is ready to give birth, so he gives the dog the shot the owner has been wanting. When Herriot returns for a follow up visit, the lady again scolds him for not giving the shot and tells Herriot he just doesn't have enough experience. To make matters worse, Herriot calls the lady by a different wrong name each time he goes to her home.

Chapters 31-33 Analysis

In Herriot's work, he deals with all types of extremes. For instance, he treats some animals big and strong enough to kill him while others are so small and delicate that they can be harmed unintentionally. This is shown quite clearly in Herriot's story about the bull and the following story about the budgie. Note also that along with a wonderful wife, Herriot has also gained a riding companion through his marriage to Helen. Helen's dog Sam has become his constant companion.

In Chapter 33 Herriot has done everything right but still comes out looking, and probably feeling, like a fool. Although he tries several times he cannot make the woman in the story understand that unless the dog is ready to give birth, the shot will not do her dog

any good. The woman associates another vet coming with the shot being given and assumes the Herriot just doesn't know what he's doing. To make matters worse, Herriot cannot get the lady's name right, another aspect of the relationship that appears to irritate the woman.



Chapters 34-37

Chapters 34-37 Summary

Chapter 34 tells the story of Gyp, the Sheepdog with epilepsy. Although this condition will keep Gyp from competing professionally, his owner decides to keep him around anyway. To compound Gyp's illness, Gyp's owner also mentions to Herriot that the dog has never barked. Although unusual, Herriot does not believe the two conditions are related. One day the man takes Gyp to a sheep dog trial. Gyp's brother, a dog with whom Gyp had grown up, competes in the trial. After the brother dog successfully completes the trial and is rewarded by his owner, Gyp, who has been watching the trial, gives out a single bark. All who hear the bark are astonished. It is the first and last time Gyp ever barked.

Herriot shares the story of how he finally won Helen's heart in Chapter 35. The two were both attending the Daffodil Ball when Herriot receives an emergency farm call. He is preparing to leave when Helen, who is attending the dance with another group, asks if he is already leaving. Without thinking Herriot asks Helen to come with him, and she does. The two kiss often on their way to the farm call. Herriot has been called to help with a dog trying to give birth to puppies. Helen helps Herriot treat the dog. The two stay with the dog's owners, an older couple, until the dog has delivered all of her babies. At the end of the evening, Herriot is confident to call Helen "my young lady."

In Chapters 36 and 37 Herriot finds himself again at Bennett's. This time the two operate on a Cocker Spaniel puppy suffering with pyloric stenosis. After the surgery is finished Bennett invites Herriot to lunch with himself and Zoe. Bennett states he only has to pay a visit to his branch surgery before they go to his house. Herriot is happy that for once he will meet Zoe in a sober condition. Bennett's branch surgery, however, turns out to be a local inn. In the thirty minutes the two stay at the inn Herriot once again forced to drink enough that he becomes hopelessly drunk. Again, Herriot is drunk for his meeting with Zoe.

Chapters 34-37 Analysis

It is interesting that even on his third visit to Bennett's surgery Herriot has still not learned the man's routine. He also lets himself, once again, be pushed into drinking so much that he becomes drunk. Herriot is embarrassed to meet Zoe in his inebriated condition, but it appears Zoe has come to expect Herriot to always be drunk. Herriot writes that he believes she realizes, despite his drunkenness, that he is really a good-natured person at heart.

In Chapter 35 it is interesting to learn that Helen and Herriot finally paired up on a night when they attend the same dance together, although they were not with each other. Helen seems to have been waiting for Herriot's invitation to leave the dance with him as

she quickly agrees to go along. The hubbub of the dance contrasts with the peace of the Chapman home almost like the chaos of Herriot's life before his marriage to Helen contrasts with the peace he feels after their union.



Chapters 38-40

Chapters 38-40 Summary

In Chapter 38 Herriot admires Frank Metcalf's cows as they stand in their new byre. Metcalf has built this modern dairy barn himself and is very proud of his accomplishments. Herriot and Metcalf both believe the new byre represents a new start for the dairy farmer. Unfortunately Metcalf's cows mysteriously begin to abort their calves soon after they are moved into the new byre. Herriot diagnosis Contagious Bovine Abortion, a disease for which there is no vaccine for cows already carrying calves. Because the cows carry their calves full-term, this negatively affects their milk production. In the end, Metcalf has only three cows in his entire herd that carry their calves full term. He has no calves to rebuild his stock and the cows he does have aren't producing enough milk to make a living. Metcalf decide to give up dairy farming and go back to work in the steelworks. Metcalf's farm is sold and the new byre stands empty.

In Chapter 39 Herriot shares with his readers how good he considers his married life to be. He observes that Helen works at trying to make him comfortable. She pays attention to him, treats him like a king and even feeds him only food she knows he likes. For instance, Herriot does not like fat on his meat. Helen takes care of this for him by cutting all the fat away from his meat before she serves it to him. It becomes clear to Herriot how badly life could be for him if Helen did not work so hard for him one day during a farm call. After he finishes his treatment, the farmer calls Herriot in for refreshments. To his dismay the farmer's wife serves him a slab of cold boiled bacon fat. With the help of a jar of piccalilli Herriot manages to consume the entire slab of fat. The farmer and his wife are delighted to see Herriot enjoy their food so much.

In Chapter 40 Siegfried decides to charge a hateful client ten pounds to geld his horse. Although Herriot doubts it will happen, the client pays the requested ten pounds. Siegfried takes the cheque and puts it in his pocket. Later Siegfried invites Herriot for a celebratory drink. As he searches for the cheque in his pocket Siegfried realizes he has lost it. He sends Herriot back to the farm to ask for another cheque.

Chapters 38-40 Analysis

In Chapter 38 Herriot address the frustration he feels when he is unable to do anything about a disease that threatens a farmer's livelihood. Metcalf has worked hard to build himself a new life. In one season his entire dream of being a dairy farmer is taken away by a contagious illness that causes his cows to abort their calves. Herriot knows the cause of the trouble and even how the bacteria is spread but has no vaccine he can use to save Metcalf's herd. Herriot feels helpless that he is unable to do anything to save Metcalf and keep him from going back to the steel business.



In Chapter 40 Siegfried's true personality comes out. He overhears Herriot complaining about a hateful customer and suggests Herriot try to remain calm all the time. Siegfried adds that there is to be no swearing in the surgery. The same customer talks to Siegfried, however, and Siegfried curses also, despite his lecture. Siegfried decides to charge the customer ten pounds to geld his horse, a badly-inflated amount. The customer pays the requested amount, but Siegfried loses the cheque, an action for which he would have scolded Herriot.



Chapters 41-44

Chapters 41-44 Summary

On one of his last days in Darrowby before leaving for duty in the Royal Air Force Herriot remembers in Chapter 41 an act of kindness bestowed upon him by Siegfried. Herriot and Helen as of yet have no home of their own and are still living in the Skeldale House. Helen is pregnant with their first child. In an offhanded way Siegfried mentions that he owes Herriot fifty pounds. It takes Herriot a long time to realize Siegfried never actually owed Herriot this money; it was his way of giving a gift. Herriot uses this chapter as an opportunity to thank his former boss.

In Chapters 42 and 43 Herriot remembers hurrying through an afternoon of calls to make a supper engagement to which Helen insisted they not be late. However, everything that could go wrong does go wrong for Herriot that evening. At his first call Herriot has to wait while the animal's owner tries to lasso the animal. He then has to wait while two maiden ladies slowly trick their pig into moving into a smaller pen using digestive biscuits. On his last call Herriot is about to finish putting a ring in a bull's nose when the bull rears and escapes from its pen. Thinking he now has no hope of getting to his supper in time, Herriot asks to use a phone. The farmer insists this won't be necessary and that Herriot will be home in plenty of time. The farmer lets a cow out of the barn, then calls the bull. Surprisingly, the bull comes and begins to suck one of the cow's teats. While he is busy nursing, Herriot is able to finish his job in plenty of time for supper.

In Chapter 44 Tristan has finally earned his own veterinary certificate. Herriot admires the young man's ability to elicit sympathy from the farmers he works with whenever he injures himself. Herriot recalls that his outbursts upon being hurt usually get a round of laughter by the farmers. Tristan, however, plays on his pain in a way the farmers sympathize with him. Although Herriot envies the treatment Tristan receives from his emotional outbursts, Herriot does not have the courage to copy his antics.

Chapters 41-44 Analysis

Note in Chapter 41 Siegfried shows his concern for Herriot and his young wife by giving them money to help with expenses of a coming baby. Instead of calling it a gift and embarrassing them, Siegfried makes up a story that it is back pay and Herriot has earned the cash. In Chapters 42 and 43 Herriot tells about the unpredictable nature of his job. Although he firmly believes he can be finished with his calls in time for the couple's supper engagement, Herriot has everything working against him. It is only the most natural, but also the oddest circumstances, a grown bull suckling his mother, that allows Herriot to finish his work on time. Finally, note that in Chapter 44 Tristan puts his own unique touch to his brand of veterinary work. Farmers who never noticed, or even

laughed at Herriot's discomfort give Tristan sympathy and compassion when he puts on a show to prove how hard his work is.



Chapters 45-48

Chapters 45-48 Summary

In Chapter 45 Herriot tries a new drug on some cows with white scour. Before administering the drug the cows were deathly sick, lying motionless on the barn floor. Although the farmer wants to go ahead and call the knacker because he can get more money for live cows Herriot convinces the farmer to let him try this new medication. Herriot fears the cows will still die but to his surprise they are much improved the next day. Herriot considers this quick recovery one of the miracles of his practice.

In Chapter 46 Herriot admits although he is primarily a large animal doctor, he still enjoys working with household pets. Magnus is one of the more colorful pets Herriot has treated. Because of Magnus' dislike for Herriot, Herriot is forced to speak in a whisper anytime he visits the Drovers' Arms, an inn where Magnus lives. When Magnus hears Herriot's voice, Magnus starts an unending yap. Magnus' dislike for Herriot began when Herriot first attempted to cut the little dog's nails. The owner refuses to help Herriot subdue the dog so Herriot wraps the snapping dog's muzzle in a bandage and holds him under one arm to clip the nails. Magnus is clearly angry that Herriot has mastered him and will not let Herriot forget his indignity.

In another case, Herriot is called to treat the foot of a dog caught in a trap. The owner is afraid the foot will have to be amputated, but Herriot believes it can be saved. Despite the pain the dog goes through while his foot is doctored during the healing process, he never holds this against Herriot. A case with an opposite effect involves a Fox Terrier. Herriot forces the dog to vomit because it has eaten poison. The dog seems to be trying to get back at Herriot for the bad experience because every time Herriot passes that particular house, the dog runs out and nips him on the ankles. Herriot believes this is the dog's way of getting even with Herriot for making him throw up.

Herriot's call-up papers arrive on his birthday, Herriot recalls in Chapter 47. In this chapter he also tells of one last case where he dealt with a dislocated leg in a dog. Amazingly Herriot is able to reset the leg without even trying really hard, a good omen for his last call before leaving Darrowby. In Chapter 48 Herriot recalls a feeling of loss as he walks out of the Skeldale House for the final time. He vows never to have to leave Helen again. His only wish is that he had know then that life was just beginning.

Chapters 45-48 Analysis

In Chapter 45 Herriot has his first real experience with modern medicine. He watches as a group of cows are snatched from death by Herriot using a new sulphapyridine tablet. He writes that although he saw many cures in his lifetime, he never saw another one this dramatic. Herriot then moves on to write about the reactions of different animals to his treatments. One dog holds such a grudge against Herriot for cutting his toenails that

if he even hears Herriot's voice he barks uncontrollably. In contrast, another dog who withstood severe discomfort as Herriot treated an injured paw, never seems to hold Herriot responsible for any of this pain at all. The book closes with Herriot preparing to leave for service in the Royal Air Force. The tone here turns from the general humorous tone to one of thoughtfulness almost bordering on melancholy. This melancholy tone does not end the book, however. The passage of time has allowed Herriot to realize this was only the closing of one chapter in his life, not the end of everything.



Characters

James Herriot

Herriot is the author of this novel. At the time of the book, he has two years experience as a veterinary surgeon and has just been promoted to partner by his former boss Siegfried Farnon. Through his writing it is obvious that Herriot is a person who loves life and loves living. This love of life shows in the joyful and humorous tone in which Herriot tells his stories. Herriot also loves the people and animals with whom he works. While he loves these people, Herriot also enjoys observing people and noticing the ironies and incongruities of their behavior and the situations in which they find themselves. Herriot often uses these circumstances as material for his stories.

Although he has the necessary experience, Herriot makes it clear that he often feels helpless when trying to treat difficult cases. There are several places in the book where he admits in his writing that he simply hasn't known what was wrong with an animal. Instead of giving up, Herriot thinks and researches until he finds a diagnosis and treatment if there is a treatment available. He is open to new medicines and new procedures and is excited about advances being made in large animal practice. However, there are cases Herriot knows he is not qualified to handle and calls on his friend Bennett to lend his expertise. Herriot is at a point in his life where his job and the joys of his job have not become mundane. For instance, although he has delivered dozens of lambs, Herriot writes that he still feels awed by the miracle of birth and new life each time another lamb is born.

Tristan Farnon

Tristan is a veterinary student who often works with Herriot. Tristan is the younger brother of Siegfried, Herriot's partner. Before he is married Herriot, Tristan and Siegfried live together in the Skeldale House. Tristan is a fun-loving character who enjoys irritating his older brother. This is shown by Tristan's insistence on smoking in the house even after Siegfried has decided to stop smoking. Tristan's love of fun and tricking people turns sour on him one night as he dresses up as the Raynes ghost. Herriot learns Tristan has been dressing up as this ghost for quite awhile and scaring people. Tristan considers his game honest fun and enjoys seeing newspaper articles about sightings of the ghost. Tristan's fun ends one night when one of the men who sees the "ghost" decides to try to catch the phantom. Tristan manages to get away from the large man who pursues him but is forced to spend the night in a drain pipe. It is after this experience that the Raynes ghost disappears from Darrowby.

Herriot describes Tristan as an extremely intelligent young man with the ability to soak up information like a sponge. He notes that Tristan never really had to study to be a vet like Herriot did. Near the end of the novel Tristan graduates from veterinary school and becomes a full-fledged veterinary surgeon like his brother and Herriot. Even as a doctor



Tristan relies on his acting to get special treatment from his clients. This is shown in the story where Herriot describes the "misery" Tristan appears to be feeling while helping to deliver a calf. Although Herriot realizes the uncomfortable nature of the position in which Tristan found himself, he could never work up the nerve to put on the same caliber of show Tristan does.

Siegfried Farnon

Before Herriot and Helen are married Siegfried is Herriot's boss. After their marriage, Herriot becomes Siegfried's partner. Siegfried is the older brother to Tristan. Unlike his younger brother, Siegfried is a very serious character. Siegfried also has a very volatile temper. It often takes very little to set Siegfried off on a rant. The quirky part of Siegfried's personality is that he is quite often lecturing Herriot and Tristan not to do something that Siegfried himself will do. For instance, Siegfried gives the two men a long talk about not leaving instruments on the farms where they go to make calls. He explains to them that the expense of replacing these lost instruments is substantial. Siegfried advises the two to do as he does and always remember to pick up any instrument they have used during that call before they leave the farm. This lecture is given just before the group of men go to a call where Siegfried leaves a new pair of forceps behind. The farmer who owns the farm lets Herriot and Tristan know this is not the first time a piece of equipment has been left behind as he kids Siegfried about the variety of things he's left on the farm.

Although Siegfried is easily angered and often hypocritical, he is also a very kind person. When Herriot and Helen are first married Siegfried allows the two to live in the vacant rooms in the third story of the Skeldale House. Just before Herriot leaves for service with the Royal Air Force Siegfried gives him a check for fifty pounds that he claims is due Herriot from the time he worked under Siegfried. Although Herriot doesn't realize it at the time, this money was never owed him; it is Siegfried's way of giving the young man a gift. Siegfried knew Herriot and Helen needed money but didn't want to embarrass them by giving it to them outright. In order to keep Herriot from feeling embarrassed or feeling that he needed to pay the money back, Siegfried makes up the story of Herriot's pay being shorted.

Helen Alderson Herriot

Helen is Herriot's sweetheart. Although it is known to the reader in the beginning of the book that Helen and Herriot do get married, Herriot writes that he was often under the impression that the two might never enjoy a successful meeting with one another. Although he was encouraged by his housemates Tristan and Siegfried to try again, Herriot writes that he was mortified by the first two failed dates to which he treated Helen. These two disastrous dates were followed by an afternoon tea at Helen's parents' house where Herriot treats an animal who promptly dies. Although Helen tries to convince him otherwise Herriot is certain Helen's father believes Herriot killed the



animal purposefully. In addition to this Herriot believes Helen's parents prefer Richard Edmundson, another young man who is dating Helen, over Herriot.

Throughout the novel Herriot describes Helen as having a dark beauty about her. He mentions that she is kind, even when Herriot brings back a load of books instead of furniture from a sale, she does not ridicule or scold. Herriot writes that he becomes fat on Helen's good cooking. He also mentions that because she was raised in a household where the man was respected and cherished, she treats Herriot with a great deal of respect. The only falling out point in their marriage that Herriot writes about is Helen's unwillingness to let her husband sit on the unsuitable chair as they ate their meals together. The couple have a high stool and one kitchen chair. The stool fits the bench they originally used as their table. During this time Helen made Herriot sit on the stool while she sat on the short chair. When they finally got a real table, the stool was too high so Helen made Herriot sit on the stool while she sat on the chair. Herriot writes that he considered forcing his new wife bodily to sit in the more suitable chair at first but decided against it once he considered Helen's size and sheer strength.

Granville Bennett

Granville Bennett is a veterinarian friend of Herriot who specializes in small animals. Three times in the course of the book Herriot takes an animal to Bennett to have him perform a needed operation. Each of these times Herriot is impressed with the level skill at which Bennett works. Although Herriot envies Bennett's shining surgical area and adept assistants, Herriot knows he made the right choice by pursuing a career in large animals. All three times Herriot visits Bennett, Bennett manages to get Herriot drunk. On his second visit to Bennett's office, the two go to a veterinary meeting in Appleby. It has been snowing very hard that day and the two return home on a road made treacherous by the snow. Although Herriot is drunk and sick, he is himself enough to be afraid they will become stuck and stranded on the road. Despite the bad driving conditions Bennett manages to get them home in one piece. The next day Herriot learns that road they traveled had been closed to traffic for two days because the conditions were too bad for cars.

Zoe Bennett

Zoe Bennett is Granville Bennett's wife. Although Herriot has in his mind that Bennett's wife will be a frumpy housewife, he is surprised at Zoe's beauty and charm. Since he is drunk all three times he sees her, however, Herriot believes Zoe does not hold an equally high opinion of him. He writes that he gets the feeling that Zoe feels he is harmless, just unable to stay sober.

Richard Edmundson

Richard Edmundson is another young man from Darrowby who is also courting Helen. Herriot believes Edmundson is Helen's parents' preference as a husband for their



daughter. Edmundson is sleek, clean and well off. It seems that whenever Herriot is in the middle of making a spectacle of himself, such as at the county fair, Edmundson always shows up with Helen in tow. However, Helen shows Herriot that she prefers him when she leaves a dance with him to go to an emergency veterinary call even though she had attended the dance with Edmundson.

Richard Carmody

Richard Carmody is a student who works with and observes Herriot for awhile. Carmody's rich dress and haughty attitude gives Herriot the impression that Carmody will not last long as a large animal doctor. After Carmody conceitedly requests Herriot allow him hands on experience with the animals, Herriot gives the young man his desire. He lets the student handle some jobs that even a seasoned vet would flinch at, such as getting blood from the ear of a pig. At the end of his day of hands on experience, Carmody smells of pig excretions, has been dragged across a pasture by a bull and has been bitten in the rear by a dog. Even at the end of his trials, however, Carmody has still not given up. It is at this point that Herriot realizes the signs of greatness in this student. Even after he has graduated from school Carmody still gives the impression of being cold and emotionless. A comment from the young man at a veterinary meeting lets Herriot know just how big of an impression his time with Herriot made on Carmody.

Monty

Monty is a Newton bull who Herriot saves from death by removing a hair ball from one of his stomachs. While he was still a calf Herriot developed a friendly relationship with the bull and used to often scratch Monty's head. As a mature bull, however, Monty turns into a mean creature. One day while trying to draw a blood sample from the bull Herriot is knocked to the ground when Monty manages to free himself from the metal yoke in which his owner had trapped him. Herriot felt lucky to escape with his life. The huge angry bull could have easily killed him. At the end of the experience Monty's owner comments about the drastic turn around from friends to enemies in the relationship between Monty and Herriot.

Mrs. Donovan

Mrs. Donovan is a woman who swears she will never own another dog after her pet dog is killed by a car. However, Herriot manipulates the woman into adopting a dog that has been abused and is in terrible condition. Herriot does this both because he believes Mrs. Donovan needs another dog and because he knows she will take good care of this neglected animal. True to her nature Mrs. Donovan cleans and fattens the dog up and soon has a loyal new companion dog. Although she is not a veterinary surgeon, Mrs. Donovan often shows up at Herriot's cases and offers to use of her condition powders. These powders are a secret concoction that Mrs. Donovan claims will cure any animal.



Mrs. Donovan is also well-known as the town's busy body and is always present at any function or gathering, no matter the size.

Herbert

Herbert is a lamb whose mother will not let him nurse. For a while Herbert's owner lets Herbert move from ewe to ewe getting a drink whenever he can. Luckily for Herbert he is adopted by a ewe whose own lambs are born dead. Benson named the lamb Herbert after his youngest son. He said they both had the same fearless way of getting what they wanted.

Jock

Jock is a dog who always chases James off his owner's property after James pays a veterinary visit. Unlike most dogs Jock takes this game very seriously. When his owner has him bred and his puppies threaten to outrun him, Jock's pride takes a serious hit. Jock's owner sells the puppies, however, and Jock is able to return to his position as king of his home.



Objects/Places

Skeldale House

Skeldale House is the home where James and Helen Herriot live. It is also the location of Herriot's veterinary clinic.

Four Horse Shoes

The Four Horse Shoes is a bar where many of James' clients drink.

Ladies Hands

The farmers who call for Herriot to deliver their ewes refer to Herriot's hands as being ladies hands. These hands are small enough for Herriot to work inside the sheep and cause them minimum discomfort.

Bismuth Suspension

This suspension is the medicine Siegfried, Tristan and Herriot give Clancy to help with his vomiting.

Heston Grange

Heston Grange is the farm where Helen lives with her parents before she and Herriot are married.

A Monstrous Tweed Cap

Mr. Crump gives this cap to Herriot on the night they drink together. Throughout his process of birthing the Bamford's calf, the family replaces this cap on Herriot's head each time it falls off.

An Unusual Pair of Forceps

It is this pair of forceps that Siegfried uses to remove an object from a cow's eye. Later when Herriot asks to see the forceps, Siegfried realizes he has left them on the farm, an error he has been lecturing Herriot about not making.



Condition Powders

It is these powders that Mrs Donovan believes will bring any animal back to life. Although she is not a veterinarian, she often shows up at Herriot's cases promoting her powders.

The Raynes Ghost

This figure of a cowled monk appears frequently near Raynes Abbey. Herriot learns one night that this "ghost" is actually only Tristian dressed up in a monk's habit.

Harland Grange

This farm is one of the last ones that Herriot can remember where horses are used to help with farming duties. During his early years of practice, however, even this farm begins to use tractors. The last work horse dies after he is infected with lock jaw.

Bowes Moor Road

It is this road on which Herriot and Bennett return to Hartington from their veterinary meeting in Appleby one snowy night. The morning after their trip Herriot learns the Bowes Moor Road has been impassable for the past two days.



Themes

Courtship and Marriage

Herriot's developing relationship with Helen, the girl who he marries, is a major theme in this novel. Although Herriot does not provide information about their courtship and early marriage in a chronological timeline, he tells enough about their courtship and relationship to convey how much difference his marriage to Helen makes in his life. Herriot begins his book with a story in which he curls up with his warm wife after returning from a farm call one cold winter night. Herriot considers this one of the great privileges of married life.

Herriot soon shares that his relationship with Helen was not always a sure thing. Herriot had major competition in the form of Richard Edmundson. In their courting days Herriot believes Helen's parent prefer Edmundson to Herriot. Herriot also tells of a string of unfortunate experiences in which he believes he has made of fool of himself in front of Helen and her parents. For instance, Herriot joins Helen's family for tea one afternoon. One of the family's cows is sick and Herriot takes a look at it. However, instead of being able to help the cow, the cow dies of its illness just after Herriot gives it an injection. Herriot suffers with the feeling Helen's father believes the young vet killed his cow.

One evening at a dance Herriot invites Helen to go along with him on one of this emergency vet calls. Although she is attending the dance with Edmundson, Helen leaves with Herriot. The couple spends their evening with an older couple as their pet dog gives birth to a half-dozen puppies. At the end of their evening Herriot proudly tells the couple that Helen is his girlfriend.

Herriot shares the happy memories of his first years of marriage. Although he and Helen did not have many material possessions, they were happy. As a result of the way she was raised Helen was an attentive wife and always pleasant and kind. At the end of the novel when Herriot is called up for duty with the Royal Air Force he is distressed with the idea of leaving his loving wife alone with no home and no money. Although the couple did not plan for children, Helen is also pregnant when Herriot leaves for his duty. Even though things have not turned out exactly the way Herriot planned them, he realizes as he looks back that these happy times were only the beginning of their relationship.

Human Beings' Relationships with Animals

In the time period and area in which Herriot works, the majority of the animals he treats are working animals. His early practice is not like modern times where the majority of animals are kept as pets. In the economy of working animals, the vet is a very important and frequent visitor to each farm. Herriot underscores the importance of this relationship in the way in which he presents the animals with whom he works. His descriptions of



these animals show how familiar he is with each animal and how closely he pays attention to them. Herriot's colorful cast of animal characters includes Clancey, the huge dog who scares Herriot and the Farnon brothers so badly that even the three of them together don't want to try to examine him. The bull Monty is a character that Herriot cares for from the time he is only a calf. Herriot describes the changes in the bull's physical appearance as well as his personality as Monty matures.

Another aspect of Herriot's writing that is quite interesting is the farmers' relationships with their own animals. While these animals were indispensable to the farmer's livelihood, Herriot shows the farmer often developed an affection for their animals. For instance, Herriot notes the obvious concern that Mr. Crump, who is otherwise unemotional, shows for his injured work horse.

Although Herriot's main practice is in farm animals, he is also often called to treat house pets. Herriot obviously enjoys these encounters with small animals even though they fall outside his area of expertise. Herriot shows the conscientiousness of his personality by often conferring with a fellow veterinarian who specializes in small animals. In most all cases, however, Herriot notes the loving relationship most pet owners share with their pets. He seems most surprised when he notes this same relationship even between farmers and their working dogs. One example of this relationship is found with Gyp and his owner. Although Gyp was diagnosed with epilepsy and couldn't compete in sheep trials, Herriot felt his owner kept the dog around just because he liked him.

Challenges of the country vet

Another theme that often repeats in Herriot's work concerns the challenges of caring for animals in the early 1930's. In this time period many modern medicines, such as penicillin, had not even been developed. Animals died of conditions that are easily treatable today. Although Herriot notes he enjoys seeing the "miracle" of these early drugs, he is sorry for all the animals that were lost before a cure is found for their particular disease.

Because he treated mainly large farm animals whose owners had no way to transport them to a clinic, Herriot faced a whole series of challenges in his job. For instance, he had no sterilized operating rooms in which to carry out his procedures; he did his work in whatever barn, outbuilding or pasture his patient happened to be. Herriot also often spent long hours driving in all sorts of weather from case to case. To make matters worse, Herriot was on call at all hours and was often waked in the middle of the night to doctor a sick animal.

Humor

The most distinguishing characteristic of Herriot's writing is his ability to recognize the humor in most any situation. Herriot not only relies on his patrons and their animals for sources of humor, but he is also aware of the absurdity of some of his own actions. Even in situations that would mortify some people, Herriot presents the situations so the

humor and comedy of the circumstances becomes clear. Most people, for instance, would not consider a visit during which the cow of Herriot's love interest dies to be a humorous situation. Herriot, however, presents this story in a way that it becomes hilarious.



Style

Point of View

This novel is a fictionalized autobiography of Herriot's early years as a veterinarian and thus is written in the first person by Herriot. He tells his experience from his point of view. Herriot does not speculate about circumstances but tells only things that he has witnessed personally. This first person point of view fits Herriot's intentions for his novel perfectly. It is though this outlook that he is best able to share his experiences as a vet as well as the valuable lessons he learns during his early years of work.

Herriot tells his story mostly through exposition. He enjoys describing the animals and people he meets as well as the countryside he sees. There are patches of dialogue scattered throughout the book. Sometimes only a line or two of dialogue will be used in one entire chapter of the book. When Herriot does use dialogue, however, he attempts to capture the nuances and speech patterns used by his characters. For this reason these quotes are often written in the way in which the speaker might have actually sounded.

Setting

Herriot sets his stories in the fictional town of Darrowby in Yorkshire, England. It is known, however, Herriot's Darrowby was patterned after Herriot's actual hometown of Thirsk, England. The majority of the action of the novel takes place on the farms to which Herriot traveled to care for farm animals. Besides these scattered locations around the countryside, the majority of the action takes place in the Skedale House. It is in this house where Herriot lives with his partner Siegfried and Siegfried's brother Tristan. After Helen and Herriot are married, they take up residence in the third story rooms of the Skedale House. In addition to being his home, the Skedale House is also where Herriot's veterinary practice is based. The house includes a waiting room and examining room as well as a dispensary where medicines are compounded and mixed up. Other settings mentioned in the book include Granville's surgery in Hartington as well as the homes of Herriot's various patrons.

Language and Meaning

Herriot's tone and language is very informal and conversational. He writes his stories almost as if he were telling them to an audience instead of writing them on paper. His novel is very easy to read and enjoyable. Even though Herriot does often refer to animal diseases in his writing, it is not necessary for the reader to have a great deal of knowledge about animals or their diseases to understand of what he is writing.

Since Herriot is a native Englishman he refers to some objects as those from England would. For instance instead of calling the back storage space of a car the trunk, Herriot



refers to it as the boot. The careful reader may even notice that Herriot uses alternate spellings on some of his words. For instance instead of the American spelling of "recognize" Herriot uses the British spelling "recognise."

Structure

Herriot divides his novel into forty-eight short chapters. Each of these chapters is only about seven pages long. Herriot generally uses each individual chapter to tell the story of one particular experience, while the next chapter tells the story of another experience. There are only a few exceptions to this general rule where Herriot spreads the telling of a story over two chapters.

The only theme in this book that could really be considered a plot is the story of Helen and Herriot's courtship and early married life. Most of the stories Herriot tells in each individual chapter are not connected to each other and could even be used as individual short stories with each story having its own setting, characters and plot.

Herriot does not relate his story chronologically. The only way to tell that his stories do not occur in chronological order is to consider that the first chapter of the story takes place after Helen and Herriot are married. Throughout the book, however, Herriot tells stories that occurred before he and Helen were married. For most of the stories, the time they occurred in Herriot's life is not important. Herriot's main intent for the book is to share his experiences with his readers and not necessarily to convey a proper chronological sequence.



Quotes

"For a moment I forgot the knife-like wind in the thrill which I always found in a new life, the thrill was always fresh, always warm." Chapter 1, pg. 7.

"What she needed was an injection of penicillin, but this was 1939 and the antibiotics were still a little way round the corner." Chapter 3, pg. 22.

"This could be expected, because just as people place more reliance on the words of knacker men and meal travelers than their vets' when their animals are concerned it was natural that they would believe the vet rather than the doctor with their own ailments." Chapter 4, pg. 35.

"Mrs. Donovan, too, had her reward; she had a faithful companion by her side every hour of the day and night. But there was more to it than that; she had always had the compulsion to help and heal animals and the salvation of Roy was the high point of her life - a blazing triumph which never dimmed." Chapter 9, pg. 78.

"The scene before me was a far cry from my routine of kicks and buffets, of muck and sweat. And yet I had no regrets; the life which had been forced on me by circumstances had turned out to be a thing of magical fulfillment. It came to me in a flooding certainty that I would rather spend my days driving over the unfenced roads of the high country than stooping over that operating table." Chapter 16, pg. 142.

"'Oh aye, let's be at t'job - sooner the better.' He smiled at me. It was a confident smile and my stomach gave a lurch. His confidence could be badly misplaced because in those days abdominal surgery in the bovine was in a primitive state. There were a few jobs we had begun to tackle fairly frequently but removal of a hair ball wasn't one of them and my knowledge of the procedure was confined to some rather small-print reading in the text books." Chapter 18, pg. 154.

"The student was almost unrecognisable. His clothes and face were plastered with filth except where the saffron streaks of the Istin showed up like war paint, he smelt abominably, he had been bitten on the backside, nothing had really gone right for him all day yet he was curiously undefeated. I smiled to myself. It was no good judging this bloke by ordinary standards; I could recognise the seeds of greatness when I saw them." Chapter 29, pg. 241.

"And yet I have always entertained a suspicion that most farm dogs were more or less pets. The dogs on sheep farms were of course indispensable working animals and on other establishments they no doubt performed a function in helping to bring in the cows. But watching them on my daily rounds I often wondered." Chapter 34, pg. 274.

"Zoe giggled back, and I had the impression that she felt that though I was a peculiar individual there was no harm in me. I just had this terrible weakness that I was never sober day or night, but I really wasn't such a bad fellow at heart." Chapter 38, pg. 299.



"No...I hadn't organised things very well. Leaving Darrowby and maybe England for an indefinite period, no home, no money and a pregnant wife. It was an untidy situation. But I was beginning to learn that life was not a tidy little parcel at any time." Chapter 41, pg. 328.

"But tomorrow I would be far from here; in London pushing my way through the crowds. Taking big steps and little'uns." Chapter 47, pg. 377.

"I wish I had known then it was not the end of everything. I wish I had known that it was only the beginning." Chapter 48, pg. 378.



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast Herriot and Granville. Include aspects such as type of practice, lifestyle and personality.

Discuss the way Herriot presents himself in his writing. What does he convey about his personality, work ability, etc.?

Compare and contrast Herriot's life before marriage with his life after marriage.

Consider the importance of the role of the veterinarian in the lives of sheep and cow farmers. In what ways do these farmers show their appreciation for Herriot's services? In what ways do they take advantage of Herriot?

Based on information provided about Siegfried and Tristan in Herriot's stories compare and contrast the Farnon brothers. Which brother do you like better? Give reasons for your answer.

In your opinion, what was Herriot's biggest challenge during his early years as a veterinarian? Explain your answer.

Herriot often mentions that his patrons were more likely to believe the diagnosis given by the knacker or a home remedy salesman before they would believe the veterinarian's diagnosis was the correct one. Why do you think this was so? Do you believe this still happens in modern veterinary medicine?