

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS

Associates: { E. C. HEGLER.
MARY CARUS.

VOL. XVIII. (NO. 10) OCTOBER, 1904.

NO. 581

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NAPOLEON BEFORE THE SPHINX. (By L. O. Meson.)

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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WHAT THE DOG IS BUILT TO DO.*

BY WOODS HUTCHINSON, A. M., M. D.

THE first question which rises in our minds, when we see a new and strange object, is, What is it for? What is it fitted to do? And, as usual, first questions go deepest. Go about answering them, and you will soon find yourself with a fair working-knowledge of your subject. Leave them unanswered and no amount of information will satisfy you.

Let us suppose that our friend and comrade, the dog, was as strange to us as Dick Whittington's cat was to the natives of Khatmandhu. What does he look as if he was "built" to do? Two things strike us at once, the gleaming teeth in his long, powerful jaw, and the look of speed about his clean, well-set, graceful legs.

And his actions show that they are the most important things about him. He is always on the move, at a bounding elastic gallop, or swinging, tireless trot, "that eats up the long miles like fire," as Kipling says, and the joy of his heart is a wild dash after anything, stick, ball, bird, cat, that gives him the remotest chance of getting his teeth into it. Evidently, to chase and to catch have been his principal occupations for many generations.

From the length of his jaws and the size and strength of the ivory hooks with which they are armed, we would say that his usual prey had been animals of considerable size and strength.

And how does he capture these? By a stealthy approach and sudden cat-like spring? Evidently not, for, in the first place, his entire bearing and gait are against such a supposition, and, in the second, a glance at his feet shows that his claws are neither hooked,

*The first installment of a brief Introduction to the Rational Study of Natural History for Children.

nor sharp enough to hold prey pounced upon in this way, nor has he the shoulder-play and hammer paws suitable for a heavy, stunning stroke. Just watch him trying to catch that robin out on the lawn. Instead of crouching down flat, and crawling from one shrub to the next, taking advantage of every tuft of grass till he is close enough for a spring, then gazing round at the scenery with an air of skilfully assumed indifference if he misses, bang he goes, straight at his intended victim, yelping furiously to let Mr. Robin know he's coming, and when he flies away, chasing him madly as long as he can keep him in sight.

Evidently a frank and open chase, kept up as long as the quarry can possibly be kept track of, by either sight or smell, is the tradition of his race. The longer the chase, the better it suits his powers. His deep chest, powerful loins, and sinewy legs tell of both speed and endurance.

But in broken country, or through woods and copses, endurance will avail him little, if he has to depend upon his sight alone for keeping track of his game. Look at his large and restless nostrils, and see how he uses his nose to test everything that he comes across. How he lifts his head and sniffs the air before he dashes into a thicket, to return with a rabbit in his mouth. Here is the secret of his tough and wiry build, the sense which keeps him on the trail of his prey, long after it has passed out of sight and hearing, even though its scent may be eight, ten, or twelve hours old.

But why this cheerful, musical accompaniment which, from the eager, treble "yap" of the terrier, to the deep, baritone bay of the blood-hound, always announces to the echoing woodlands that the scent is hot? Surely this is not only sheer waste of valuable breath, but a gratuitous announcement to every rabbit and deer within three-quarters of a mile that the hunt is up, and they must run and hide.

But what if they do? The fatal trail of scent is left behind to be followed as we track foot-prints in the snow, while, on the other hand, every dog within earshot of the hunting-cry dashes off in its direction at once, in the hope of heading off, or even running into the tired quarry. When a dog "gives tongue" he goes back to the old wolf-days, before the dawn of history, and summons the listening pack to the chase and a share of the kill.

He is no selfish and solitary hunter like the cat, or otter, and that is one of the main reasons why we have been able to make him so vastly useful to us. With an ingenuity which does us credit, we have succeeded in transferring to ourselves the loyalty and obedience once rendered by him to the pack. He has adopted us into the pack,

and we, I am proud to say, have adopted him into the family, yet the balance of devotion and service is distinctly in our favor. He is at best, to us, but a member of the family; we are to him the embodiment of the whole pack. He probably worships us, much as the savage adores the ancestral spirit of his tribe.

Look more closely at his feet and see how admirably they are adapted for this long-distance racing. Only the balls of his toes, and the central pad, round which they are compactly grouped, touch the ground. The dog moves continually on tip-toe, just as we do when we run fast. This gives both elasticity and increased length of leverage. Each toe is shod below with a thick, leathery pad of tough skin, and tipped by a strong curved nail.

The toes spread just enough to give a secure foothold on every sort of surface; with the aid of his claws he can scramble almost anywhere that a goat can. Though his claws are neither hooked enough to hold, nor long enough to slash with, they have a keen, rounded, cutting edge, and are strong and flat, arched above and hollowed beneath, just like small trowels. Capital burrowing-tools they make, whether to dig the rabbit out of his hole, or to enlarge the hollow under the roots of a stump into a snug chamber for the mother and her puppies.

If you will take up a dog's foot with one hand and press it firmly down upon the palm of the other, you will see that the toes can be spread quite widely apart, and the folds of skin between them put on the stretch. This power of spreading makes it an excellent paddle to swim with, the foot expanding against the water on the down-stroke, and collapsing on the return, just like a duck's foot, so that the dog swims stronger and higher out of the water than any other of our domestic animals. Most animals swim with only their heads above the surface, but the dog carries his neck, shoulders, and often half the length of his back out of water.

Now let us look at his coat, and see what clue that will give us to his profession and occupation. It is evidently a regular hunter's suit, a capital "rough and ready" costume, good for all weathers and temperatures. Much as its length and color may vary in the different breeds, we shall always find it to consist of two kinds of hair: one, long, coarse, and shining, which forms the entire surface, or outer coat; the other, short, fine, and woolly, which grows close to the skin, and forms the under or inner coat. The long, outer hairs give the coat its character and color, according as they are stiff or silky, straight or curly, black, white, or brown. Their use is to protect the dog from brambles and thorns in his gallops through

the underbrush, to shed the rain and keep out the snow, to form a blanket under and a mackintosh over him when he sleeps. Hence they remain practically the same winter and summer.

The soft, short, mossy undercoat, however, is chiefly for warmth, like our own flannels, and hence is much thicker and closer in winter than in summer. Lift up the outer coat and you will see it lying among the roots of the hair like moss under grass, and usually a duller shade of the color of the outer coat. Look at the cat's fur and you will find exactly the same arrangement, only the long outer hairs are so fine and silky that at first glance you think there is only one class of hair present. Separate the coat by blowing into it and you will at once see the dull-colored, lustreless inner-coat at the bottom of the fur.

What could we say of the probable habits of the two animals from a comparison of their coats? That the dog had been accustomed to be out in all weathers and to sleep in the open, while the cat had avoided the rain and the wet and always slept under cover.

Don't apply this line of reasoning to the fur of a seal-skin sacque, or an otter cape, as these are only the dyed *under-coat* of the animals, the long, stiff outer coat having been carefully plucked out, hair by hair. Nearly all animals that are covered with hair have these two coats, though some, like the pig, have lost all but a few of the outer bristles, and others, like the sheep, have only an immensely-developed under-coat, in the form of wool.

If you are curious as to how the dog gets rid of his winter under-clothing, just let him rub against your dark dress or stockings in the spring, or watch the carpets of any room he is allowed to come into, and you'll see that he sheds both coats within a few weeks' time. They both come in again, fresh and bright, but with the under-coat very thin and light, and it is not until the cold nights begin in the fall that it grows thick and long to form his winter flannels.

Nearly all animals shed their winter coats in the spring and get a summer one, which does not thicken up till fall, and that is why their skins are of no value for fur purposes during the summer. Even the sheep would shed if we didn't shear him first, and look how rough and shaggy a pony's coat gets in winter. They all have one great advantage over us in the matter of clothes, for of their spring suits the clothiers' classic guarantee is literally true, "the longer you wear 'em, the thicker they get," and they grow themselves without having to be bought or fitted.

As for the uses which man has made of the powers of the dog-

engine, they are household words. Long before the dawn of history he had become our companion in the chase, then the most important occupation of life. He was far the earliest animal to be domesticated, and hence is entitled to our affection as both the oldest and the staunchest friend of man. How early in the infancy of the race at the Stone Age, man went forth and slew the she-wolf in her lair, but saved her cubs alive, or, as Dr. Carus explains it in his "Philosophy of the Tool," the wolf began prowling round the camp-fire for bones, or following the chase for the offal, we know not and never shall know, for when man appears upon the threshold of history, the dog is at his heels.

In the days when our great-grandfather rose from his bed of dried leaves and bearskins, with his dinner and perhaps even his breakfast still running at large in the forest, the dog was simply invaluable. A man's living and that of his whole family might literally depend upon the speed of his dog. No wonder that he was made much of and that some savages will today share their last piece of meat with their dogs.

There are even gruesome stories abroad, that at times he has been regarded as of more value than some members of the human family. Darwin tells of a conversation that he had with the chief of a little band of natives on the bleak and barren coast of Tierra del Fuego. The old man knew a little English, and Darwin, noticing the famished appearance of his followers, asked what sort of a winter they had had. He was told that it had been frightfully severe and food so hard to get that all the old women of the tribe had died of hunger. Pointing to the score or more of wolfish dogs, which were sniffing suspiciously around the group, he asked in some surprise, why these had not been sacrificed for food? The wizened old chief looked at him for a moment, in contemptuous wonder at such a foolish question, and then with a shrug of his shoulders, replied, "Doggies catch otters, old women no can!"

A convincing testimony to the savage's high regard for his dog, if not exactly to his humanity, tho' indeed his assistance in the struggle for existence, in the hunting-stage, was simply invaluable. From the frozen North, where he trailed the musk-ox and brought the bear to bay among the ice-hummocks, to the sun-scorched South, where he coursed the antelope across the desert, or pulled down the deer in the jungle, half the success of the hunter depended upon him. His speed enables him to catch the game in the open and hold, or delay it, till the hunter can come up, his nose and scenting powers, to find it however skilfully hid in the thickest and most impenetrable

tangles. He can follow the invisible trail of the wounded bull or trace the tottering steps of the dying elk to the thicket where he has dropped in his tracks. His "dogged" persistence drives the hunted deer circling back to the place from which he started, or into the nearest water, there to meet his fate.

So indispensable was he that it is doubtful whether man could have become civilized without his aid. When a little later in history, man reached a stage of greater comfort, where he was not obliged to kill and eat at once everything that he captured and so saved some of the young calves and kids alive and saw them grow and multiply into flocks and herds under his care, the dog begins to play a new part. He becomes the sworn protector of the very animals whose hereditary enemy he had been for countless generations. In their defense he will even turn against his own cousin, the wolf. Wherever the shepherd, the herdsman, has gone, from the plains of Asia Minor to the ranges of Arizona, from the misty Highlands of Scotland to the dusty flats of Australia, the dog has gone with him as his right-hand man. His keen scent for danger, his courage when it comes, his tireless ranging powers, his skill in finding the lost and the strayed, his sagacity and obedience, render him absolutely indispensable.

Even today no farm is considered properly equipped without its dog to frighten the fox or polecat from the hen roost, the wolf from the flocks, and the thief from the granary or orchard. As the ever-watchful and absolutely incorruptible guardian of our property, our homes, and, in troublesome times, even our lives, his place would have been and is yet hard to fill.

Still another way in which he has been of service is as a beast of burden. Whenever the soil or the climate will not let grass enough grow to feed a horse or a donkey, the dog is harnessed to the cart, the sled, or the travaux. As is well known, the Eskimo and our Northern Indians depend entirely upon him for this purpose. Five good Eskimo dogs will gallop forty or fifty miles a day with a sled carrying a man and all his weapons and provisions for a long trip. Some of the northern Indians, who are too lazy to build a cart in summer, take two light poles about six feet long, tie them together at one end with a thong about a foot long and throw this across the dog's back, so that the other ends of the poles trail on the ground. A piece of cloth or leather is slung between them just behind the dog's hocks, and then upon this rude and slanting trail-litter, known as a "travaux," are piled food, cooking pots, bedding, or babies, until the load is about as heavy as he can drag. So much is he used for

this purpose that in the Indian sign-language, the sign for "dog" is made by extending and slightly separating the first two fingers of one hand, and then drawing them, nails downward, along the palm of the other hand, to imitate the poles of a travaux.

Nor need we go so far to find the dog in common use as a draught-horse. Cross over to Holland or Germany, and you will see scores of dogs, in every city, drawing fruit wagons, milk-carts, peddler's trucks, and even towing boats along the canals. And it is an odd sight to see a dog harnessed on one side of the pole of a truck-wagon and a man, or more commonly, a woman, on the other. You probably didn't know that you are repeating a forgotten chapter in ancestral history, when you put a fearfully and wonderfully constructed harness upon patient old Carlo, to his speechless disgust, and drive him in triumph to your little red wagon.

With his record of at least ten thousand years of continuous service and devotion to our race, is it any wonder that our hearts go out to the dog, as they do to no other animal? Although hunting has shrunk from the principal business of life to a mere pastime of our leisure hours, and most of us have neither flocks, nor herds, nor growing crops, nor any property interests, which require protection other than that of the policeman on duty, and the timelock, so that half his practical utility to us has absolutely disappeared, his hold upon our affection is stronger than ever. He is no longer our servant but our friend and companion.