



The Human Side of Animals

Royal Dixon

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Life is one throughout. The love that fills a mother's heart when she sees her first-born babe, is also felt by the mother bear, only in a different way, when she sees her baby cubs playing before her humble cave dwelling. The sorrow that is felt by the human heart when a beloved one dies is experienced in only a little less degree by an African ape when his mate is shot dead by a Christian missionary. The grandmother sheep that watches her numerous little lamb grandchildren on the hillside, while their mothers are away grazing, is just as mindful of their care as any human grandparent could be. Animals have demonstrated long ago that they not only have as many talents as human beings, but that under the influence of the same environment, they form the same kinds of combinations to defend themselves against enemies; to shelter themselves against heat and cold; to build homes; to lay up a supply of food for the hard seasons. In fact, all through the ages man has been imitating the animals in burrowing through the earth, penetrating the waters, and now, at last, flying through the air.

When a skunk bites through the brains of frogs, paralysing but not killing them, in order that he may store them away in his nursery-pantry so that his babes may have fresh food; when a mole decapitates earth-worms for the same reason and stores them near the cold surface of the ground so that the heads will not regrow, as they would under normal conditions, only a deeply prejudiced man can claim that no elements of intelligence have been employed.

There are also numerous signs, sounds and motions by which animals communicate with each other, though to man these symbols of language may not always be understandable. Dogs give barks indicating surprise, pleasure and all other emotions. Cows will bellow for days when mourning for their dead. The mother bear will bury her dead cub and silently guard its grave for weeks to prevent its being desecrated. The mother sheep will bleat most pitifully when her lamb strays away. Foxes utter expressive cries which their children know full well. The chamois, when frightened, whistle; they might be termed the policemen of the animal world. The sentinel will continue a long, drawn-out whistle, as long as he can without taking a breath. He then stops for a brief moment, looks in all directions, and begins blowing again. If the danger comes too near, he scampers away.

In their ability to take care of their wounded bodies, in their reading of the weather and in all forms of woodcraft, animals undoubtedly possess superhuman powers. Even squirrels can prophesy an unusually long and severe winter and thus make adequate preparations. Some animals act as both barometers and thermometers. It is claimed that while frogs remain yellow, only fair weather may be expected, but if their colour changes to brown, ill weather is coming.

From the facts enumerated in this book I find that animals are possessed of love, hate, joy, grief, courage, revenge, pain, pleasure, want and satisfaction—that all things that go to make up man's life are also found in them. In the attempt to establish this thesis I have been led mentally and physically into some of Nature's most fascinating highways and hedges, where I have had many occasions to wonder and adore.

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