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EDUCATIONAL FEATURES OF THE ANIMAL ACTS

One of the main points, amply demonstrated by the Keller Bros and trained animal acts, is that animals are capable of far more complicated behavior than was previously deemed possible. They are indeed brighter than is commonly believed. Animals have not previously been observed under conditions which would demonstrate their true abilities, nor have they been trained with methods which bring out the full range of their behavior. The ordinary animal in a small barnyard pen, living an unnatural life, does not have any opportunity to demonstrate his intelligence. Not that the Keller animals are living exactly a "natural" life, but they are demonstrating their abilities.

This greater appreciation of animals and their abilities has an application to the handling of pets. It should increase children's interest in their pets, and stimulate cultivation of a wider variety of species as pets. It will make it possible to instruct children, and adults, in better methods of training and handling their pets. It will be possible to train hitherto neglected species in interesting behaviors which will make them of interest as pets. Thus, rabbits are lovable pets, and many children acquire them at some point in their pet raising careers, but generally abandon them sooner or later because the rabbits do not "do anything". If they can teach their rabbits a few cute behaviors, they will be proud of them and feel a greater attachment to them.

The development of the new animal psychology and its practical demonstration leads us to a more detailed knowledge of animals' reactions to their native environments. It gives us a clearer knowledge of how they get along in the world and form the behaviors which give them the ability to deal with their natural habitat, its dangers, its uncertainties, and its difficulties in the search for food and shelter, companionship and safety. Furthermore, the peculiarities of various species are better understood; the dog's social nature, the keen vision of the birds, the solitary nature of the cat and the peculiar way in which he hunts. Myths and inaccurate guesses about animal behavior and the ways in which the various animals respond can now give way to accurate knowledge--although we are far from knowing all the answers, we know a great deal more about what animals can and cannot see, how they find their food and their mates, how and why they behave as they do in groups, or not, as the case may be.

The primary educational feature of course is the graphic demonstration of the principles of behavior. Here we can see depicted both forcefully and entertainingly the real stuff of which everyday behavior is made--the principles of conditioning, extinction, discrimination, differentiation, work on a ratio of responses to reinforcements, the effects of drive, fatigue, etc., can all be seen at various points in the animal acts.

And there may be an educational analogy in the behavior of the lowly chicken who even with its limited capacity, by virtue of constant practice and steady work is able to accomplish remarkable things.