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THE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS THE DOMESTICATION OF ANIMALS

BY FRANCIS GALTON, F.R.S.

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The domestication of animals is one of the few relics of the past whence we may justly speculate on man's social condition in very ancient times. We know that the domestication of every important member of our existing stock was originated in pre-historic ages, and, therefore, that our remote ancestors had accomplished in a variety of cases, what we have been unable to effect in any single instance.

The object of my paper is to discuss the character of ancient civilisation, as indicated by so great an achievement. Was there a golden age of advanced enlightenment? Have extraordinary geniuses arisen who severally taught their cotemporaries to tame and domesticate the dog, the ox, the sheep, the hog, the fowl, the camel, the llama, the reindeer, and the rest? Or again, Is it possible that the instincts of savages, combined with the qualities of the animals in question, may have sufficed to originate every instance of established domestication?

It is to be presumed, in the first place, that animals would be originally domesticated in lands where they abounded in a wild state, and where the natives were skilled in capturing them. Unless the animals were easily obtainable, we could hardly expect a sufficient number of experiments to have
been made to yield a successful result. If they had been rare in all places and at all times, they would ipso facto be disqualified for domestication; for animals must be hardy and able to multiply freely under varying circumstances, else they would be of no importance as a domestic breed.

Secondly.—It is a fact familiar to all travellers, that savages frequently capture young animals of various kinds, and rear them as favourites, and sell or present them as curiosities. Human nature is generally akin: savages may be brutal, but they are not on that account devoid of our taste for taming and caressing young animals; nay, it is not improbable they may occasionally possess it in a more marked degree than ourselves, because it is a childish taste with us; and the motives of an adult barbarian are very similar to those of a civilised child.

In proving this assertion about taming animals, I feel a difficulty in making a good selection of cases from the published works of travellers. They do not usually think the subject I am speaking of, worthy of detailed mention; and the few interesting anecdotes that exist are scattered sparingly through a vast number of volumes. I have been chiefly indebted in writing this essay to general recollections, which I have not had time to verify, to the conversations of recent travellers, and to the memoranda which many of them have been so kind as to favour me with. Under these circumstances, I shall fortify my statement of the frequency with which animals are reared by savages by selecting out of a large, but not an exhaustive list, a few accounts of cases where they were protected tenderly by the least civilised of races, leaving it to be inferred that the same savages who were capable of much fondness towards animals in particular cases, would not unfrequently show a little of it in others.

North America.—The traveller Hearne, who wrote towards the end of the last century, relates the following story of moose or elks in the more northern parts of North America. He says, 'I have repeatedly seen moose at Churchill as
tame as sheep and even more so... The same Indian that brought them to the Factory had, in the year 1770, two others so tame, that when on his passage to Prince of Wales's Fort in a canoe, the moose always followed him along the bank of the river; and at night, or on any other occasion when the Indians landed, the young moose generally came and fondled on them, as the most domestic animal would have done, and never offered to stray from the tents.

Sir John Richardson, in an obliging answer to my enquiries about the Indians of North America, after mentioning the bison calves, wolves, and other animals that they frequently capture and keep, says, 'It is not unusual, I have heard, for the Indians to bring up young bears, the women giving them milk from their own breasts.' He mentions that he himself purchased a young bear, and adds, 'The red races are fond of pets and treat them kindly; and in purchasing them there is always the unwillingness of the women and children to overcome, rather than any dispute about price. My young bear used to rob the women of the berries they had gathered, but the loss was borne with good nature.'

I will again quote Hearne, who is unsurpassed for his minute and accurate narratives of social scenes among the Indians and Esquimaux. In speaking of wolves, he says, 'They always burrow underground to bring forth their young, and though it is natural to suppose them very fierce at those times, yet I have frequently seen the Indians go to their dens, and take out the young ones and play with them. I never knew a Northern Indian hurt one of them; on the contrary, they always put them carefully into the den again; and I have sometimes seen them paint the faces of the young wolves with vermillion or red ochre.'

Africa.—Mr. Mansfield Parkyns, who passed many years in Abyssinia and the countries of the Upper Nile, writes me word, 'I am sure that negroes often capture and keep alive wild animals. I have bought them and received them as presents---wild cats, jackals, panthers, the wild dog, the two best lions
now in the Zoological Gardens, monkeys innumerable and of all sorts, and mongoos. I cannot say that I distinctly recollect any pets among the lowest orders of men that I met with, such as the Denkas, but I am sure they exist, and in this way. When I was on the White Nile and at Khartoum, very few merchants went up the White Nile; none had stations. They were little known to the natives; but none returned without some live animal or bird which they had procured from the natives. That the capturing of animals was a very ancient custom may be read from the tombs of the kings in Egypt, where naked negroes from the south are bringing presents to the Pharaoh, among which are various wild beasts. While I was at Khartoum, there came an Italian wild beast showman, after the Wombwell style. He made a tour of the towns up to Doul and Fazogly, Kordofan and the peninsula, and collected a large number of animals. Thus my opinion distinctly is, that negroes do keep wild animals alive. I am sure of it; though I can only vaguely recollect them in one or two cases. I remember some chief in Abyssinia who had a pet lion which he used to tease, and I have often seen monkeys about huts."

On the West African Coast there is a busy trade in live birds and monkeys. Dr. Murie writes me word, 'While at the island of Corisco and its neighbourhood, on the West Coast of Africa, I saw grey parrots, a small species of baboon, and marmoset monkeys kept by the negroes. While they retained them, their children played with them as pets, but I believe their object in capturing them was for sale, for they found a ready market among the sailors in the shops frequenting that coast."

In Mr. Murie's recent journey in company with Mr. Petherick by the side of the White Nile, young live animals were frequently brought to their camp for sale.

In Central Africa, as at Kouka, antelopes and ostriches are both kept tame; so I am informed by Dr. Barth.

In South Africa, I have heard of numerous instances
where zebras and antelopes were reared by half-castes, and, as I fully believe but cannot distinctly assert, by blacks also. I should, however, state, that Mr. Oswell’s recollections do not confirm my belief. Unfortunately, I cannot obtain further evidence, as Dr. Livingstone and most other South African travellers are now absent from England.

There are instances in Africa where other motives induce the natives to protect and partly tame animals, besides that of caressing them. Serpents of large size, and I know not what other creatures, are held sacred in the delta of the Niger and elsewhere. They go about the villages with impunity and are fed by the people. The most remarkable instance of all is the account by Captain Speke of a menagerie that existed up to the beginning of the reign of the present king of the Wahumus, on the shores of Lake Nyanza, which was first established some centuries ago. It reminds us of the great menageries of the ancient Mexican kings and our own Zoological Gardens.

Eastern Archipelago.—Mr. Wallace, the distinguished naturalist and traveller in the Eastern Archipelago, writes me word, ‘The rudest people I have seen, catch and tame birds, but more, I think, for sale and profit than for love of them. In this respect the Malay races are superior to the Papuan. The former keep parrots, monkeys, &c., as pets, and will often not part with them; whereas the Papuans catch immense quantities of birds, such as cockatoos and parrots, but sell them readily.’

South America.—Mr. Wallace also adds from his South American recollections, ‘In the interior of South America, the Uapes Indians rear great numbers of birds and monkeys. The women carry the monkeys continually on their heads when very young, and even suckle them; the only way in which many kinds can be reared.’ This is confirmed by the following extract from a report on the savage tribes of the Amazon, made to the Viceroy of Peru in 1796. I am indebted for it to Mr. Markham, the South American
traveller. It states, 'Just as the Spanish ladies are fond of having little dogs as pets, the Omagua women amuse themselves by taming monkeys, the smallest and prettiest they can get.'

Central Asia.—Mrs. Atkinson, the widow of the Siberian traveller and the companion of his journeys, tells me that the Kirghis occasionally rear antelopes; she herself had one given to her.

It would be tedious and unnecessary to adduce more instances of wild animals being nurtured in the encampments of savages. It will be found on enquiry that few travellers have failed altogether to observe them. If we consider the small number of encampments they severally visited in their line of march, compared with the vast number that are spread over the whole area, which is or has been inhabited by savages, we may obtain some idea of the thousands of places at which half unconscious attempts at domestication are being made in each year. These thousands must themselves be multiplied many thousand-fold, if we endeavour to calculate the number of similar attempts that have been made since men like ourselves began to inhabit the world.

Conditions of Domestication.—I conclude from what I have stated that there is no animal worthy of domestication that has not frequently been captured, and might ages ago have established itself as a domestic breed, if it had not been deficient in certain necessary particulars which I shall proceed to discuss. These are so numerous and so stringent as to leave no ground for wonder that out of the vast abundance of the animal creation, only a few varieties of a few species should have become the companions of man.

It by no means follows that because a savage cares to take home a young fawn to amuse himself, his family, and his friends, that he will always continue to feed or to look after it. Such attention would require a steadiness of purpose foreign to the ordinary character of a savage. But herein