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Why Women Make Such a Fuss Over Dogs

Psychology Explains How Vanity and a Desire to Display Motherly Affection Lead to the Often Ridiculous Pampering of the Faithful Creatures Which Men Treat Only as Their Humble Slaves



A grieving woman in the fashionable animal cemetery at Hartsdale, N. Y., laying her daily tribute of flowers on the grave of a dog that died six years ago.



A German police dog is the favorite escort of many women when they go for a stroll in the park.



Mrs. Mistinguette, the French actress, with what looks like a tangle of yarn or string, but which really is her most cherished dog.

By CHARLES GRAY SHAW, Professor of Philosophy at New York University

WOMAN is coming into her own. Since the older days, those material years when woman ruled the roost, man has been casting the ballot, making the laws and establishing the customs. But now, in the twentieth century, we are undergoing a kind of maternal revival.

Woman's voice, loud in making laws and setting up her own standards of taste. Woman's boldness in dress, which has changed the street into a stage. In only one sign of this, her freedom. Her place in the business world and her adoption of the cigarette are still others.

But there is at least one other thing among the signs of the feminine times. It is the dog, the lady with the canine pet.

It is thus under the dog star that woman has begun to celebrate her longed-for liberty. In this combination of beauty and the beast there is a psychological problem which arouses the interest of those who are psychologically minded.

Why, then, does woman make such a fuss over her dog? We need no figures to show us that the dog is now an essential part of woman's life. Not all women possess and pet dogs, not all smoke cigarettes, but cigarettes and canine pets are associated with the life of the new woman.

The dog appears on the front seat of the limo car. He is carried tenderly in his basket when military steps into the Pullman bound for the seashore or mountains. He has his place in the crowded apartment. On the avenues, all be-ribboned and be-blancketed, he appears in leash to share the life which interests with the canine proclivity to run and sniff at will. The dog is having his day, even if he does not always enjoy it.

The psychological explanation of woman's interest in dogs is not to be found until one has observed man's general relation to the lower animals. While evolutionary and fundamentalists are deploring the descent of man, we must pause to observe how man has treated his animal contemporaries.

It is plain here that man has decided just which species, and about how many specimens of them, shall survive upon the planet which man has invaded and made his own. Some forms of life disappear automatically. Others, like bees and deer preserve, are threatened with non-existence because man is exercising the will to limit their numbers.

Man is practical in his relation to the animal world. The beast which saves him labor and grants him food, as horses and cow, are preserved. The less useful or useless, ones must take their chances with him. They will be lucky to keep their place on the overcrowded earth. Dog and cat have survived man's destruction, have become domesticated and have their place, if not their use, in man's life. This has been because man has fancied such creatures. Man is thus the dog fancier or cat fancier in general. The dog is kept, bred, trained. He is made useful for his own sake, and is made interesting through the special marks which betray breed. The result is setter and pointer, chow and dachshund, as also one of the latest canine varieties—the police dog of the war.

Woman accepts man's judgment as to the real value of animals, but the eccentric her own fancy when it comes to the special case of the dog. For her fondness, which seems ill-placed, the has her woman's reason. Apparently they are special ones.

Man's attitude toward animals, even dogs, is a realistic one which is easily understood. Woman's attitude toward the dog is not so realistic; it is romantic and occult.

Unlike man, woman does not need the dog in hunting wolf or fox, in shooting partridge or duck; since woman does not engage in such robust sports of the great outdoors. Her pet is not prized because he is a good pointer, setter or retriever; he is not prized and petted because of his courage and fidelity in the lonely Alps or on the battlefield. Woman has her own special reason for making friends with the canine world. The most apparent motive at work in the heart of the woman who cuddles the canine is that which appears in the desire to express affection. Where children are concerned, such loving expression is expected and just. In the case of the dog it is not so apparent.

A woman represses the word or act which is directed against her child; he shall not be scolded or struck. In the manner, a woman can show the same kind and degree of resentment against him who shouts at or strikes her mischievous dog. Indeed, it is possible for a woman, in her affection for her pet dog, to be more highly incensed at the injury done the canine than at that done the child.

Both dog and little boy are beloved, both are relatively helpless, but the dog makes a special appeal to her sympathies because he has no such rights at law as has the child. The dog receives only the limited rights granted by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The dog's extra rights must be guarded; hence the fond mistress becomes his protectress.

In the parallel case of man and dog there is no such display of affection for the dumb animal. Man, long since made friends with dog, and horse too, but the relation was a mutual one which both parties could comprehend.

Man mistook for the companionship of the faithful dog, whose presence to camp was a sort of comfort for the lonely man. But the canine companion received only a rough collar instead of a ribbon, only practical food rather than the delicacies of the lady's table.

The master of the beast revealed such fondness as he might entertain for the dog in rough play, not in tender caressing. He wished the dog to understand that the relation was that of master and slave. The man desired to express his feeling of mastery, which was understood and appreciated by his canine companion. A man's dog may be in Windsor Castle or White House, but he understands that he is only a dog.

These are days in which everybody talks about "reactions." What is your reaction to this or that subject—the judge, the amendment, the Broadway show? In matters of such reactions we might inquire how the female brain reacts to the dog as object.

There is in that tender brain the general reaction of affection, so different from man's frank response to the animal. Then there is more than this. There is the dim expression and reaction to the overlying idea of the feminine mind—maternity.

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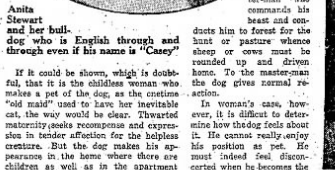
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Anita Stewart and her bull-dog who is English through and through even if his name is "Casey"

If it could be shown, which is doubtful, that it is the childless woman who makes a pet of the dog, as the creature "old maid" used to have her inevitable cat, the way would be clear. Thwarted maternity seeks recompense and expression in tender affection for the helpless creature. But the dog makes his appearance in the home where there are children as well as in the apartment where they are not.

ter-man who commands his heart and conducts him to forest for the hunt or pasture whence sheep or cows must be rounded up and driven home. To the master-man the dog gives normal reaction.

In woman's case, however, it is difficult to determine how the dog feels about it. He cannot really enjoy his position as pet. He must indeed feel discomfort when he becomes the subject of endearing tones and fond caresses. His reactions, we will assume, are not normal or favorable.

In addition to the lady's lap dog as her object of affection and maternal regard, there is the dog in another aspect, which is significant of the times. The lady's dog is the sign of wealth and luxury. Indeed, it is a significant thing that the dog is found in the homes of the poor or the rich, hardly in the domesticity of the poor middle class.

In the poor home he is there for a purpose, or he is brought into share the poverty, where all lead a kind of a dog's life. In the home of the rich person the dog makes his appearance as a symbol of superiority. The people there can afford to have this pedigreed animal, which is likely to appear at the animal dog show.

It was, some years ago, that we associated the dog with the actress. The actress, living somewhat apart from the social order, felt the desire to be distinguished on both stage and street. Before the footlights it was her beauty or talent, or both, which set her apart from the world of women and men generally. On the street this distinguishing mark was sought by means of her dog.

Among women generally, or those who are feeling their oats of feminine individualism, the desire to appear different if not superior reveals itself in the presence of her canine consort. People will observe her who leads, or is led by the dog. They will see that she is different.

This will minister to that vanity in which all delicate minds rejoice. This will show how great is the social distance between those few who have their chow and Pomeranians and the many, many others who could not afford such a pet, or who would not dare risk social position by having such a companion. The woman with the dog thus demonstrates to her own satisfaction at least, her social superiority.

The future of the pet dog is not to be determined in so many words as by marking out so many years. The dog has long been with mankind, and has his place in man's life.

The lady's dog, which arouses her reactions of sympathy and superiority, is not necessarily a fitted institution. Such a glib creature is a sign of the present great social transition.

We have yet to settle down to peace, the general tranquility which life can afford. It is not unsafe to predict that the settling down of life will be the present fresh will witness the departure of such social phenomenon as have been observing—the lady's pet dog.