

will; and leave biology as it is for any who may wish to take up that subject. At present the effect can only be to quash the teaching entirely beyond its first and most elementary stage.

There are not wanting signs elsewhere of the evil effects of the younger school of botanists not recognising the importance of first training students in a thorough course of practical and systematic botany before proceeding to laboratory work. In an examination lately held for a post at Kew, I am informed that two gentlemen who had been trained at Cambridge competed with a gardener for the post. The gardener secured it. *Verb. sap.*
 GEORGE HENSLOW

Animal Intelligence

HAVING frequently observed in your columns accounts of remarkable instances of reasoning power in animals, I am tempted to send you the following notes, which may perhaps be not without interest to the readers of NATURE.

A young canary belonging to our family is in the habit of receiving small pieces of biscuit, cake, or such like from the tea-table. The hardness of the biscuit has ever been a source of great annoyance to Dicky. One day, however, after an expectant and close examination of the tea-table, he was offered a piece of hard biscuit. Without making the least attempt to break it, he lifted it from the floor of his cage, and taking it to his water-trough, gently dropped it in, following up the action by patiently stirring it round and round with his beak, until it was in a condition to be eaten. He then carefully removed it and devoured it without any trouble. He now puts every *hard* substance which he deems eatable into the water. He endeavoured to soften sweets in the same way, but finding that the sweet became gradually smaller and smaller, he hastily abstracted it, and has never since put anything of that nature into the water.

An equally interesting case of reasoning power was lately exhibited by our cat. Pussy had lately become the mother of a family of kittens, and was naturally indisposed after the occurrence. She wandered about through the house in a strange manner, as if seeking for something, always, however, keeping within near range of the coal bunkers when they were likely to be required. With a view to finding out what she wanted, the bunkers were left open. The cat immediately entered, and commenced searching diligently among the coals, until she found a piece covered with pyrites. This she proceeded to lick vigorously, returning to the bunker and repeating the operation at regular intervals. On ground sulphur being offered her, she at once forsok the pyrites for that, and ere long, by use of that medicine, regained her usual health.

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 September 29

In the notes on Australian ants forwarded by me by the last mail I forget whether any mention was made respecting an idea that has struck me several times, as to the method in which the antennæ are employed by ants as a means of communicating with each other. That ants utter no audible sound is pretty plainly proved by experiments made with the microphone. It is said that the *Ambillidæ* give a kind of sharp cry when captured, but the statement requires to be verified. Ordinary ants may be generally spoken of as destitute of any means whereby to utter articulate speech. Beyond the fact that they do not appear to be able to speak, so as to be heard by human ears, the tests resorted to by Sir John Lubbock would go to show that it is extremely doubtful whether ants possess the sense of hearing at all. This, however, does not preclude the possibility, or even the probability, of their being in full power of a means by which they are able to converse. It will be remembered that the antennæ are divided into two separate portions, the *scape* and the *flabellum*. The latter is subdivided into about ten separate segments. Now in this arrangement, by adopting a preconcerted system of signals, all the words of an English dictionary might be expressed.

Let us say that A meets B, and, according to the vocabulary of Formicaria, that a touch with the tip of the antenna of A on the terminal segment of the antenna of B signifies any particular word. A similar touch made on the second segment of the antenna of B indicates another word, and so on. Here there is a means of expressing at least ten different words by taking from the point of the flabellum to its base. If the second

point of the flabellum of A is employed as a touching organ, the number of signs that might be conveyed from the one ant to the other would be twenty. If all the segments were thus utilised, a hundred different signs might be interchanged. This is for one antenna only. By utilising the pair this number would be doubled, and by multiplying the number of touches, to express words or plurals of words, also, and by crossing the antennæ so that the right antenna of A touched the left of B, and *vice versa*, all clearly distinct signals, the vocabulary of these little people would be extended almost *ad infinitum*. Say that the one touch of a segment of the flabellum meant an ant, two touches a pair of ants, and three a multitude; here there exists a means by which complicated ideas might be communicated in a manner somewhat similar to that adopted by the Chinese, by whom a particular sign means a woman, two mischief, and three marital unfaithfulness; or, as in the language of the Australian natives, who employ the term "Yarra" as signifying "flowing," and "Yarra-Yarra" as "ever-flowing." All this would be pantomime, of course; but those who have witnessed a public exhibition of the skill of well-taught deaf-mutes, are aware of the amount of information that can be imparted by the simple use of the ten digits, just half the number of separate conversational organs at the disposal of ants. Nor do persons and nations, well able to speak audibly, fail to avail themselves of the same kind of speech. A Chinaman utters a certain word, but it may mean half a dozen different things, as he moves his fingers to the right or to the left, up or down, or describes some imaginary diagrams in the air.

The above views may seem altogether visionary at first sight, but we have been told so many remarkable stories relative to the instincts displayed by the singularly intelligent creatures under consideration, that no persevering student of their habits will be inclined to say that the use by them of some such code of signals is altogether beyond the range of possibility, even of probability.

It might be as well if naturalists, when watching the meeting of ants, would notice carefully whether the observed touches vary in any particular, and whether any noticeable results followed after, and appeared to be connected with, the variations.

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 July 16

Meteors

I HAVE to record a brilliant series of meteors seen last night (Sunday, July 20) by myself and others. I will describe that seen by myself, as, amid the many splendid meteors I have observed during my sixty years of life, I have never seen one more magnificent. I was walking up and down my "quarter-deck," the carriage-drive in front of my house, which faces due north and south, admiring the glorious tints of the dying day, for we have been having, on a reduced scale, the grand sunsets about which I have already written. I was looking due north, and saw a huge fireball suddenly appear about half way between the horizon and the zenith. It moved slowly and horizontally, leaving a broad trail of red light behind it, as well defined as that emitted by a rocket. The meteor itself was about half the size of a full moon, white, and of the most intense and dazzling brilliancy. It travelled so slowly that I had time to call out, *several* times, to my wife, "Look at that glorious meteor," and she had time to turn round and see it. At about north-north-west it suddenly broke up into six, if not *seven* pieces, but at this moment its light was so intense that I could not be quite certain; six, however, I counted *distinctly*. They did not *fall*, but trailed on in a line after the larger mass, which did not seem diminished by the rupture, and finally, at north-west, they all disappeared. On taking out my watch I found it was just two minutes past six, and as we are a month past our shortest day, you can fancy there was plenty of daylight left to dim its splendour. But it was a magnificent sight, and its intense brilliancy surpassed anything I have seen before.

At 6.30 two friends walked up to dinner. I asked if they had seen the meteor. They said, "Yes, how splendid it was!" I asked, "Could you count the number of pieces into which it broke?" They looked at each other in amazement. "It did not break!" "In what direction did it pass?" was my next question. "From west to east," said one of them; "if you were standing here you could not have seen it; it was low down on the southern horizon, behind your house." I then