

Dogs Have a Soul — and Now They Have a Church



Royal Dixon, the Avatar of the New Church, Who Seeks to Re-Establish the Noachian Kinship of Man and Animals.

By Marie Lyndall Darrach

A REAL church—with all the appurtenances thereof—is to take the place of the romantic Happy Hunting Ground in the spiritual adjustment of the affairs of animals. It has been started in New York, which is an experimental station for the propagation of all ideas that need hothouse forcing. It is to have a distinctive building—a special Bible with animal texts—and a Sunday school which boys will love to attend instead of sneaking off to go fishing on the Sabbath.

A Church for Animal Rights is the latest evidence—not that the Church is really going to the dogs, as some pessimists would have us believe—but that an entirely new note of inclusiveness has been sounded, and that the proper interpretation of Christianity takes into consideration the claims of dogs—and all other living creatures—and is no longer to be considered an affair concerned solely with the destiny of man.

The social equality of animals was proclaimed long ago when they marched blithely two by two into the ark, as guests at the most famous nautical house party on record, and ate at the "first table" with Noah and his wife with no question of precedence, except as to which should occupy the place of honor beside the host and hostess. But all through the ages this social position granted them on that occasion has been questioned and the favored ones among animals at the present day—the dogs that take their meals with the family and ride in limousines; the cats that sleep on cushions on their mistresses' beds; the chameleons that accompany debutantes to balls, and the monkeys that trail along with their masters on the golf links—are branded as "climbers" and are snubbed and ill-treated by all but the understanding humans to whom they belong.

"Love me, love my dog," is the command of a maid to a man, and the male person obeys: "Stop kicking my dog around," snaps a pseudo statesman in a political fracas, and the press features the animal for the benefit of the campaign. "Give up that chorus girl or my money goes to a hospital for cats," warns the maiden aunt, and the lawyers have a lovely time later at the expense of both the young man and the cats. Thus animals have always been important factors in shaping the destinies of men, but that the position they occupy in the eternal scheme of things was important enough to take account of their rights in a man-ruled world, was not thought of until the founding of the First Church for Animal Rights by two young men who have the courage of their convictions and the temerity to proclaim their purpose to the world.

The First Church for Animal Rights was

launched in the city of New York on Easter Sunday, for the purpose of curtailing the autocratic tendencies of man, which for so long have found expression in a contemptuous disregard of the fact that all life is one, in the eyes of God, and that since into every living creature He has infused the Divine essence, man's rights are no greater than those of animals in the sight of the Creator.

Upon this basic principle Royal Dixon, who has devoted much of his life to the study of animals and written numbers of books about them, has founded a new church pledged to a dual purpose—that of awakening the humane consciousness in man and of championing the cause of animal rights. There has already been a most remarkable reaction to the idea on the part of the public, and from present indications it will not be long before branches of the "Mother Church" will be established in other cities throughout the country. The present headquarters of the movement are 44 Fifth avenue, New York City.

Behavior of Dogs in Battle

The project, which not so many years ago would have been looked upon as a passing fad, is now being greeted enthusiastically by a surprisingly large coterie in New York, which insists that the gospel of animal rights is no new thought to thousands who acknowledge a debt of gratitude for the service rendered by these humbler creatures of God's kingdom during the World War. Virtues heretofore supposed to be human attributes alone were found in animals on the battlefield, and many a scouter is silent now when he recalls incidents that bid him pause before denying as he once did the possibility of an animal possessing rights, even approximating those conceded as the prerogatives of man.

It is only the occasional person who cannot recite from his own experience some instance of unusual and praiseworthy conduct on the part of an animal sent as he had been into the trenches to do his "bit" with the allied armies. A new respect for animals and a desire to do them greater justice in future was born at that time of danger and stress, so that now when a man appears as the founder of a church, the doctrine of which claims for them the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, there has been found no dearth of supporters of the new faith.

Some Mysteries of Nature That Still Baffle Solution

NATURE is full of mystery. She sets conundrums which man, with all his learning, is unable to answer satisfactorily.

Crows when at rest on the tree-tops or when foraging in the fields invariably have sentinels out to give warning of danger. Why has Nature gifted these birds in this distinctive way? How do the crows arrange the duties of the sentinels?

When rock-shooting begins, the first shot will send the whole colony of birds into the air in a panic, but as soon as they reach a height which is beyond the range of the guns, the cloud of birds will pause and remain at the same altitude al-

though shot may be spluttering in the tree-tops for an hour. How do they know when they are at a safe altitude?

The most conceited citizen of the bird kingdom is the common turkey cock. He is powerful, arrogant, aggressive, ever seeking a quarrel, but usually the first combatant to run away when a battle really takes place. Why has Nature endowed him with such a strange medley of qualities?

Why is it that the common male barndoor fowl has been singled out by Nature to be a perpetual demonstrator of the art of politeness to the weaker sex? As soon as the cockerel grows

Scattered through the length and breadth of the land are men and women, who as students twenty-five years ago in the University of California listened with scorn to the positive assertion made by the venerable Prof. Howson to his classes in philosophy that "Socrates," the shaggy-coated little skye terrier that followed always at his heels, had an immortal soul. And when the dog "passed on" one day as a result of old age or some canine ailment, there was much joking and cynical speculation among them as to the possible destination of the "soul" of poor little "Socrates." Two of those scoffers are among the founders of the First Church for Animal Rights, and if the whole hundred or more of those students could be assembled, there would probably be surprisingly few among them who would not hesitate before condemning the idea as heresy because of their entirely changed viewpoint on the whole subject of the rights of animals.

There has been some criticism, however, on the part of those who, while conceding that animals have rights that should be considered according to human standards, are not prepared to believe that they have souls. These take exception to the use of the word "church" in connection with the movement, and say that a league or an association is the proper organization to function in their behalf.

But Royal Dixon, the founder, and Dr. S. A. Schneidman, the executive director of the new church, insist that their aims are logically within ecclesiastical confines, and that following a perfect conception of fair play for animals there comes naturally a demand for an adequate animal

religion and then a church in which to preach the cardinal principles of the new faith.

That it is not an animal church but a church for animal rights, kills any argument against it based on the query, "Is a dog a person?" and with the conclusion that he is not the assertion that there is no reason why he should be suddenly raised to membership in an institution that from the beginning has been designed for the needs of man alone.

Dr. Schneidman, who, like Royal Dixon, has devoted his life to the study of animals, and who has added to his academic knowledge of them a practical and humane understanding of their needs through his profession as a veterinarian, is

A Dog Parishioner Introduced to the Pages of the Bible.



Dr. S. A. Schneidman, Director of the New Church for Animal Rights.

credited with actually putting the machinery into motion that has resulted in the establishment of the First Church for Animal Rights. It is the culmination of a life-long desire on his part, as well as that of Royal Dixon, to lift all work for animals to a spiritual plane that recognizes religion as a living thing with an awakened humane consciousness that considers not only man's relation to man, but man's relation to every other form of life.

A call to meet with them at the Astor Hotel was sent out in January by Royal Dixon and Dr. Schneidman to all lovers of animals in New York City interested in the establishment of a church based on love for all living things, which would be non-sectarian and humanitarian, and which would aim to extend the consciousness of its members beyond the human into the humane.

The response was most surprising. Men and

women appeared from all walks of life, eager to voice their belief in the rights of animals. From the mistresses of pampered Pekingese, who came in luxurious limousines, to the shabby apparition of a wilder way through mazes of hotel hallways to the meeting place by way of the freight elevator, all of those assembled applauded the plans for a church that would take into account the knowledge of which Christ himself was possessed when He knew the birds and the animals and the flowers so intimately that they inspired Him to the similes throbbing with life which He uses in the exposition of His greatest spiritual teachings.

It was no assemblage of freaks or faddists that congregated on Easter Sunday, after several preliminary meetings, and with distinctive ceremonies dedicated the First Church for Animal Rights, but a sane, sensible group of men and women earnestly desirous of making the world safe for animals by raising to the dignity of a new creed the simple belief that every living creature has the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. There are those even among the members who question the scope implied by the words "every living creature" and the literal interpretation of this clause has led to some discussion among advocates of the "Swat the Fly" movement and among those who have been devoted to the cause of exterminating the mosquito. Killing animals for food and for the purpose of personal adornment is also involved in the basic principle for which the church stands and will necessitate some concessions on those becoming converts to the new faith.

Biblical Stories of Animals.

"Although the Bible has many references to animals," said Dr. Schneidman, "it is astonishing and confusing to realize how little organized Christianity has done for them. The ecclesiastical conception of them has been that they are creatures without souls and therefore with no rights as against those, or at the hands of, mankind. The Bible means nothing unless it awakens the humane consciousness and it is through this medium that the First Church for Animal Rights will serve mankind. It will make better men and women of its members as well as championing the cause of animals in a way never before put into practice, although others as well as Royal Dixon and myself may have thought of it.

"Our plan also include the building of a church edifice which will be an ecclesiastical landmark in New York and in which services will be held every Sunday. An animal Bible which will serve as a textbook for the new religion is being compiled by Royal Dixon and will be made up of passages from the Scriptures in which there are references to animals. All sermons will be based on Biblical texts containing references to the oneness of all life and that specially mention animals. Sunday school classes in which children will be taught their responsibility to animals as well as the tenets of the new religion will be a feature of the weekly services. There is no intention to have the Church for Animal Rights take the place of any other faith, nor will its teaching conflict with other religious affiliations of its members."

There has been much discussion already among those interested in the new church as to what type of edifice will be erected. There is a difference of opinion as to whether it should be along dignified classical lines and dependent for its distinctiveness on murals depicting animals and their service to mankind, or if perhaps something as bizarre as a glorified Noah's Ark might be more to the popular fancy.

Dumb "Brothers" of the Saints

The former idea is the one in keeping with the spirit of the founders, however, and it will doubtless be the plan adopted when an architect is instructed as to designs for the building. So many of the saints had animal cronies that the matter of murals will be far from difficult. Among the Franciscans, too—St. Francis, St. Anthony and others—there was a great love for animals. There is a wonderful picture somewhere in Rome showing Anthony preaching to the fishes and an old story says that he is addressing them as "dearly beloved fishes" and that the "salmon and the cod are listening with profound humility and grave and religious countenances." He had a pet lamb with him always and pet doves for whom he built nests in his cloister. In fact, all the Franciscans had such a fellow feeling for animals, according to the stories that have come down to us, that much material for artistic and symbolic decoration could be easily assembled and in the attitude of these old saints toward animals may be found a precedent already established for the founding of a Church for Animal Rights.

These saintly lovers of God's humbler creatures had evidently discovered that man is in no absolute sense any more worthy than animals, that the world is no more his than theirs, and that heaven without animals might be a strange and lonely place.

With the spread of the gospel of the First Church for Animal Rights it will become in time impossible to condescend even to a fish, and the test of a true citizen of the world will be not whether he feels a brotherhood with man, but that his feeling of brotherhood extends to every living creature inhabiting the earth.