

Raymond, Syria, Feb. 27, 1892

Dear Sir:—

Thinking it might interest you to hear how strongly sexual selection seems to have acted upon a race of semi-domesticated animals, I have prepared the enclosed brief account of the street-dogs of this city, for your perusal.

Should you deem the case sufficiently interesting for publication, you would confer a favor upon me by forwarding the paper to the editor of "Nature", or by making any use of it that you may think fit. In any case I shall be most happy to seek for any further particulars, in this connection, which may seem desirable for the full elucidation of the subject.

I am, Dear Sir,

Yours very respectfully,

William D. Hamilton

On the Modification of a Race of Syrian
Street-Dogs by means of Sexual Selection.
by W. Von Szeck M.D.

Beyrout is one of the principal ports on the
Syrian coast, & has a population of from eighty to
one hundred thousand. Like most Oriental cities,
its system of street-cleaning is far from perfect,
& much of the scavenging is left to the street-dog,
~~many~~ ^{hundreds} ~~thousands~~ of which roam at large through town
& suburbs, picking up a subsistence as they best
can. Twenty years ago, & previous, these dogs were
~~a very~~ ^{quite a} homogeneous race, the following being a rough
Description of a typical specimen:— Height at
shoulder, 20-22 in; length from snout to root of
tail 32-34 in; length of tail, 12-15 in. Color,
sandy-gray, with some variety of shades (rarely so
light as to pass for dirty-white), in which distinctly
darker above than beneath, & not uncommonly
sprinkled or brindled. Head of medium size, with well
protruded snout, & small pointed, semi-fundulous ear;
tail bushy, usually curled up over back, sometimes
much curled; general aspect, decidedly feral-like,
or semi-wolfish, disposition, however, all the
same. The only departure worthy of note

from the above type, at the time of which I wrote, were occasional black dogs, mostly with shorter hair than the sandy ones, & rarely, pigmented black & white specimens. At the present date, the case is very different. The sandy-gray color still prevails, it is true, but there is hardly an imaginable ^{color or} combination of colors which may not be found; & in form, size & proportions of trunk & limbs - shape of head, - form & size of ears - length & closeness of hair - length, bushiness & carriage of tail - there is ~~as much~~ as much diversity.

Twenty years ago, but few persons in this city owned dogs of any foreign breed whatsoever, but pointers, prods, terriers, a few greyhounds & setters, & an occasional Newfoundland, retriever or mastiff, have since been imported & to some extent, bred here. By far the majority of foreign dogs to be found in Beyrout at any time are smaller & decidedly weaker than the original natives; very few indeed can range the streets, unaccompanied by their masters, without running the risk of ^{a considerable} more or less serious injury from the street-dog. Despite their marked muscular inferiority, however, the foreign dogs have succeeded in mongrelizing the whole race of street-dogs so thoroughly, that it is now no

easy matter to find one of these which does not
bear unmistakable evidence of a foreign strain.

To account for this, I can confidently cite
the following facts, from my own personal obser-
vation & experience:— 1st, Native bitches very often
manifest a decided preference for certain foreign dogs; &
I have repeatedly seen such a bitch reject, one after
another, of a train of kindred suitors, to accept without
hesitation a thorough-bred pointer. [My brother once
owned a French pointer named Jack—quite small, but
beautifully proportioned, & of a uniform golden-fawn color.
This dog was so great a favorite with the opposite sex
of the native breed, that he led an exceedingly "gay"
life. Pointer bitches, in the contrary, not infrequently
refused him for the sake of a street-dog.]—

2nd, Pointer & other well-bred bitches are frequently
so decided & persistent in their preference for street-
dogs (usually for some particular individual male,
it may be, but communicated with by the male) that
they will forego whole seasons rather than
accept of any other than the one by their masters.

In such cases, the male dog is usually a street-dog
of a superior quality, & is frequently a foreigner
which is the reason why the native breed is so
generally so much inferior to the foreigner.

to multiply the chances of infection for the whole race.
3. ² Though strains are most strongly pronounced
in the suburbs, where street-dogs are rather less
numerous than in the heart of the city, & where dog
& runaway matches are favored by hedgerows,
shrubbery, &c. In the city itself, on the contrary,
where the chances are ten to one that claims will
be settled by the law of battle, the foreign taint is
not so evident - indeed, a casual observer might
easily overlook it in many instances; & if any pure
blooded representatives of the old stock are still in
existence, it must be in the very most thickly stocked
quarter, where butchers' shops are many & near together,
& street-dogs proportionately numerous.

W. J. Van Dyck, M.D.,

Beirut, Syria
Feb. 27th, 1882

