Insect Behavior

Instinct and Intelligence, by Major R. W. G. Hingston. MacMillan Co. $2.50.

Major Hingston believes that "everyone understands what is meant when one speaks of "instinctive action." He is equally positive that "we must examine the lower animals in the same way as we examine ourselves" . . . by observing a certain kind of behavior and inferring a mental state behind it. We should not be surprised, therefore, that he reaches the final conclusion that insect behavior shows "glimmerings of intelligence", that insects "reason," "reflect on a course of action," "act with judgment," "act with forethought," etc. Major Hingston creates not only his God but even his insects in his own image!

The chief lesson of this book is how necessary it is to define one's concepts with precision, how essential it is to sweep away with determination the whole rubbish of anthropomorphism and base our investigations upon a strictly objective foundation—in order to achieve results worthy of scientific consideration. Mr. Hingston's careful observations and really profound knowledge are largely wasted because of his antiquated and discredited methodology.

Yet, in spite of its serious scientific shortcomings, the book is worth reading because of its admirable lucidity and simplicity and its unbelievable wealth of illustrative material on insect behavior. It is as fascinating as Fabre at his best.

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